

Immanuel-God with us
The reason for Christ's coming
Advent Devotions 2025

“Immanuel-God with us *The reason for Christ’s coming*”

An Advent Devotional on how Christ comes as our Prophet, Priest, King,
and Good Pastor

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About the Cover: Jesus comes as our Prophet, Priest and King. This is an Orthodox icon depicting Jesus wearing the High Priest’s garments, as He sits on the throne as King, along with the Crown of Glory. Jesus also holds a book of Prophecy. The Arabic on the top of the icon is read from right to left, and says, “Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest”. The book also has Arabic, and it says, “I am the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.” This points us to the Fourth Week in Advent, where Christ will be shown to come as the Good Shepherd, or as you will see, the Good Pastor. As we prepare to celebrate Jesus arriving on earth two millennia ago, we also get to see how Christ has also called Pastors to give us this same Jesus.

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The Last Saturday of the Church Year

People loved by God, tomorrow, the holy Church begins her journey to the joy of the Christmas season, where we celebrate Jesus Christ coming down to earth, and being our Immanuel, which we hear in Matthew chapter one means God with us. This story is well known for us as believers, but amidst the busy-ness of the season, with more services occurring, Christmas shopping, Christmas parties, the plenteous holiday feasting from Thanksgiving through the new calendar year, it can be easy to forget why Jesus laid aside His glory and was born of virgin's womb. These devotions will help you to refocus on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, and how Jesus has given His Office of the Holy Ministry, that is, His Pastors, to you, so that, that man called to your place, would bring you to Christ, our Good Pastor. So tomorrow, as we begin this journey to the Baby laid in a manger in Bethlehem, go to Church. Be fed by His Word and Sacraments, and use this devotion as a supplement for that needed part of your life.

Heavenly Father, as we deal with the added stress, the hustle and bustle of this season, help us to humble ourselves under Your mighty Hand, that we would have our hearts and minds focused on Your Son, Jesus Christ, our LORD, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

In Christ,

Rev. Nathaniel Brown

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Orthodox icon of Christ the Good Shepherd

First Sunday in Advent Feast Day of St. Andrew

Ezekiel 3:16-21

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. (Ezekiel 3:17-19)

People loved by God, November 30th is the day that the Church remembers Saint Andrew, the first-called Apostle of Christ. It is fitting that the Sunday closest to this day is the first day of Advent, keeping in line with the first-called Apostle. And regardless of if your congregation celebrated this Apostle this year or not, the Old Testament for this feast day speaks of Ezekiel being a watchman on the wall. Ezekiel was to watch inside the people of God and tell them to repent of their sins, and also to protect them from the evils of the world outside of them. And Andrew, the first Apostle, had the same job, as do our Pastors today. But Ezekiel, Andrew, and any Pastor you know has this authority to be the watchmen on the wall, only because of Christ. This week, you will hear how Christ came as our Prophet. And what was the message of Jesus? The forgiveness of sins, as seen in Mark 1:14-15. Jesus was preaching the same repentance as the Old Testament prophets did, as seen by John the Baptist proclaiming this same message. Jesus came as our Prophet.

Let us pray. LORD Jesus Christ, you called Andrew to be Your servant and Apostle, and to follow in proclaiming Your example of the forgiveness of sins. Fix our own eyes onto Your Prophetic work among us in Your Word and Your Sacraments. Amen.

Monday of Advent 1

Zechariah 9:9-16 and Matthew 21:1-9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

People loved by God, in the One-Year Lectionary, Advent begins in a seemingly strange way. Jesus enters into Jerusalem triumphantly, and as your readings for this devotion said, humble and mounted on a donkey. This is the Palm Sunday narrative. And this is incredibly fitting for us as we begin our Advent journey to the manger. Because Jesus doesn't come to simply be a cute baby that the shepherds and angels sing about. Jesus came as the Ultimate Prophet of God, and this means that He comes to fulfill all of the prophecies spoken of Him in the Old Testament, not just the nice images of being born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Jesus also came to fulfill the prophecies of Holy Week. Being humble and mounted on a donkey. Being betrayed by a friend. Being stricken, smitten by and afflicted in every way. This humble reminder for the First Sunday of Advent truly does help us to see Christ and why He came. Jesus came as our Prophet to fulfill all the prophecies about Him.

Let us pray. O most gracious Holy Spirit, we rejoice that Jesus Christ came to us in the manger. Help us to remain steadfast in Him, as He fulfilled all of the prophecies of the Old Testament for our sake. We pray this through the same Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with the Father, and with You, ever one God. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 1

John 5:39-47

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. (John 5:39)

People loved by God, Jesus has come as our Ultimate Prophet. But what does it mean to be a prophet of God? There are plenty who claim to be Christians today who say that a prophet is anyone who speaks the future. IT doesn't matter if they are right or wrong. But this is not how Jesus defines the prophets. In your reading today, Jesus says that the Scriptures, which at the time, were only the Scriptures written by His prophets, point to Him. This is what it means to be a true prophet of God. Pointing to Jesus. In that sense, the Old Testament prophets pointed forward in time to Jesus. And it can be said that Jesus pointed to Himself being found in the Old Testament, like He did with the bronze serpent on the pole in John 3. Jesus, as our Ultimate Prophet of God, pointed to Himself as the only way of salvation. And it can be said that Pastors are the New Testament Prophets, who point, not forward in time, but backwards to the actions of Jesus which were done for us. They also point us to Jesus coming again to fully show believers that He alone is who saves us. Jesus is the Ultimate Prophet of God because He is the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, You have told us to be diligent in prayer to You, and live our lives reading Your Word. Help us to see that both of these actions are done so that Your Son can be revealed to You, through the same Jesus Christ our LORD. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 1

Hebrews 1:1-14 and Luke 4:16-21

So [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

People loved by God, your readings today are going to be preached on if your congregation is following the service plan that accompanies these devotions. So, if your church offers a midweek service, go to it. Be fed in the Word. But your readings today talk about Jesus. In your reading from Hebrews, you hear that God used to speak through the prophets, but now, God speaks through His Son, Jesus. He is the true and ultimate Prophet of God. Whatever Jesus speaks is speaking about Himself and His Work. In your reading from Saint Luke, you hear how Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies simply by His speaking the words of the prophecy. Jesus is the One Who preaches the saving Gospel to us poor, miserable sinners, the One Who heals our broken, sin-filled hearts. This Gospel continues to be sent out to us, even though 2,000 years ago, Jesus came and was born of the virgin Mary, taking on our flesh and blood into Himself. This Jesus, your Savior, came as Prophet, to proclaim God's favor unto you.

Let us pray. LORD Jesus Christ, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. We thank you that you laid aside this glory of creation and came down to earth to be our prophet so that you could give liberty to us who have been oppressed. We celebrate that You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 1

Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality... The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. (Acts 10:34-38)

People loved by God, Saint Peter was sent to Cornelius to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. And when Peter preaches to Cornelius' household, he says the whole story of Christ. Jesus Christ commanded the disciples to go to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth that Jesus died and on the third day rose from the dead, and was seen publicly by many. But verse 38 lines up with the theme of this week that Jesus was sent by God the Father. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power...for God was with Him. Many of the prophets of the Old Testament had the ability to do miracles to prove that they were truly sent by God. Think about Elijah staying with the widow who had enough flour to make a small morsel of bread for her and her son, and then they had no food, and yet, as First Kings chapter 17 says, the flour did not run out, and after Elijah raises her son, in verse 24, she says that these signs prove that Elijah is a man of God, and the word he speaks is the truth. Jesus is the same way! He does the miracles to prove He is a prophet of God, as Jesus Himself explains in Matthew chapter 9. Jesus came as Prophet of God, and had the miracles to prove He was truly from God.

Let us pray. O blessed, holy Trinity, we thank you that the prophets that you sent in the Old Testament to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to Your people had miracles attached to their ministry so people would believe in them, and out of your grace and mercy, You provided the same when Christ Jesus came to us. Help us to find comfort and trust in the miracles that are today associated with the forgiveness of sins, those being the means of grace of Christ Jesus our LORD. For You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are ever one God. Amen.

Friday of Advent 1

John 1:1-18

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)

People loved by God, the Word of God is vital for God's people. This has been true since the Garden of Eden, when God spoke creation into existence. God spoke after the Fall, promising One who would crush the serpent's head, even though His heel would be bruised. God spoke His Word of repentance to the prophets, who passed those words on faithfully, to Jew and to Gentile alike. And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. God's unchangeable Word deigned to take on your flesh and blood. And God's Word continues to come to you. In the hearing of your sins forgiven. In His Scriptures opened and explained to you. In the water. In the bread and wine. God's Word remains as vital for God's people as it did in the Garden of Eden. And God's Word has a name. That being the name of Jesus, the Ultimate Prophet of God, Who has the glory of God. We continue to behold that glory.

Let us pray. O Holy Spirit, You strive to bring us closer to the Man who sent You onto the Apostles. We ask that You would continue to have us behold His glory, glory as the only-begotten from the Father, full of the grace and truth of His unchangeable Word, as we hear His Word proclaimed, and our eyes see seemingly simple water, bread, and wine. We ask this through Jesus Christ our LORD, Who lives and reigns with You and the Father, ever one God. Amen.

Saturday of Advent 1

2 Timothy 4:1-5

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

People loved by God, preach the Word. This is the command that Saint Paul gives to young Pastor Timothy in your reading for today. This seems to be simple, and yet, there are many Pastors who get this wrong, and many who claim to be Christian who don't seem to care about this simple fact. The main job description of a Pastor is to point you to Jesus, the Word of God incarnate. In that sense, Pastors today fulfill the same job as the Prophets of the Old Testament, and the role that Christ fulfilled as our true and ultimate Prophet. Pastors are the stewards of the mysteries, and they are the ones who publicly forgive sins, their hands are the ones Christ uses to wash His new saints in the waters of Holy Baptism, their hands feed the faithful with Christ's own Body and Blood. Pastors are not like prophets in that they cannot say with certainty anything that will happen in the future, other than Jesus Christ is coming again and will bring the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come when He does. Pastors don't know the future apart from that fact. But Pastors do know Jesus, just as the prophets of old saw the glimpses and shadows of Jesus and pointed to Him as the Savior of the World. So tomorrow, go to Church. Hear about Jesus, the Word of God who came to earth for you.

Let us pray. LORD Jesus Christ, as we wrap up this week meditating on how the prophets of the Old Testament, and the Pastors of the New Testament both point to You, help us to prepare next week for hearing about your actions as Priest, as we approach the celebration of Your birth. Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent

Luke 21:25-33

Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” (Luke 21:27-28)

People loved by God, today’s reading is the Gospel for congregations that use the Historic Lectionary. And in this reading, Jesus is teaching about the end of the world. The Son of Man, Jesus Christ Himself, is going to come victoriously. And Jesus is teaching His disciples this during Holy Week, right before His crucifixion and His resurrection three days later. What Jesus taught before Holy Week was pointing towards His death, how He needed to be crucified and then raised. But in Holy Week, the topic changes to what the disciples will need to do after He ascends in glory. And part of what the Church does is we wait. Advent is a time of waiting in preparation for Christmas, but this reading reminds us that we are waiting for Christ’s second Advent. This second Advent, or second coming, will be the full victory parade when sin, death, and the devil are shown to be fully defeated because of Christ’s victory over His enemies, when He offered Himself up as the sacrifice on the cross. Jesus came the first time to be our Priest.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father and Creator of the heavens and earth, we thank you for sending Your Son Jesus Christ to be Priest for us. Help us to lift up our heads when persecution and tribulation comes to us, and remind us that our redemption is drawing near, indeed, it will come, when Christ our LORD returns in glory. We ask this through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God. Amen.

Monday of Advent 2

Numbers 5:5-10

Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his. (Numbers 5:9)

People loved by God, the book of Numbers can be challenging to read straight through, because of all of the laws that are explained. But your reading today helps to explain all of the laws. When someone harms another, it is just to pay to cover the damage done. Replacing someone's property when you destroy it is good. That makes sense to us as people, and even more as believers. But when sin is involved, what is the price for that? In the Old Testament, the priests would be the ones to determine the amount wronged and have the sinner pay up. And in the New Testament, the same mentality applies. Jesus Christ is our true and faithful Priest, and He says that we are sinners, and God is the One Who has been wronged. And He says that death is the correct punishment for us. The Baby that we are about to celebrate in the manger is the Priest Who says we need to die. But as you remember through your life, and will be seen more in the devotions this week, Jesus as our great High Priest, offers not you or I up as the sacrifice, but offers Himself up as the True Sacrifice. Jesus came as our Priest, but also as our Sacrifice.

Let us pray. LORD Jesus, we poor, unworthy sinners know that we have no good apart from You. Remind us this week that You came as our High Priest, Who did not offer up sacrifices for Yourself and for us, but rather, offered Yourself up for our sake, and so that our sin would be taken from us. Continue to have your sacrifice on our minds as we quickly approach the celebration of Your birth. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 2

John 17:1-26

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word." (John 17:19-20)

People loved by God, what did the priest of the Old Testament do? They offered sacrifices to cleanse and remove sin, as a foreshadowing of Christ's own sacrifice on the cross. They taught people how to live in the right way that God wants all people to do. And they also prayed for the people under them, that they be kept in the faith. And your reading today focuses on that last reason. This chapter of Scripture is often called the High Priestly Prayer, because Jesus is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners, and yet, He still prays for them. He intercedes in beautiful words for us to read today. Verse 20 has Jesus praying not just for His disciples who are a few feet away asleep, but also for all who will come to faith from the disciples' teaching. That is you and I as believers, 2,000 years later, who have heard the words of the disciples through the writings of the New Testament. Even though the time of sacrifice draws near, Jesus still remains the faithful Priest of God, and prays for His Church, that they be kept in faith.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus Christ serves at Your right hand, and continues to intercede for us poor sinners. Remind us that His sacrifice on the cross was why He came to earth. Even when He was a Baby in the manger, He was acting as Priest on our behalf and was riding on in lowly pomp to die. Grant that His priestly actions for us are not forgotten or ignored in our lives, through the same Jesus Christ, our LORD, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 2

Hebrews 7:20-28

He, [Jesus] because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. (Hebrews 7:24-27)

People loved by God, this week of devotions may be confusing to you. After all, we are in Advent, not in Lent. We are supposed to be rejoicing in family events, Christmas shopping, and decorating the Church to celebrate Christ's birth. Lent is the time when we sing "Ride on, ride on, in majesty" and when we mourn our sin as we see the approaching somber celebration of Good Friday and rejoice in the resurrection that happened on Easter. But as your reading says today, Jesus Christ is our High Priest. His three-fold office is Prophet, which we heard about last week, Priest, which is the focus of this week, and King, the focus next week. Priests offer sacrifices for sin. So yes, celebrate Jesus and Him being the Baby in the manger, but celebrate, knowing that your sins brought Jesus to earth, not to remain the cute Baby, but to offer Himself as the True Sacrifice for sin. And go to Church this evening to hear more about Jesus Christ being the True Sacrifice for your sin.

Let us pray. LORD Jesus, it is sometimes easier to picture you simply as the cute baby of Bethlehem, and to look with shame at Your cross. Comfort us with the fact that You are our High Priest, and help us to see the beauty of Your sacrifice, which was so pleasing to our Father and Yours, that He raised You up from death, so that You can live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 2

1 John 2:1-2 and Romans 8:34

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

People loved by God, the season of Advent is a joyous one, as we prepare ourselves inside and out to celebrate the Babe of Bethlehem. But for many, the “Joy to the World” that we sing loudly through the Christmas season seems hollow. For us in the Northern Hemisphere, we are losing minutes of sunlight day by day, and the darkness can feel solid enough to strangle you. For some, this is the first Christmas without mom or dad, or other heartbreaking deaths. For some, seeing family gather, and you don’t have good relationships with your family, and you mourn. Where is your Savior when the world is filled with joy, and you are filled with sorrow? People loved by God, your Savior is at the same place. Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, is at the right hand of the Father. And He is interceding for you. Jesus knows what it is to be joyous, as He likely was at the wedding in Cana. And Jesus knows what it is to mourn, as He did at the grave of Lazarus. Your High Priest knows your emotions, because He took on your flesh and blood and is human, just as you are.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, You tell us in the Scriptures that there are times to mourn and times to rejoice. Help us to show the hope of Christ coming to earth for those who need it, and to rejoice with those who are rejoicing in Christ, our High Priest, coming and dwelling with us. We ask this through the same Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday of Advent 2

Psalm 22

I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You...My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever! (Psalm 22:22, 25-26)

People loved by God, Jesus, when He was on the cross, offering Himself up as our True Sacrifice, prayed this Psalm, most famously, the beginning verse of this Psalm: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” But the end of this Psalm transitions from the agony of the cross to Jesus serving as our Priest and conducting the Divine Service for us. This is another description of what the Old Testament priests did. They declared God and His works to the people. They gave the praises of the people to God with their prayers when everyone was assembled together. And Jesus, as our True and Faithful High Priest, came to earth to declare the mighty works of God to His people, Jew and Gentile alike. His praises continue to be proclaimed in the great assembly of the Church, even to this day.

Let us pray. O Holy Spirit, You have caused the Church to sing and declare the praises of God throughout all generations. Have us continue to sing those same praises, just as Christ prayed on the cross. Help us to celebrate the joy of His coming with those we know and love in our communities and families, through the same Jesus Christ, our LORD, Who lives and reigns with You and the Father, ever one God. Amen.

Saturday of Advent 2

Luke 22:19-20

And [Jesus] took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:19-20)

People loved by God, this reading may surprise you. The institution of the LORD's Supper doesn't seem to be a priestly act, and yet it is. Jesus, as the High Priest is saying what the Sacrifice would be. Just as the Passover lamb would be sacrificed, and the flesh eaten by the people, so also, Jesus, the Passover Lamb would be sacrificed, and His flesh needs to be eaten by the people. And Jesus tells His disciples to do this as well. They are not re-sacrificing Christ on the cross, because Jesus, our High Priest, already offered that sacrifice. But the disciples are tasked with this noble work of doing the same thing Jesus did, in remembrance of Him. How do we definitively remember the sacrifice of Jesus? By going to Church and declaring the praises of Him Who called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. And we remember the sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood as we eat and drink His Body and Blood. With that in mind, go to Church tomorrow, and remember how Christ came to be our True High Priest.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, Your Son Jesus Christ was the sacrifice for our sin, and remains at Your right hand, interceding for us. As we quickly approach the celebration of His birth again, remind us how Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and LORD of Lords, even as we celebrate His birth in the manger, through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our LORD, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent

Matthew 11:2-10

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." (Matthew 11:4–6)

People loved by God, this Gospel reading reminds us of the sad fate of the Forerunner, John the Baptist. He was thrown in prison. And Jesus tells the disciples of John to take heart, and to comfort John with the signs Jesus is doing. The blind hear and see. Lepers are cleansed. The poor have the Gospel preached to them. And then Jesus speaks to the crowd. John was not a king of this world, because those kings sit in palaces with the finest of clothing. But Jesus also came to this world, and had no place to lay His head. He is a King, not of this world, but a King that has healed His subjects. It is not hate speech to say Christ is King. This is His title, but His kingdom does not look like the world around you would think of a kingdom. Jesus Christ came as King.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, from Whom all fatherhood is named, You placed Your Son Jesus onto the eternal throne promised to one of King David's descendants. Grant that we would recognize His Kingdom here on earth, and keep us steadfast in faith to see His Kingdom in glory everlasting, for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Monday of Advent 3

Psalm 45:1-17

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. (Psalm 45:6-7)

People loved by God, this Psalm shows all the beauty of Christ's Kingdom. The first verse shows that all of the things that are written because of the Kingship of Jesus, and the goodness that comes from living in His Kingdom. Grace is poured out from His lips, which continues to happen when you hear that your sins are forgiven, when King Jesus washes you clean of all of your sins in the font, and when King Jesus appears on your lips so you can taste and see that the LORD is good. King Jesus rides in majesty and honor, and He does this most famously humble and mounted on a donkey as the Triumphant King of Israel. Jesus Christ came to earth as King, but He continues to be the King, even to today.

Let us pray. LORD Jesus Christ, Your Father has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. We give You thanks and praise that You came to earth to be our King. Not a tyrant as Pilate and Herod were, but a loving King Who was willing to die for His subjects. Help us keep the image of You ask King in our minds as we prepare to celebrate your royal birth. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 3

Revelation 5:1-14 and Acts 7:56

Then I [Saint John] looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:11-13)

People loved by God, your readings today talk about the Kingship of Jesus. Revelation 5 talks about Jesus entering into heaven to be seated on His throne as the victorious King. And Acts 7 grants us the words of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, who sees Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. And these images might seem to be out of place at first. After all, both of these happen after Jesus Christ has been crucified and resurrected. They don't seem to fit in with our preparation of Christmas. But on that first Christmas, did Jesus look like a King then? No. Here was a Baby, placed in a feeding trough, cared for by a young mother, heralded by angels and shepherds. His birth was not a royal birth. But both at Christmas, and at His ascension, Jesus shows that His kingdom is not of this world.

Let us pray. O Holy Spirit, You have given us eyes to see our good and gracious King with spiritual and not with earthly eyes. Continue to help us to seek His Kingdom where Christ has promised to be, with the gathering of His saints, and in the Sacraments. Help us to avoid the bustle of this world, with the many good things that come about during this season, and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, our LORD, Who lives and reigns with You and the Father, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 3

John 18:36-19:16

Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 18:37, 19:14-15)

People loved by God, your reading today should be hard to read. Your King, King Jesus, has a good kingdom. It is not a Kingdom of this world, but Jesus still has authority here in this world. And Pilate knows this. Jesus tells him that the Kingdom of Jesus is not of this world. And so Pilate gives the King His coronation. His Kingdom doesn't look normal, as you read in the devotion yesterday. And His coronation isn't normal either. King Jesus is crowned, not with gold or silver, as He deserves, but with thorns. He is shown to the people, not as a royal that people should bend the knee to, but with the cry "Behold, your King" and the crowd says they want nothing to do with that King. This is the humiliation of the King, but King Jesus says in John chapter 12 that His humiliation is actually His exaltation where He is placed upon His throne to rule and reign. Go to church this evening, and hear that King Jesus does not look or act as a normal king.

Let us pray. King Jesus, Your kingdom is not of this world. Continue to be in our midst and rule our hearts, so we, as Your people, may glorify in You. Help us to behold, behold our King, even as you go to the throne of the cross to die for us. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 3

Colossians 1:17-18

And He [Jesus] is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:17-18)

People loved by God, what do we call our leaders of our earthly governments? The head of state. And this headship starts with King Jesus. He is the head, and His kingdom, that is, His Church, is His body. This headship is why we have the Fourth Commandment, because we honor all of our leaders, not just our parents. And that reality is shown by Saint Paul in the concluding verses of Ephesians chapter 5. Husbands are the head of the family, and wives need to submit to their head of household. This all starts from being submissive to Christ, our head, and our King. We listen to our King because we know that He is not leading us astray. His kingdom, as you read a couple days ago is good. We should want to have this kingdom given to us more and more, as we grow closer to Christ, who came to be our eternal and everlasting King.

Let us pray. Most blessed, holy Trinity, You are Who created the heavens and earth and redeemed them, and in Holy Baptism, You claimed our bodies to be Your Temple. Grant that we would continue to see Your Kingdom in our midst, as we quickly approach the birth of Jesus Christ our LORD. For You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Friday of Advent 3

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

People loved by God, all authority has been given to Jesus. And as King, Jesus has the ultimate say in what happens in His Kingdom. And what does Jesus say to do? Baptize and teach. You and I have our King's orders. So the Word goes out, and we work to bring people in our lives into the Kingship of Christ. We have an easier job of this with our children, but we should want all that we interact with in our daily vocations to be brought into the Kingdom of Jesus. And this headship is understood in our families, and our government. After all, those parents and governmental leaders have authority because King Jesus has given them some power and authority. We honor those leaders because by doing so, we honor Jesus Christ, who came to earth to be King, not an earthly king, but an eternal, heavenly King.

Let us pray. Pour out on us, Your grace and mercy, so that we would see your Kingdom among us. Enliven our hearts that all those we see in our daily vocations would hear of the Kingdom of Jesus from our mouths. Keep us steadfast in faith to You that Jesus Christ coming to earth would remain our focus as we quickly approach the celebration of His birth. For You, LORD God, live and reign, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Saturday of Advent 3

Hebrews 13:7-17

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever... Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. (Hebrews 13:7-8, 17)

People loved by God, you may be a leader in this world. Be it as a Father, or as high up in government as the President. But Martin Luther in the Large Catechism says that spiritual Fathers are the ones that are most usually neglected. And your reading for today says twice that you are to remember and obey your leaders. But no governmental leader has spoken the Word of God directly to me, and they aren't caring for your souls. The Kingship of Jesus truly does come from our spiritual leaders as well, that being our Pastors. So listen to your Pastors also. They are fighting satan and his demons day in and day out. He hears the dark sins, and when things are going well, he often is overlooked. I don't care if your Pastor gave you a book list for Christmas gifts, or if the parsonage needs a new heater. What your Pastor wants more than anything is to have you be brought closer to King Jesus. He will live on the praise of one of his sermons for a month, and may even cry when you seriously tell him that you have been praying for him. He would love to be treated to dinner with his wife, and the kids are with you as you babysit. The kingdom of Christ where you live is most clearly seen with your Pastor, who gives you King Jesus to you week in and week out. So tomorrow, go to Church. Listen to what he says. And afterward, thank him for what he is doing in your place.

Let us pray. King Jesus, You have given us Pastors to lead us closer to You, and they deeply care for our souls. Remind me to listen and obey him, for he brings us Your Kingdom to us week in and week out. Help us to celebrate Your birth with Him this week, as we live together as one holy Christian people, with You as our True Head. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

John 1:19-28

Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?" He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD," ' as the prophet Isaiah said." (John 1:19-23)

People loved by God, your reading today goes back to John the Baptist. And his confession helps to show that he is the one foretold to prepare the highway for the LORD. His confession is simple, I am not the Christ. I am not Elijah who is to come, though Jesus disagrees with his humility, and John is not the prophet who is to come. But John still knows who the Christ is. As you can read in the very next verse after your reading today, Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. And this image is very helpful to remember why we get so busy at this time of year. Because it isn't about you or me. It isn't about how many presents we can get or how much credit card debt we get into buying gifts for others. This time of the year isn't about how many family events you can cram into your childrens' break before they go back to school. This time of the year has the meaning in the name. It is Christ-mass. How do you keep Christ in Christmas? You go to mass, or the Divine Service. So this week, as Christmas comes upon us, go to all of the services your congregation offers. Maybe the congregations are gathering together to do a Circuit-wide Christmas Day service. Go to that. Receive the Body and Blood of Jesus. For it is He alone Who takes away the sin of the world.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, keep our minds focused this week on Your Son, Jesus Christ. The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

Monday of Advent 4

Micah 5:2-5

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” (Micah 5:2)

People loved by God, your reading today gives you the famous verse, that Jesus will be born in Bethlehem, the City of David. And this is important to remember and celebrate as we draw ever closer to the Christmas season. But verse four of your reading gives another cherished image of Jesus. Jesus will stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD. They shall abide in Him. This image is the one we all know and love, Christ carrying the lamb on His shoulders. This is an image that we see in the earliest images that were painted or carved by the Church. Jesus Christ being the Good Shepherd caring for His flock is a wonderful reminder of how Christ cares for us. Bear with me as I give you a bit of a language tidbit. Latin has been used in the Church to give greater glory to the actions we sing. Think of the Gloria in Excelsis that we are about to sing with the angels on Christmas Eve. That simply means Glory in the highest, the first line of the angel's song. The Latin for Shepherd is a word you already know, because that word is Pastor. Jesus is your Good Pastor. Jesus came to earth to be your Good Pastor.

Let us pray. LORD Jesus Christ, You care for the flock of God enough to come to earth and be born in Bethlehem. We ask that as we approach the celebration of Your birth, You would shepherd us with Your Law and Your Gospel. Amen.

For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” And Jesus said to them, “I AM the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst... I AM the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I AM the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. (John 6:33-35, 51-55)

People loved by God, yesterday, you read that Christ would feed His flock. And your reading today tells you how Christ feeds His flock in the strength of the LORD, as Micah says. Jesus says that anyone who eats of the Bread of Life will live forever, and His flesh is that same Bread of Life. This is the strength of the LORD, to eat the flesh of your crucified Good Pastor. And how do you eat the flesh of the Lamb of God? You go to church, and you listen to your own Pastor tell you to hunger and thirst for righteousness, the same righteousness that you receive in that place joined with the bread and wine. Christ has ascended into heaven, but He takes the hands of your earthly Pastor and uses them to feed you with His flesh. As verse 56 says, whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in Him. This happens at Communion. So tomorrow and the next day, go to Christmas Eve AND Christmas Day services. Receive the Body and Blood of Christ for your sins to be cleansed from you.

Let us pray. O Holy Spirit, there were many that left after Jesus taught a hard saying foreshadowing Holy Communion. We poor sinners plead with You. Do not have us leave from the care of our Good Pastor, Jesus Christ, but bring us ever closer to Him. Amen.

Eve of the Nativity of our Lord

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

People loved by God, these verses are familiar, because we had them a couple days ago to talk about Jesus having all power and authority. Today, however, we transition to who Jesus said these words to. Jesus took the eleven disciples with Him up on a mountain, and He gives them the authority to Baptize His Church. Yes, in an absolute emergency, anyone could do a Baptism, but we should always want the man that Jesus Christ Himself has sent to a specific place to do the Baptism. This is for the sake of good order, as the Lutheran Confessions say, and it is following the same track of who Jesus gave this authority to. Jesus did not tell the masses to Baptize. He only told the men who were the first Pastors that they had this authority. Because Jesus is the Good Pastor, and He uses Pastors specifically to Baptize and teach.

Let us pray. LORD Jesus Christ, as we celebrate the Eve of Your Nativity, we also thank you for sending Pastors into our midst to Baptize, following Your command. As we celebrate You, the Light of the World, coming into our world, we simultaneously celebrate You coming to each person that You have Baptized, symbolically shown by a lit candle at their Baptism. Amen.

Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Day

John 20:19-25

Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:21-23)

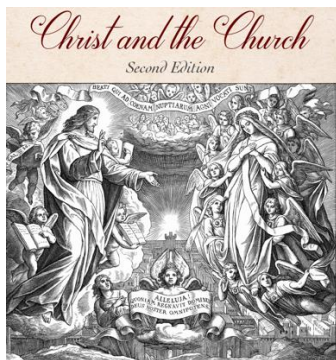
People loved by God, Merry Christmas! As the world throws out all the Christmas decorations, and by noon, the holiday stations will return to normal, the Church's celebration is just beginning. We remember that Christ is our Good Pastor, and these words near the end of Saint John's Gospel account, help us to celebrate until He returns. Because Christ is about to ascend into heaven. People on earth have been waiting for over two thousand years for His return. And soon for you and I, families will leave to go home, the gifts will be returned or forgotten, and the joy of this great day will fade. But for you, the faithful believers of Jesus, Christ and His message endure. Because Christ, our Good Pastor, told the first Pastors to forgive sins. Any sins you forgive are forgiven. Any sins you retain are retained. Just as for many, Christmas Day services are less attended, these words are also more quickly forgotten. This is the "quasi" Means of Grace, that being Holy Absolution. But Christ tells His Pastors to forgive sins. And this is the entire point of our Advent preparation that has led into Christmas. The forgiveness of sins truly is the Church's life. Because Christ Jesus, our Good Pastor, wanted to make sure His flock was well cared for when He ascended, and ever sits for us at the Father's right hand. So Jesus sent your Pastor to you. Rejoice in this, and once again Merry Christmas. Joy to the World, the LORD is come! Let earth receive her King.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, You sent Your only begotten-Son into the flesh to be born of the virgin Mary, to suffer and die, and on the third day rise from the dead. We ask that we would always receive His Pastoral counsel and seek the forgiveness of sins wherever they have been promised to be. For You, heavenly Father, along with Jesus Christ, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, live and reign, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

✠ *Soli Deo Gloria* ✠
✠ Latin for *Glory to God alone* ✠

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