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Cause for Great Joy

Hearing the Gospel of Christ in the Advent and Christmas Hymns of Paul Gerhardt



An Advent and Christmas devotion written for the saints and households of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

Advent 2026

To the Glory of God

For the Evangelical Lutheran Church wherever she is found.

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The Twelfth Day of Christmas
January 5, 2027

Gracious Child, we pray, 0 hear us,
From Your lowly manger cheer us,
Gently lead us and be near us,
Till we join Your choir above. (LSB 375:6}

"*And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*" (Isaiah 35:10)

This last stanza and last devotion rightly point us ahead to the everlasting joy of the life to come. In this life we receive, we hear, we remember, we eat and drink our Lord's gracious visitation to us. From this we have joy, give thanks, sacrifice in love for one another, and we pray.

Throughout this season of Advent and Christmas we have been hearing God's Word from the Scriptures and also in the hymns of Paul Gerhardt. That German pastor has continued to tell of the great deeds of the Lord to many generations that have come after him. He knew the joy that would come with joining the "choir above" as he calls it. For him it meant the choir that consisted of all the believers in Christ from Creation on. It meant that he would join his fathers in the faith. It meant he would join his children and wife who had passed already. Already in pondering Jesus in the manger we know the hope of heaven and eternal life. And so from Advent and Christmastime we look forward to eternity because these very seasons of the Church year have retold us of our Savior Jesus and His great love for us. Each and every day, because of Jesus our sorrow and sighing flee away a little more as the eternity of gladness and joy approach. It is certain, Jesus has said so. That's what He has in store for you.

Gracious Child, we pray, 0 hear us, from Your lowly manger cheer us, gently lead us and be near us, till we join Your choir above. Amen.

The Eleventh Day of Christmas
January 4, 2027

0h, the joy beyond expressing
When by faith we grasp this blessing,
And to You we come confessing
That Your love has set us free. (LSB 375:5}

"*Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!*" (Psalm 107:21–22)

Joy is not something we cook up in ourselves. Joy comes from God who gives it to us. We have joy when we remember our Lord's gracious work for us. We remember the wondrous works of our God to the children of man and by faith believe all of His Word. Faith receives the blessing and from this great blessing comes great joy.

In joy we are thankful. We realize just what God has done for us. We cannot always see it or feel it, but because His Word says it we believe it to be true, and from that trust in His Word we give the sacrifice of thanksgiving. We come confessing His love because His love sets us free to confess. His steadfast love frees us to tell of His deeds in songs of joy. In fact, that is one of the themes that goes through all of Paul Gerhardt's hymns—joy in the deeds of God—praise in response to what Jesus has done.

This is always the picture of praise in the Scriptures. God acts. He does the work. Humanity receives the gift, is given joy and thanksgiving, and can tell of God's good work in songs of that same joy. Our hymns are fine examples of this—they speak about God's work for us in Christ Jesus. They tell of the greatness of Jesus and the salvation He has accomplished for us. Hearing this good news, the Spirit through that Word gives us faith in Jesus and strengthens it as well. This is a great joy for us who were in bondage but are now free. Sing praise to our Lord, Jesus Christ who has set us free.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the salvation You have earned for us and given to us. Send Your Spirit to strengthen our faith. Draw us ever to hear Your Word that we may sing it to You and each other in song. Amen.

"*0h come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*" (Psalm 95:1)

God's people sing His praises. From the well of joy that comes from being forgiven, redeemed, delivered, and at peace with God it is quite necessary for songs to be sung and praise to be made.

These songs are far from shallow songs about ourselves or other humans. The songs of Christians are songs of the Lord God Almighty, that is, to Jesus Christ. They tell of His marvelous deeds. They sing His praises. They pass on in words and melodies the great teachings of the Word of God to the next generations. They are a right part of the praise of God's people.

This Advent and Christmas, please use this devotion, "Cause for Great Joy" in your daily devotional life. The primary material for the devotions is both from Scripture passages and the Advent and Christmas hymns of a Lutheran pastor named Paul Gerhardt. His biography is on page 5 of this booklet. Through both song and the Word, the devotions are geared to lead you through Advent, celebrating the "coming" of our Lord (past in the Incarnation, present in His Word and Sacraments, and future on the Day of the Resurrection of all the dead) and into Christmas, a more specific rejoicing in that first coming of Christ. The great and mysterious Incarnation, the Son of God, fully divine, assuming human flesh as Immanuel (God with us). The devotions are meant to be brief but certainly can be mined for greater depth. The prayers are short and are meant to be a part of your normal prayers for your household, church, community, nation and world. Some other practices could also be good ideas, perhaps reading one of the Gospels like John or Luke, perhaps cracking that Small Catechism to review what you learned in days past, or maybe reading something like the Large Catechism. Through it all, we hope that your faith in Christ is strengthened in hearing the songs of the faith and the Scriptures that run underneath them. Christ be praised, because He gives us cause for great joy!

The Lord bless your reading and hearing of this devotion,

The authors and editor



Paul Gerhardt.

The Tenth Day of Christmas
January 3, 2027

From the bondage that oppressed us
From sin's fetters that possessed us,
From the grief that sore distressed us,
We, the captives, now are free. (LSB 375:4}

"*Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart.*" (Psalm 107:13–14)

We generally want to think more of humanity than the Bible says. We like to think that people are basically good or that at the very least are neutral in things. Such thinking can help us be lax towards our Lord's Word and gifts like Baptism, but it is not truthful thinking. The Scriptures define what is truth.

And the truth is this. Every human being is conceived in bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. This is described in many places of Scripture (Psalm 51; Ephesians 2; Romans 5; Colossians 1). Humans just don't naturally believe it (we are in bondage and cannot believe it unless someone else frees us). There is no freedom that can come unless God does it. And Jesus Christ, God in the flesh has done it.

We once were captives but have been made free by Christ. Darkness and the shadow of death no longer haunt us because we have been freed, our bonds burst apart in the water and Word of Baptism. That is our great moment of deliverance. And from that moment, baptism (what God did in it) becomes a great comfort and security for us. It frees us from sin, we do not belong to it any longer and by God's grace can resist it. We no longer need look at death as the end, for even death has to release us because Christ has died and rose. Our grieving doesn't have the same darkness to it, but instead is grief with hope in what God has done and still promises to do. You belong to Christ, and in Him there is great freedom.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for freeing us from the bondage of sin, darkness, grief, and the shadow of death. Help us to live in our baptism each and every day, knowing how You have set us free. Amen.

The Ninth Day of Christmas
January 2, 2027

Jacob's star in all its splendor
Beams with comfort sweet and tender
Forcing Satan to surrender,
Breaking all the pow'rs of hell. (LSB 375:3}

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be dispossessed; Seir also, his enemies, shall be dispossessed. Israel is doing valiantly. And one from Jacob shall exercise dominion and destroy the survivors of cities!"" (Numbers 24:17–19)

Jacob's star is not a common name used for Jesus. This prophecy of the coming Messiah was uttered by Balaam, who was paid to curse Israel but each time could only bless them. Indeed Jesus would be a blessing to Israel. Something to remember here is that the New Testament describes the Church as Israel, and then also as we look at the enemies listed in the Numbers text, we can understand that they mean the enemies of the Church, things like fear, terror, sin, death, the devil, and even hell. These are what this stanza interpret as the things destroyed by this Star of Jacob.

This understanding is nothing new. The wise men (Matthew 2) noted the star of the new King. Revelation also describes Jesus as a star (Revelation 22). By extension the start of the Gospel of John refers to Jesus as Light coming into the world. He shines into the darkness, overcoming it.

The conquering work of Jesus is celebrated all of the year by the Church. We are free because He has freed us and defeated our foes. The devil may still prowl around like a roaring lion, but He has been mortally wounded and his death is certain. This can give us great cause for rejoicing.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for Your conquest over the old accuser Satan. Grant us the comfort of the forgiveness of sins, life, and everlasting salvation. Amen.

Paul Gerhardt (b. Mar 12, 1607 d. Jun 7 1676)

Paul Gerhardt is probably the greatest hymn-writer that Lutheranism has produced. Under a portrait of Gerhardt found in a church in Germany is the inscription "A divine sifted in Satan's sieve". This saying portrays the life of Gerhardt well. He was well acquainted with suffering and grief, as well as the cost of confessing the faith in perilous times.

Gerhardt lost his father early in his life and grew up in the times of the Thirty Years War as foreign armies swept across German soil and left the different regions in chaos and destruction.

Gerhardt was trained in Wittenberg and was ordained and made preacher at Mittenwalde in 1651. He later served as a pastor at St. Nicolai in Berlin. He was removed in 1666 for refusing to sign onto an edict that attempted to merge the Lutheran and Reformed churches. He was forbidden to preach or conduct worship services. He called this his "Berlin Martyrdom". After a few years of persecution in Berlin while being supported by other faithful congregation members, he later served at another parish until his death.

Gerhardt's life was filled with sorrow. He lost his wife and four of his children. Perhaps this accounts for the tone and quality of his hymns. He understood suffering, and yet his hymns also reflect a jubilant joy and hope in Christ. They have served to strengthen the faith of countless Lutherans throughout the centuries.

In all, Gerhardt wrote over 148 hymns. His hymns have been found to be the most popular of all German Lutheran hymn-writers. Not even the hymns of Luther are more popular. *Lutheran Service Book* includes a number of his hymns (334, 360, 372, 375, 438, 449, 450, 453,
467, 596, 683, 724, 726, 737, 754, 756, 880). They all reflect a proper understanding of suffering and the cross, as well as the hope and joy found in Christ. Gerhardt is commemorated in the church year on Oct 26th.

The First Sunday in Advent
November 29, 2026

0 Lord, how shall I meet You, How welcome You aright?
Your people long to greet You, My hope, my heart's delight!
0 kindle, Lord most holy, Your lamp within my breast
To do in spirit lowly All that may please You best.

(Lutheran Service Book/LSB 334:1}

For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness. (Psalm 18:28}

In a few short weeks on Christmas Eve, our congregation, like many others, will celebrate the tradition of singing "Silent Night" by candlelight. On that night our worshipers will not pull out lighters and matches to light their own candles at the beginning of the hymn; instead the flame from the Christ Candle near the altar will be taken and shared with all in attendance. From a single source will every candle be lit.

The Psalmist writes, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (119:105) Like the candles on Christmas Eve, the lamps of faith in the hearts of Christians are kindled by a single lamp and light: the Word of God. As the Word of God is proclaimed from the lectern, pulpit, and altar, the Holy Spirit then creates and strengthens faith in every believer, in order that they would meet and welcome the Lord aright as he comes to them in the Divine Service to forgive their sins. This is what pleases our Lord best: to believe his holy Word and receive his forgiveness.

The best and indeed the only way that we Christians can rightly receive the Lord now is by hearing and believing his Word. Then finally, on the Last Day, like the five wise virgins of Matthew 25, we will celebrate with great joy the coming of the Bridegroom Jesus Christ, who will receive us into his marriage feast that never ends.

Almighty and merciful God, bless my hearing of your Word this Advent season, that I might meet and welcome you with joy as you come to me in the Means of Grace; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

The Eighth Day of Christmas (Circumcision and Name of Jesus)
January 1, 2027

Christ, from heav'n to us descending
And in love our race befriending
In our need His help extending
Saved us from the wily foe. (LSB 375:2}

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people" (Luke 1:68)

Much of this devotion has been spent speaking about how Christ has come down from heaven to deliver us. This stanza of our last hymn of the season speaks again of this great deed of our God. On the occasion of the Eighth day after His birth, we celebrate also a part of this visitation—the circumcision and naming of Jesus.

On this day we celebrate how our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law concerning circumcision and also demonstrated His willingness to shed His own blood for us. This causes us as Christians to have great joy. For God has visited His people, not in judgment as an enemy, but in redemption as a friend.

The stanza says that "in our need His help extending". Humanity was indeed "in need". Sold to the dominion of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh we could not hope for salvation from within us. We belonged to another. But Christ came, befriending us, having mercy upon us and visiting His people.

And in His visitation He was meant for one thing, even at eight days old, the redemption of the human race. Redemption is purchasing language—Christ Jesus bought us back, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. All of this gives us the occasion to have faith within that cannot help but confess through raising our voices.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for Your gracious visitation to redeem us. Help us keep this faith and confession for all our days. Amen.

The Seventh Day of Christmas (Eve of the Circumcision and Name of Jesus)
December 31, 2026

See how God, for us providing,
Gave His Son and life abiding;
He our weary steps is guiding
From earth's woe to heav'nly joy. (TLH 90:3}

Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:30-31}

The Scriptures are filled with descriptions of the Christian's life as a journey. The Psalmist writes, "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me," (Psalm 23:3-4a) and "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105) The apostle Paul wrote of himself, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7) And in the book of Acts the early Christian Church is known simply as "the Way". (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22)

The way of the Christian faith leads from earth's woe, caused by sin and death, to heavenly joy, won for us by Christ's death and resurrection. It is not an easy way to walk; Jesus himself says, "The way is hard that leads to life." (Matthew 7:14) Those who walk it must take up their crosses and follow Jesus. It means death.

But this way does not end in death, but rather in eternal life, because Jesus has already walked the way before us. Having died and risen from his grave, we too can be confident that we shall rise and that the end of our journey is life forever. Therefore while the way seems long and arduous, and we grow weary and faint, our strength is renewed by God through his Word, who will bring us safely home.

0 God, keep us throughout the days of our earthly journey, that we may not faint, but remain steadfast unto life everlasting. Amen.

The First Monday in Advent (St. Andrew, Apostle)
November 30, 2026

Your Zion strews before You Green boughs and fairest palms;
And I too will adore You With joyous songs and psalms.
My heart shall bloom forever For You with praises new
And from Your name shall never Withhold the honor due. (LSB 334:2}

Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:8-9}

It often comes as a surprise for those who are not familiar with the traditional lectionary of our church that the Gospel lesson for the First Sunday in Advent is the Palm Sunday account. Isn't Advent supposed to be a preparation for Christmas? And isn't Palm Sunday supposed to come right be-fore Good Friday and Easter?

First, in a sense, yes, Advent is a time of preparation. However, it is a preparation for more than just Christmas Day. The word *Advent* means "coming", and so the season is a preparation for our Lord's coming: in flesh, born on Christmas Day; in Word and Sacrament, every Divine Service; in glory, on the Last Day. Christians prepare for his coming—then, now, and someday—as the crowds did in Jerusalem long ago. We confess that he is the Son of David and the Lord and honor his name.

Second, yes, Palm Sunday comes before Good Friday and Easter, but the cross and resurrection is the reason why Jesus Christ came in flesh, born of the Virgin Mary. He came to suffer, die, and rise again in order that we might not die eternally, but have everlasting life. For this we adore him with joyous songs and psalms, as faithful Christians have throughout the ages.

Lord Jesus Christ, you came to earth to save me and all people by your blessed death and resurrection. Fill my heart and voice with praise for you and your great salvation. Amen.

The First Tuesday in Advent
December 1, 2016

I lay in fetters, groaning; You came to set me free.
I stood, my shame bemoaning; You came to honor me.
A glorious crown You give me, A treasure safe on high
That will not fail or leave me As earthly riches fly. (LSB 334:3}

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. (Isaiah 61:1}

Not every captive is imprisoned by chains of iron. The fetters which bind all people is sin. As the pastor declares in Divine Service, Setting Four, "We cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition." From the moment of conception, every single human being is captive to sin, and sinners cannot free themselves from that original sin. Without a Savior, sinners remain bound by their sins in this life and face everlasting punishment following death.

But Jesus Christ has come and set us free from bondage to sin and death. He won that freedom by being bound as a prisoner and subjected to a criminal's death. But death could not bind him. He rose from the grave triumphantly, shattering the power of sin and death. Now he delivers that freedom to us through his Word, by proclaiming liberty to the captives. By his Word we are truly set free.

Now we who were once captives are honored as sons and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. Our fetters have been exchanged for a glorious crown; our earthly riches fade in comparison to the treasure on high that is laid up for us. We are no longer slaves, but sons, and if sons, then heirs through God. (Galatians 4:7)

0 God, you anointed your Son, Jesus Christ, to win freedom for all who are in bondage to sin and death. By your holy Word strengthen me in faith toward you and your kingdom; through the same Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

The Sixth Day of Christmas
December 30, 2016

Sin and death may well be groaning,
Satan now may well be moaning;
We, our full salvation owning,
Cast our ev'ry care away. (TLH 90:2}

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. (2 Corinthians 4:8-10}

We are often reminded that the holiday season is not always joyful for everyone. Various reports and articles tell us that it is common to feel increased anxiety and depression during the weeks surrounding Christmas. The happiest time of the year proves to be anything but.

If our Christmas cheer is based on the shiniest wrapping paper and the brightest lights and the newest gifts and the biggest trees, than it should come as no surprise that it is fleeting and leaves us feeling less than fulfilled.

But our Christmas joy as Christians is not based on things or even feelings, but rather on the Word of God and the salvation bestowed therein. The truth of the Christmas season is that our Lord Jesus Christ was born, flesh like our flesh, blood like our blood, body and soul just as we are. And in his flesh and blood, body and soul, Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose again that we might have eternal life.

The joy that comes from the Gospel is greater than fleeting emotions, because it is grounded in God's unchanging Word. If this is the foundation for our Christmas cheer, than we may be joyful, like Paul, even when afflictions, perplexities, and persecutions may come.

Lord Jesus Christ, true joy comes from you alone. Grant me faith to hold fast to your Word, than in times of both gladness and sorrow I may rejoice in your salvation. Amen.

The Fifth Day of Christmas
December 29, 2026

Come, Your hearts and voices raising,
Christ the Lord with gladness praising;
Loudly sing His love amazing,
Worthy folk of Christendom. (LSB 375:1}

0h give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. (Psalm 107:1-3}

How can we respond to so great a salvation? What can we possible give in return for the gift of God's Son, born for us on Christmas Day? Is there anything we can do in return? This question is both asked and answered in the Offertory of Divine Service Setting One: "What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call on the name of the Lord." (*LSB* 159, from Psalm 116:12, 17)

The proper response to the Lord's salvation is praise and thanksgiving. This is evident throughout the Christmas story. Mary sings her song of praise, the Magnificat, after the annunciation by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:46-56), the angel and a multitude of the heavenly host praise God on the night of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:13-14). The shepherds return from the manger, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen (Luke 2:20).

And we Christians today do the same, even incorporating these songs of praise into our own worship. We sang the Magnificat during our Advent Midweek Evening Prayer services. The angels' song, the Gloria in Excelsis, has returned with the Christmas festival. We rejoice and give thanks, for our God has given us his Son, Jesus Christ, born of Mary, born to die that we might live forever. There is no better response to this gift than to praise and thank him.

Glory to you, 0 God, in the highest, for you have sent your only-begotten Son into our flesh to bear our sins and be our Savior! Amen.

The First Wednesday in Advent
December 2, 2026

Love caused Your incarnation; Love brought You down to me.
Your thirst for my salvation Procured my liberty.
0h, love beyond all telling, That led You to embrace
In love, all love excelling, 0ur lost and fallen race. (LSB 334:4}

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10}

"For us men and for our salvation." We confess these words each week when we confess the Nicene Creed. These simple words are crucial to our salvation. For the Son of God Jesus Christ came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man for us men and for our salvation. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate for us.

These words are the pure Gospel, for they confess no mere historical knowledge of a man named Jesus, nor even a general faith that God exists, but rather a saving faith that believes that God loves us, not because we have earned or deserved his love, but rather for the sake of Jesus Christ, and his death and resurrection.

The familiar Bible verse says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16). The word "so" refers not to a quantity of love (i.e., "so much") but a quality of love (i.e., "in this way"). This is how God loved the world: he gave his only-begotten Son. This is how God loved you. He thirsted for your salvation. He embraced you, though part of a lost and fallen race. And he was crucified as the propitiation for your sins. All because he loves you.

Blessed Savior, you loved me, though weak and fallen. You became incarnate for me and suffered for me because you loved me. By your unfailing love strengthen me to love you with my whole heart and my neighbor as myself. Amen.

The First Thursday in Advent
December 3, 2026

Rejoice, then, ye sad-hearted, Who sit in deepest gloom,
Who mourn o'er joys departed And tremble at your doom.
Despair not, He is near you, Yea, standing at the door,
Who best can help and cheer you And bids you weep no more.
*(*The Lutheran Hymnal */TLH 58:5}*
"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20}

Advent is sometimes considered to be a season of repentance, but Advent is also a season of joy, for the Messiah has come. The Law shows us our sin, and with godly repentance we mourn over our sins. Our sins should indeed cause us grief. Moreover, the death and hell we each deserve for those sins is a cause for trembling, as the explanation to the Close of the Commandments in the Small Catechism teaches us: "God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we should fear his wrath and not do anything against them."

And yet, in the midst of our grief, even our fear, we do not despair. To despair is to lose the hope of salvation, succumbing to Satan's accusation that our great sins exceed the bounds of God's mercy. But, as we confess at the beginning of the Divine Service, God's mercy is boundless. And so his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, offered his holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. And so Jesus continues to draw near to us, standing near our door, knocking through his holy Word, helping and cheering us by his pure Gospel.

By the work of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are opened to hear his Word and believe in him. In this faith we approach his holy table, eating with him the holy food he gives: his very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

Lord Jesus Christ, I confess that for my many sins I surely deserve nothing but punishment. 0f your boundless mercy, you gave yourself for me that I might be free. Thank you for your undeserved grace. Amen.

The Fourth Day of Christmas (The Holy Innocents, Martyrs)
December 28, 2026

The world may hold
Her wealth and gold;
But thou, my heart, keep Christ as thy true treasure.
To Him hold fast
Until at last
A crown be thine and honor in full measure. (LSB 372:6}

"*Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*" (James 1:12)

The fourth day of Christmas recounts the story of the young boys of Bethlehem under two years old who were killed by King Herod in his attempt to slay Jesus (Matthew 2:13-18). These "Holy Innocents" bore suffering and death for the sake of Christ coming into the world. This verse from James and also this last stanza of our hymn remind us of this as well.

The world wants more wealth, more power like Herod. It doesn't share these with the faithful. But the wealth of this world is fast falling apart. Moth and rust destroy and thieves pay each other with their thievery. The hymn stanza encourages us to remain steadfast under these trials, holding Christ as our true treasure. No matter what is going on around, from the latest news stories of chaos in the world, or our own struggle to keep what we have or get just a little bit more—the hymn has it right—to Christ hold fast.

For these days are short, and a time comes when Christ returns in glory, when true treasure will be found, crowns of righteousness and life will be given and honor in full measure. Then will the glory of Christ and of His Church be truly known by all who have ever lived.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the witness of the faithful through time. Help us to remain steadfast and resist the trials of the times, of power and wealth. Help us to regard You as our true treasure and to hold fast onto you. Amen.

The Third Day of Christmas (St. John, Apostle and Evangelist)
December 27, 2026

Remember thou
What glory now
The Lord prepared thee for all earthly sadness.
The angel host,
Can never boast,
0f greater glory, greater bliss or gladness. (LSB 372:5}

"*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" (Luke 2:13–14)

This third day of Christmas moved us into the day of St. John, who wrote not only the Gospel of John, but three epistles and the book of Revelation. He was used by God to reveal the truth of Christ, many of the passages you have read in this devotion. John has been afforded great honor, but it was meant to serve you (1 Peter 1:12) and give you the Good News.

It is the same for the praise and announcement of the angels. They were used by God to announce a great glory, bliss, and gladness. Heaven had come to earth. Peace had been established between God and man in the God-man, Jesus Christ. A great work had been done out of God's great love for all humanity.

There is no greater glory than to be called a Child of God. No angel can claim that or what God did to make you His own. This is the good news, the glory that God prepared for you in Christ Jesus—that because of Him you have received adoption as sons. Your baptism truly made you into a Child of God. There God became your true and dear Father and you became His true and dear child. The season of Christmas moves on, and we rejoice in the Word of God, especially that written through John which tells us this good news.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the glory of being Your own child. Thank You for the faithful witness of John. Help us to believe it and confess it before the world. Amen.

The First Friday in Advent
December 4, 2026

Ye need not toil nor languish Nor ponder day and night
How in the midst of anguish Ye draw Him by your might.
He comes, He comes all willing, Moved by His love alone,
*Your woes and troubles stilling; For all to him are known. (*TLH *58:5}*

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:10-11}

The fulfillment of the Gospel promise, first spoken to Adam and Eve in the Garden, was not contingent on the quantity or fervency of his people's prayers. Instead, it was according to God's perfect timing, as St. Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

If Christ did not first come to his people because of their prayers and efforts, it is not on account of our own preparations and works that Christ comes to us today. Our sins and iniquities are so great that our own might could never be enough to draw him to ourselves

But Christ has come, not motivated by your reason or strength, but by his great love alone. He came willingly to be born of the Virgin Mary, and he went willingly to the cross to suffer and die. Today he comes willingly to you in his Word and Sacrament to forgive your sins and bring you all comfort and consolation.

Jesus Christ comes willingly to you today in the Means of Grace to give you life and life abundantly. He can only do so because he once came willingly to lay down his life for you, his sheep. This he did not because you earned it, but because he loves you.

Good Shepherd, grant me your Holy Spirit to receive you as you come to me, not by my works, but by your grace alone. Amen.

The First Saturday in Advent
December 5, 2026

Sin's debt, that fearful burden, Cannot His love erase;
Your guilt the Lord will pardon And cover by His grace.
He comes, for you procuring The peace of sin forgiv'n,
His children thus securing Eternal life in heav'n. (LSB 334:6}

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39}

How wonderful is the Gospel, that nothing in all creation is able to separate us from God's love in Jesus! For even that which did separate us from God's love, our sin, has been pardoned and covered by the blood of Christ.

The Apostle Paul writes about this in Romans 5, calling us "weak. ungodly. sinners...enemies of God." Yes, our sins are such that we were truly his enemies, opposed to his will. But while we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. Therefore we sing, "Sin's debt, that fearful burden, Cannot His love erase." Sin's debt cannot erase God's love for us in Jesus because the opposite has happened: God's love for us in Jesus has erased sin's debt. We are truly absolved, forgiven, set free. We who were once debtors to God are now his heirs. Once we owed more than we could ever repay; now we are given blessings more than we could ever number. Jesus has come, and he brings the peace won for us by his death on the cross.

Therefore we sing the song of the Christmas angels each and every Divine Service: "Glory be to God on high, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men!" God and sinners are reconciled by the blood of Jesus, shed for you.

Almighty God, you have rescued me from sin's debt by the atoning sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ. Increase my faith, that I might live in your fellowship; through the same Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

The Second Day of Christmas (St. Stephen, Martyr)
December 26, 2026

Thou Christian heart,
Whoe'er thou art,
Be of good cheer and let no sorrow move thee!
For God's own Child,
In mercy mild,
Joins thee to Him; how greatly God must love thee! (LSB 372:4}

"And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:59–60)

It is no coincidence that the day of St. Stephen, the first martyr after Christ in the Scripture comes the day after we celebrate the birth of Jesus. The battle is won, but it continues on in our own lifetime. Stephen knew this. He boldly proclaimed the truth of who Jesus was and what He had done for all people (see Acts 7). This brought persecution and hatred, including his own martyrdom for believing and confessing Christ.

Why could Stephen submit to this? He believed in Christ. He knew that God loved him and that no sorrow in this life could move him to believe anything else. Jesus had come. Jesus was absolute proof of God's goodwill and love for him. So he could be of good cheer even in death and even pray for those who killed him (of whom Paul is included).

We may not be required to die for our faith, but we will face occasions for sorrow. Perhaps this season brings sorrow and grief as we remember loved ones who have departed. Perhaps we feel sorrow over being alone. Perhaps not everyone who gathers is joyful in the Lord. Perhaps the fallen world has taken its toll on your body and mind. None of this can overcome the truth of Christ's birth for you. God loves you. Jesus is proof.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for Your birth as sign of Your love for us. Help us to be of good cheer no matter what sorrows may be tempting us. Amen

The Nativity of our Lord—Christmas Day
December 25, 2026

Thy light and grace
0ur guilt efface
Thy heav'nly riches all our loss retrieving.
Immanuel,
Thy birth doth quell
The pow'r of hell and Satan's bold deceiving (LSB 372:3}

"*The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*" (1 John 3:8b)

Merry Christmas! What great reason do we have today to be joyful and merry? Our Savior is born, and today we remember that fact. Jesus has come, God is with us (Immanuel, see Matthew 1:23). This fact of God being with us, coming to earth with all that He has and is, this fact gives us great joy.

Christ in coming to earth has destroyed the works of the devil. That is why He appeared (became incarnate and was revealed as who He is) according to the Apostle John's first epistle. Sin, death, and the power of the devil have been defeated. This is sure in His birth, for the Son of God will always accomplish that for which He is sent. He is faithful and never fails to do any less than what He promises.

This means for you this day, there is forgiveness of all sins. There is also victory over death—both in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. There is a new power over you, the one who has purchased you with His holy, precious blood, and innocent suffering and death. That blood flowing in the veins of the newborn of Bethlehem, holy and precious. That suffering and death that would come to Him years later at Calvary. All of this has been done for you, that the devils power over you and his evil works for you would be destroyed by the appearing of Christ.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for your appearing to destroy the works of the devil. Thank you for retrieving all that our first parents lost. Help us celerate this today. Amen.

The Second Sunday in Advent
December 6, 2026

What though the foes be raging, Heed not their craft and spite;
Your Lord, the battle waging, Will scatter all their might.
He comes, a King most glorious, And all His earthly foes
In vain His course victorious Endeavor to oppose. (TLH 58:8}

0ur God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest. (Psalm 50:3}

Often forgotten in the midst of all the Christmas cheer, with the tidings of comfort and joy, and the images of the tender infant, wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger, is that the infant is the Mighty Lord of all, come to deliver his people from bondage to their enemies.

This is the great mystery of the incarnation, and particularly of Christmas—that the baby Jesus is God of God. He lies in a manger, yet he is the King most glorious. He must be wrapped in swaddling cloths by his mother, yet his foe Satan can only oppose his victorious course in vain. His birth goes virtually unnoticed, save for a few shepherd and Magi from the East, yet he is waging battle and will scatter all the might of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh, who rage against him and his people.

By faith alone do we recognize that the infant Jesus is the Mighty God, and likewise by faith alone do we confess that it is only by his death on the cross that he scattered the devil's might and was victorious over sin and the grave. Not by human might or cunning, but by his bitter sufferings and death, what the Apostle Paul calls the foolishness and weakness of God (1 Corinthians 1:25), did Christ triumph over his enemies. That triumph is yours by grace through faith. Though to the eye it might seem that the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh are raging, take heart: the victory has been won by Jesus.

Lord Jesus, your victory over sin, death, and the devil was not won through human might or power, but by your suffering and death. Help me to walk by faith, not by sight, and confess your salvation. Amen.

The Second Monday in Advent
December 7, 2026

He comes to judge the nations, A terror to His foes,
A light of consolations And blessed hope to those
Who love the Lord's appearing. 0 glorious Sun, now come,
Send forth Your beams so cheering, And guide us safely home. (LSB 334:7}

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. (Malachi 4:2}

On the Second Sunday in Advent, we heard the prophet Malachi foretell the final Day of the Lord, when Christ will come with glory to judge the living and the dead: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." (Malachi 4:1) From a passage like this, it's easy to understand why so many, even Christians, look ahead to the Last Day with fear and trembling.

However, when Jesus speaks of how the Christian ought to view the Last Day, he says, "Now when you see these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:28) For the Christian, the Last Day is not something to be dreaded, but something to anticipate, even desire. That's why the Church has prayed from the time of Christ's ascension, "Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20)

We pray for the Lord's coming because it will be for us as the prophet Malachi foretold: the day in which the sun of righteousness rises with healing in its wings. For us, the return of Christ is not the blazing fire of judgment, but the comforting warmth of the rising sun. For Christ is our righteousness through faith.

Come, Lord Jesus, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to be with you in heaven. Amen.

The Nativity of our Lord—Christmas Eve
December 24, 2026

He whom the sea,
And wind obey
Doth come to serve the sinner in great meekness.
Thou, God's own Son,
With us art one,
Dost join us and our children in our weakness (LSB 372:2}

""*even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"" (Matthew 20:28)

God had come to earth and become man. This is offensive to reason but the great comfort of the Christian. The very God who created all things and still preserves them came down to save, to serve. He takes on all of our human weakness and frailty. This just doesn't make sense, but it is the clear teaching of Scripture meant for our comfort.

That is perhaps just as offensive to reason. Gods in pagan religions usually do not serve their subjects, but instead expect to be served by them. This is reflected in many forms of worship across religions which seek to focus on doing something for "god" rather than receiving God's service in worship. Our God comes, He comes to serve us, to save us.

And that is maybe the most offensive part of this—that God would offer Himself as a ransom for many. This true God becomes true man. Weakness is embraced. Service is given rather than demanded. Salvation is worked by God rather than those needing to be saved.

As you gather with family at this time of year, take note of this stanza taking about the inclusion of "our children" here. Jesus work as the God-man is for all of us, in all generations, young and old alike. He has served us all with full salvation. Thanks be to God!

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for coming to serve us. Thank you for saving us. Help us to behold you by faith in Your Word's truth rather than what others may try to tell us. Thank you for our families and this time. Amen.

The Fourth Wednesday in Advent
December 23, 2026

0 Jesus Christ,
Thy manger is
My paradise at which my soul reclineth.
For there, 0 Lord,
Doth lie the Word
Made flesh for us; Herein Thy grace forth shineth (LSB 372:1}

"*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14)

The hymn "O Jesus Christ, Thy Manger Is" is not too well known in many congregations. This is a bad thing because this hymn delivers the Christmas Gospel to us in our present life situations like most of the hymns of Paul Gerhardt do. In our devotions over the next six days we will focus on this great hymn.

The nativity of our Lord is a great paradise, for as we have heard several times already, Christ has become our brother. God in the flesh. Glory of heaven right there on earth. Our souls can relax and recline and rest in the paradise that Christ coming to earth creates for us.

That paradise is the one of grace given by God for our sake because of Christ Jesus. The text from John 1 is the basis for this stanza, and it shows us the great love of the Father and Son for us. In Christ there is fullness of grace and truth, and Christ in the manger shows the fullness of grace and truth come down from heaven to earth.

This same grace and truth come to us now in the Word. Paradise comes to us now in that same Word. As the coming days have many opportunities to hear that Word, come and be a part of it.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Help us to regard the place where you are as our Paradise—even now as You come to us in Your Word at Church. Amen.

The Second Tuesday in Advent
December 8, 2026

All my heart again rejoices
As I hear Far and near Sweetest angel voices
"Christ is born!" their choirs are singing
Till the air ev'rywhere
Now with joy is ringing (LSB 360:1}

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (Luke 2:10}

Advent is about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It covers past, present, and future advents of our Lord. This means that it retells the story of Christ's first coming in the flesh at Bethlehem. This next hymn, "All my heart again rejoices" helps us to rejoice in that first coming of Christ.

This is our Christian response to the good news of Christ's birth—joy. This joy cannot be changed by other circumstances, for it is a joy of something God has done, an unchangeable fact of history that Jesus has been born. It is an occasion decked out in angelic choirs singing. Heaven had come to earth on such an occasion because earth had no way of getting to heaven.

It is the same for us. We could not ascend into heaven on our own, but instead heaven came to us in the man of Christ Jesus. Marked by the song of angels and the announcement of good news (God has come to save you!) our hearts can indeed rejoice. What we could not do, God has done for us. God is with us. This is a joy which we have during the entire year, but one which the season of Advent reminds us of leading up to our celebration of Christmas.

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to save us. Grant to me the joy of knowing and believing in all that you have done for me and my salvation. Allow me to join in that joyful song of praise for what You have done. Amen.

The Second Wednesday in Advent
December 9, 2026

Hear! The Conqueror has spoken:
"Now the foe, Sin and woe, Death and hell are broken!"
God is man, man to deliver,
And the Son now is one
With our blood forever (LSB 360:2}

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Hebrews 2:14-15}

Faith comes by hearing (Romans 10) the Word of Christ, the Conqueror. He speaks words of victory over our lifelong enemies like the Devil, sin, woe, death and hell. He has broken their mastery over us. This verse helps point this out to us in our hearing and singing, that Jesus is a Conqueror even at Christmastime, for Christ's coming in the past, present, and future are all certain. His victory over our enemies is certain at His birth, at His incarnation.

Jesus became our brother, truly a flesh and blood human to deliver us and conquer for us. In this way Jesus is a bridge between God and Man, being both true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, but also true man, born of the Virgin Mary. And this one-ness is forever now. At the moment of His Incarnation Jesus assumes human flesh forever. This is why the Resurrection accounts make it point to stress Jesus is still a true man. The Incarnation was not a temporary thing, but forever for us. He is one with our blood forever, a living, breathing sign of how much God was will-ing to do for our salvation.

Lord Jesus Christ, in Your Incarnation You have taken on our flesh forever. We give You thanks and rejoice that You have done this for our deliverance and salvation. Help us to trust Your great Word of conquest over all of our foes in this life and the next no matter our circumstances. Amen.

The Fourth Tuesday in Advent
December 22, 2026

Dearest Lord, Thee will I cherish.
Though my breath Fail in death,
Yet I shall not perish,
But with Thee abide forever
There on high, In that joy
Which can vanish never. (TLH 77:15}

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26}

It sometimes comes as a surprise to visitors and new Lutherans that many of our hymns conclude with a stanza on death. At first blush it may seem a bit morbid that we sing about things like "my breath fail[ing] in death". Some perhaps feel a bit uncomfortable thinking about the end of their lives, let alone singing about it.

But Christians should never feel hesitant to speak of their own death, for their death has been overcome by the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the words of the Easter hymn: "Jesus lives! And now is death but the gate of life immortal." (*LSB* 490:5) Because of this, there is no contradiction in Jesus' blessed promise. Whoever believes in Jesus will live though he dies, and he will never die.

Death is not the end of the Christian's existence. Rather, it is the entrance into the bliss of heaven, where all believers will worship with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, together awaiting the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Therefore the Chris-tian can sing boldly and confidently about his death, because after death comes life in the Lord's blessed presence and joy that never vanishes.

Lord Jesus Christ, take away all fear of death, for in you I believe that I shall not die, but live forever. Keep me and all believers steadfast in the one true faith unto life everlasting. Amen.

The Fourth Monday in Advent (St. Thomas, Apostle)
December 21, 2026

I am pure, in Thee believing,
From Thy store Evermore
Righteous robes receiving.
In my heart I will enfold Thee,
Treasure rare, Let me there,
Loving, ever hold Thee. (TLH 77:14}

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Galatians 3:26-27}

"Justification is the article on which the Church stands or falls." But what is the article of justification? It is simply, "People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight." (Augsburg Confession IV:2-3)

The apostle Paul wrote about justification using the imagery of clothing. All who are baptized into Christ have put on Christ as a righteous robe. Just as the robes worn by the Old Testament priests (and by pastors in the Divine Service today) covered their bodies and daily clothes, so also our flesh, along with its sinfulness, is covered by Christ. Therefore when God looks upon us in Christ, he sees not our sins and iniquities, our failures or shortcomings, but rather he sees righteousness, innocence, and blessed-ness. He sees the blood of Jesus that covers all sin. He sees us not as re-bels and enemies, but as his dear sons and heirs of his kingdom.

Faith alone, worked in us by the Holy Spirit, clings to the promises of God, especially that promise given in Holy Baptism: "You are my beloved son; with whom I am well pleased."

Heavenly Father, you have justified me freely for Christ's sake through faith alone. Keep me from all attempts to justify myself by my works, but grant me to rest in your grace alone; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

The Second Thursday in Advent
December 10, 2026

Should we fear our God's displeasure,
Who, to save, Freely gave His most precious treasure
To redeem us He has given
His own Son, From the throne
0f His might in heaven (LSB 360:3}

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32}

It can happen in a Christian's life that they wonder how God would regard them. It is the natural opinion of the Law (opinio legis) that when times go well for us God is happy and that when things don't go well that God is upset with us. This is the natural religion of man, not Christian thinking.

Christians need not fear God's displeasure. Even in bad times we know that God is our true Father and that we are His true children. Jesus is proof of God's love for us in all times and seasons of life. The Son of God, who is God from all eternity left His heavenly throne, laying aside His glory to become one of us to redeem us—and all of this while we were still enemies of God (Romans 5)! If God has done that to save us, we can regard Him as our dear Father even when our situations look like we are not fa-vored at all.

This is a great cause for us to rejoice in our Savior's birth. God is on our side! He is pleased because of His Son, and because God the Father sent His only-begotten Son we can be sure that he is God our heavenly Father as well. We need not be fearful about how God regards us. Jesus is all the proof we need to know God is pleased.

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ to be one of us and save us. Help us to believe this fact even when our situation in life or our natural religious thoughts are telling us lies. In His name. Amen.

The Second Friday in Advent
December 11, 2026

Should He who Himself imparted
Aught withhold From the fold, Leave us broken-hearted?
Should the Son of God not love us,
Who, to cheer Sufferers here,
Left His throne above us? (TLH 77:4}

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33}

It was not just the Father in heaven who sent Jesus, but the Son Himself was eager to come to earth to be our Savior. Therefore we not only don't need to doubt how our Father regards us, but also how the Son of God regards us.

The Son of God came down to earth, left His throne above us to save us. This is a fact that can cheer us as we struggle in this life. He does not leave us broken-hearted. He is no half-way Savior who only grants help in eternity, but actually helps us now in our lives as well. He knows our burdens and seeks to lift them by trading them for His yolk and burden, which are easy and light (Matthew 11:30).

Some of the most damaging thoughts we can have is when we think we are too far gone for Christ or that Christ doesn't care for us anymore. The fact of Christ's incarnation disproves these thoughts and that's what this hymn stanza proclaims to us. Christ loved you enough to leave heaven, come to earth, become man, live, die, and rise again. He has ascended back to His throne, but His care for you remains the same that brought Him from that throne. It is a care for you that exists even today, no matter what.

Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks that You left Your throne in heaven to be our brother. Help us to realize that You cheer us and do not leave us brokenhearted. Help us to rejoice in all times, knowing full well that you care for us. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 20, 2026

Guilt no longer can distress me;
Son of God, Thou my load
Bearest to release me.
Stain in me Thou findest never;
I am clean, All my sin
Is removed forever. (TLH 77:13}

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. 0ut of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:10-11}

There is no greater blessing for the Christian than to be able to say confidently, "I am clean. All my sin is removed forever." There are no qualifiers to that statement; no "ifs, ands, or buts" about it. It is a fact, and we are bold and confident to confess that fact because God himself says so: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." (Psalm 130:12)

But those transgressions have not simply disappeared into thin air. The righteousness of God demands that a payment be made for sin. Consider, when a debt is forgiven (as in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant – Matthew 18:23-35), the money does not simply reappear in the lender's account. The loss is borne by the one who forgives. So it is with Christ. He forgives our sins because he bore those sins on the cross. He paid the debt owed by us with his precious blood. The loss was ours to suffer, but he suffered it in our place. Therefore we can confidently say, "I am clean."

Lord, you are worthy of all honor and praise, for you sent your Son to bear my sin and pay the penalty I deserved. Because of him, I am clean. All my sin is removed forever. Amen.

The Third Saturday in Advent
December 19, 2026

Let me in my arms receive Thee;
0n Thy breast Let me rest,
Savior, ne'er to leave Thee.
Since Thou has Thyself presented
Now to me, I shall be
Evermore contented. (TLH 77:12}

He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40:11}

John 3:17 states, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." What comfort that is for us poor sinners, that Jesus Christ came in the flesh not to condemn us for our trespasses, although that is what we deserved, but rather to save us from them and give us life and forgiveness.

This is not simply a New Testament concept, however. Our Lord's merciful coming was foretold by the prophet Isaiah in the text read for the Third Sunday in Advent: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." (Isaiah 40:1-2)

Our Lord Jesus still comes to comfort and save his people to this very day in his Word and Sacraments. Through his Word, we can rest contentedly in Jesus' arms, confident that nothing will separate us from his love. Certainly Christ will come again in judgment to separate the believers from the unbelievers. Scripture is clear on that point. But "behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2)

0 God, grant that I would rest in your arms through the hearing of your Word and receiving of your Sacrament and seek no other comfort than that which you offer me there; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

The Second Saturday in Advent
December 12, 2026

If our blessed Lord and Maker
Hated men, Would He then Be of flesh partaker?
If He in our woe delighted,
Would He bear All the care
0f our race benighted? (TLH 77:5}

"*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14)

The past few days have been focused on the fact of our Lord's Incarnation and what that means about how God regards us. The repetition is on purpose. We learn best that way, and we always have our reason and experience telling us things that not in line with Scripture.

These stanzas call us outside of our reason, senses, and experiences. They don't deny these things as gifts of God, but do put them in their proper place. Eve in Genesis 3 forget the Word of God and went with what she thought, saw, and experienced—a decision which has had eternal ramifications.

Even in the situation of the Fall, God sought out Adam and Eve to give them something more than reason, senses, or experience—He gave them promise. So also when Christ takes on human flesh, and our hearing of this from the objective Word of God, we have something more sure than what we think, see, or experience in ourselves.

What great joy can this bring to us? Never ending joy as we will know someday, but for these days we take joy, sometimes quiet joy in the midst of suffering and struggle that our Lord has so loved us to become one of us.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for Your Incarnation. Help me to trust Your Word against my own reason, senses, or experiences. Amen.

The Third Sunday in Advent
December 13, 2026

See the Lamb, our sin once taking
To the cross, Suff'ring loss, Full atonement making.
For our life His own He tenders,
And His grace All our race
Fit for glory renders. (LSB 360:4}

"*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29)

Advent cannot be separated from Christmas nor any other part of the Church Year, because the Church Year is meant to teach us about Christ—His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return. So a hymn stanza sung at Christmas cannot leave out what Christ would do—make full atonement. This is the point of His coming at Bethlehem that He would also be the Lamb of God at Calvary.

This stanza briefly teaches us the Gospel. Christ makes atonement—full atonement. Nothing more for you to do. He is the sacrificial Lamb, who takes our sin from us and gives Himself up for our eternal good. This stanza also of course reminds us that this is purely by grace, without any merit or worthiness in us. There is nothing in us that caused God to love us and save us—instead it is all God's work, from motivation to full completion of the work of our salvation.

This is a great relief to us. At a time when so much is demanded of us in our day to day lives, it is relieving to hear the Gospel of our salvation because of Christ's full and completed work for our sake. Certainly, this gives us great reason to rejoice in all that God has done for us.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for making full atonement for me. My sins are taken away by Your full sacrifice. You are the Lamb of God who has taken away my sins. Help me to believe this for all of my days. Amen.

The Third Friday in Advent
December 18, 2026

Hither come, ye poor and wretched;
Know His will Is to fill
Every hand outstretched.
Here are riches without measure;
Here forget All regret,
Fill your hearts with treasure. (TLH 77:11}

The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world. (1 Samuel 2:7-8}

After receiving her long-awaited son Samuel through divine intervention, Hannah sung a song of praise, one that was echoed by another mother who received a miracle child: Mary.

In both songs, the theme of the Great Reversal shines forth: "The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor." "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty." (Luke 1:52-53)

This Great Reversal is true for every Christian. For we who were poor and lowly in our sins have been raised up to receive riches without measure: forgiveness, life, and salvation. We are raised to life everlasting because Christ humbled himself to death and the grave. We are filled with the treasures of heaven, because Christ became poor for us.

Lord Jesus Christ, though you are rich, yet for my sake you became poor, so that I by your poverty might become rich. Grant me a humble spirit, that I may serve others as you have served me. Amen.

The Third Thursday in Advent
December 17, 2026

Hither come, ye heavy-hearted,
Who for sin, Deep within,
Long and sore have smarted;
For the poisoned wounds you're feeling
Help is near, One is here
Mighty for their healing. (TLH 77:10}

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30}

Advent is, again, the season of coming. Once, Christ came, born of Mary in Bethlehem. Now Christ comes in Word and Sacrament. On the Last Day Christ will come with glory to judge the living and the dead. But in this season, Christ bids us to come to him in repentance and faith, confessing our sins and transgressions and believing that they are freely forgiven by grace alone.

Certainly this cannot be done by our own reason or strength, as the Small Catechism teaches. We were dead in our trespasses, as St. Paul writes (Ephesians 2:1, 5). But God has made us alive together with Jesus, having forgiven us all our trespasses (Colossians 2:13). As he once called Lazarus out of the tomb, Jesus calls us to come forth from death to life (John 11:43). By the power of the Holy Spirit, we hear that call and come.

And having come, we find healing for our wounds, rest for our souls, an easy yoke and a light burden. We find such blessed peace because Jesus came and still comes for us.

Gracious Lord, send your Holy Spirit to me through your Word, that I would come to you and find perfect healing and rest; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

The Third Monday in Advent
December 14, 2026

Softly from His lowly manger
Jesus calls, One and all, "You are safe from danger.
Children, from the sins that grieve you
You are freed; All you need
I will surely give you." (LSB 360:5}

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."" (Luke 2:11–12)

It is a great mystery that in order to conquer all of mankind's enemies, God chose to come as the weakest, more fragile among us—a baby. This hymn stanza shows this fragility in that "softly" speaking from the manger. The manger was a feed trough. Animals ate there. And in a symbolic way we feed on Christ in the manger by faith in His Word, for He is the Savior who was promised to be found there. It was a great sign of who He was that the shepherds could find Him there just as the angel said. The manger serves to remind us of His faithfulness and greatness at the same time—for the One in the manger can declare all humanity free from danger, He is true God after all.

Over and over again the Scriptures exhort us to not be afraid. We are safe because God's Word says so. Our Baptism is God's sign to us. With our sins fully taken care of by the work of Christ, we are even freed from the grief that our sins bring us. This freedom is as sure at Christmastime as it is on Easter Sunday. Christ would not fail. He cannot fail.

Let this be a great comfort to you—Christ does not fail. He will not fail you now. You are safe from danger. Your sins are forgiven. Your sadness will be turned to gladness and joy. Everything you need in this life and the life to come will be provided by Christ Himself.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for being found in the manger. Help us to trust You for our safety from all danger, freedom from all sins, and provision for all that we need in this life and the next. Amen.

The Third Tuesday in Advent
December 15, 2026

Come, then, banish all your sadness!
0ne and all, Great and small, Come with songs of gladness.
We shall live with Him forever
There on high In that joy
Which will vanish never. (LSB 360:6}

"And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD." (Psalm 27:6)

The final stanza of this hymn points us to eternity (as do most of Gerhardt's final stanzas). This is the hope and goal of all Christian teaching and preaching (and singing) - to strengthen faith in Christ and hope in all that is yet to come.

This hymn has not for a moment denied that this life has sadness. It is a fallen world we live in, we sin, and others sin against us. This creates more than enough opportunity for grief and pain. These hymns call us out of that to see what joy and gladness we have been given in Jesus. No mater who you are, you have great reason to rejoice and be glad—for you have Christ. Those enemies of sin, death, and the devil have been put under His feet, and He has lifted you above them.

He has promised to bring you to be with Him for eternity. You will be in His tent, able to sing His praise forever. And that joy will be as eternal as our eternal lives. Christ is our eternal life and our eternal joy—just as He is our present life and present joy.

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the promise of eternal life with You in heaven. Grant us hope in those things yet to come as we look at the sad situations around us now. Help us banish our sadness with such glad and good news. Amen.

The Third Wednesday in Advent
December 16, 2026

Ye whose anguish knew no measure,
Weep no more; See the door
To celestial pleasure.
Cling to Him, for He will guide you
Where no cross, Pain, or loss
Can again betide you. (TLH 77:9}

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4}

These words from the end of the Revelation to St. John have comforted Christians for centuries. The hope of life in the Lord's blessed presence, free from sorrow, shame, suffering, and death, is the hope to which believers cling even as they endure those very things. For the word "anymore" makes it clear that such things are endured here and now. The preachers who claim that the Christian can achieve an earthly life free from suffering must have a very low view of eternity. For what good is it to have your tears wiped away in the new creation if you should not mourn or cry in the old?

But there is cross, pain, and loss in this life. For we are sinful human beings living in a fallen world. But into this fallen world came the Sinless One, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He endured all earthly afflictions, as we do, and yet without sin. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. With his wounds, then, we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Now, through him we leave anguish without measure for celestial pleasure. For he is the Door. If anyone enters by him, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. (John 10:9) He is truly the way to heaven. By him alone, we have entrance to the place of eternal rest and comfort.

Almighty God, grant that I find true pasture and rest for my weary soul through your Son Jesus Christ alone. Amen.