



Salus Christus

ADVENT DEVOTIONS



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"Solus Christus"

Advent Devotions

written by:

Rev. Marcus J. Baikie, Rev. Weslie Odom,

Rev. Andrew Packer, and Rev. Joshua V. Scheer

art director: Kris Brown

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The Nativity of Our Lord — Christmas Day

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high, And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel! (LSB 357:6)

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)

Today we celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord — Christmas Day. The baby boy born in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger is the Word who was with God in the beginning and is God. That boy is the true Light through whom all things were made. The prophet Isaiah foretold: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone." (9:2) And the light that shone on them is the little Lord Jesus. "A great and mighty wonder" that a newborn is the everlasting Son of God, by whom all things were made!

His own people should have received Him. The testimony was there, spoken by prophets who foretold the coming Messiah, by angels at His birth, by His Father at His baptism. Nevertheless they did not. But you, by faith alone, have. For all those who believe in His name have received Him. The Word who spoke all things into existence has spoken faith into your heart. You have been reborn not by earthly bloodlines, but by the shed blood of the Light who came into the world for you. Rejoice, therefore, for Christ is born for you!

Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Nativity of Our Lord — Christmas Eve

O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree, Free them from Satan's tyranny That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save, And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel! (LSB 357:4)

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

Jesus Christ is God, and yet not as the false religions imagine Him to be. He is not some petty demigod who controls one aspect of nature or some an otherworldly blue-skinned, four-armed deity. Rather, the Christ, true God, is true man. The King of Kings, born to save His people from their sins, was a baby boy, born in humility to a young Jewish virgin and a carpenter to whom she was betrothed.

Had the one true God come as false religions suppose Him to be no one could dare approach Him — for fear, for guilt, for shame. But Christ has come as man, of humble birth, in order that we may draw near to Him with confidence that we will "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16) To Christ alone who was born in flesh and blood like us, who was tempted as we are, who sympathizes with our weaknesses, can we draw near, as the shepherds and wise men did long ago. For Christ alone is Immanuel — God with us. Christ alone is approachable to help in time of need. Christ alone is present to forgive sins and give life and salvation.

Almighty God, grant that as we have known the mystery of Christ's Incarnation on earthy we may also come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*For the
Evangelical Lutheran Church
wherever she may be found*

And for the Glory of God

The First Sunday in Advent

By grace God's Son, our only Savior, Came down to earth to bear our sin.
Was it because of your own merit That Jesus died your soul to win? No, it
was grace, and grace alone, That brought Him from His heav'nly throne.
(LSB 566:3)

**"Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble,
and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.' "**
(Matthew 21:5)

During Advent we often talk about the three comings of Christ: 1) Christ came to us on that first Christmas morning. The Word became flesh for us so that He might suffer, die, and rise again for us. 2) Christ continues to come to us through the Word and Sacraments to give us forgiveness, life, and salvation. 3) He will come again to judge the living and the dead. No matter which coming of Christ we are talking about all of them are, for us believers, by grace alone.

Let's start our week by defining what we mean by grace. Martin Luther says, "Grace means that God is merciful to us, that He deals graciously with us for the sake of Christ our Lord, forgives us all our sins, and that He does not impute them to us or punish us with eternal death. Grace is the forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake, the covering of all sin. That is grace." (*Luther's Works*, 22:139)

All of Christ's comings are by grace alone because Christ has come, continues to come, and will return again so that we might receive the forgiveness of sin for His sake.

Almighty and Merciful God, it is by Your grace alone that Christ has come for me, still comes to me, and will return again for me. Grant that I would receive Him and all His gifts this Advent season; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

The Fourth Friday in Advent

O come, O come Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in
lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel! (LSB 357:6)

**"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his
people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)**

Long before an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, the prophet Isaiah foretold the birth of the Christ: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14b) Immanuel means "God with us." Thus the Son borne by Mary is none other than the One True God, now with us in human flesh.

Was this good news that God was now with His people on earth? Not necessarily. After all, in the final chapter of the Old Testament the Lord declares, "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 will set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." (Malachi 4:1)

Thanks be to God, the angel who appeared to Joseph brought good news to him, saying, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." God had not come in destruction to set the arrogant and evildoers ablaze. He had come in mercy to save sinners. And so He comes today. Jesus remains Immanuel, God with us, in His Word and Sacraments, and so He saves us from our sins.

Lord Jesus Christ, be always with me as You have promised: in Your Word, in Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper. There You are present to save me from my sins. Amen.

The Fourth Thursday in Advent

Seek where you may To find a way That leads to your salvation. My heart is stilled, On Christ I build, He is the one foundation. His Word is sure, His works endure; He overthrows All evil foes; Through Him I more than conquer. (LSB 557:1)

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Peter’s words before the Jewish authorities remind us once again that if one of the great solas of the Reformation is lost, all are lost. First, he refers to Scripture alone. He quotes the prophecy in Psalm 118, fulfilled when Jesus, the Christ, was rejected and crucified by the builders, the religious leaders of the Jews. Scripture alone teaches this.

Second, Christ alone is our salvation. No one else could possibly prevail over sin and death, because all have sinned and deserve death. Christ alone, being perfect, won forgiveness, life, and salvation for all.

Third, this salvation is given by grace alone, which is found in the little word “given.” The saving name of Jesus is given among men, not on account of their works, but by grace and grace alone.

Finally, it is received by faith alone. We confess, “Christ’s name is received only by faith. Therefore, we are saved by confidence in Christ’s name, and not by confidence in our works.” (Apology to the Augsburg Confession, IV:99)

Lord Jesus Christ, Your name is the only name in which salvation is found. Thank You for Your grace in giving me Your name through Your Scriptures, which I receive through faith. Amen.

The First Monday in Advent

By grace I’m saved, grace free and boundless; My soul, believe and doubt it not. Why stagger at this word of promise? Has Scripture ever falsehood taught? No! Then this word must true remain: By grace you too will life obtain. (LSB 566:1)

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’ ” (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

As we talked about yesterday, Christ has come, continues to come, and will come again by grace alone. And He comes by grace alone to be THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS for us.

The Bible is clear that no one has any righteousness in and of themselves and that if we stood before God with our own works, merits, and righteousness we would be condemned. So Paul says, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.” (Romans 3:10-11) And in Isaiah, “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” (64:6)

And so Christ came and continues to come to be our righteousness. Christ is righteous in and of Himself because He is very God of very God. Yet He comes and fulfills God’s Law perfectly on our behalf (His active obedience) and suffered for our sins on the cross in our place (His passive obedience), so that He might be our righteousness. So Paul says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Gracious Father, we thank You that, though we are not righteous in ourselves, Your grace has appeared in the flesh in Your Son that He might be our righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The First Tuesday in Advent

By grace! This ground of faith is certain; As long as God is true, it stands.
What saints have penned by inspiration, What in His Word our God commands,
Our faith in what our God has done Depends on grace — grace through His Son. (LSB 566:4)

So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor [grace] in the eyes of the Lord. (Genesis 6:7-8)

Genesis 6:8 is such a wonderfully comforting verse. In the midst of the destruction that would come upon the entire world, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. That is, even as God prepared to destroy the entire world by a flood, He still chose to be gracious to Noah and His family — to save them and redeem them. Any time we see the word “grace” or “mercy” in the Bible we must immediately think of Jesus because we have no grace or mercy apart from Him.

And this truth that we are saved by grace alone is a comfort to believers in all times and all places. Martin Luther said, “These are words that restored Noah’s courage and life. Such great wrath of the Divine Majesty would have slain him if God had not added the promise to preserve him.” (*Luther’s Works*, 2:54)

It was God’s grace in the midst of the coming judgment that gave Noah courage and life. It is no different for us. The words that restore our courage and life are the words that we have found grace in the eyes of the Lord by grace alone for the sake of Christ alone. God has promised to preserve us by His grace alone. There is no greater comfort no matter what may come.

Gracious Lord, you preserved Noah and His family purely out of your grace and mercy, preserve us this day and throughout this Advent season by the same; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Fourth Wednesday in Advent

Seek whom you may To be your stay, None can redeem his brother.
All helpers failed; This man prevailed, The God-man and none other,
Our Servant-King, Of whom we sing We’re justified Because He died,
The guilty being guiltless (LSB 557:2)

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:22)

Jesus Christ alone is the way to eternal life. However, this does not mean that salvation is limited. Instead, He is the way opened to all nations that all who believe in Him would be saved. Certainly this is evident in the New Testament. For example, Jesus said to the disciples, on the first Easter evening, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [the Christ’s] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46-47)

Note the words: “Thus it is written.” Jesus tells us that the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations was foretold in the Old Testament as well. Salvation was not just a Hebrew or Jewish matter until Christ came along. Rather God willed from the very beginning that Jesus Christ alone would be the way of salvation for every single person. And so to this very day, the Lord continues to call pastors and missionaries to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. Yes, Jesus Christ alone is our salvation, but His salvation is not just for us alone. It is for all nations.

Lord God, send Your Holy Spirit to all nations who hear Your Word, that many would come to repentance and faith in Christ alone for salvation. Amen.

The Fourth Tuesday in Advent

O come, O come, Emmanuel And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel! (LSB 357:1)

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6)

“Isn’t it divisive, intolerant, and even unloving to claim that Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal life?” It’s a common objection, even among many Christians. But if we take Jesus at His Word, He says quite clearly, “No one comes to the Father except through Me.” No one means no one. “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Is this divisive and intolerant? Perhaps. But Jesus Himself said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” (Matthew 10:34-35) Faith in Jesus Christ alone as Savior will inevitably divide you from those who reject Him.

But is this unloving? Certainly not! For in His great love God the Father gave the Way to heaven to us: Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. Those who object to this fail to see how lost and condemned we truly are. On account of sin, we would be condemned to hell apart from God for all eternity, but God in His perfect, boundless love sent Christ alone to reconcile us to Him and give us life in His name.

Dear Father in heaven, thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. In Him alone do I find life and salvation. Amen.

The First Wednesday in Advent

By grace! None dare lay claim to merit; Our works and conduct have no worth. God in His love sent our Redeemer, Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth; His death did for our sins atone, And we are saved by grace alone. (LSB 566:2)

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

When we say that salvation is by grace alone we mean that it is completely and totally a free gift of God. This means there is nothing anyone can do to earn it through their works or effort.

Salvation from beginning to end is all of grace. It is because of God’s grace that He sent His Son to be our Redeemer. It is because of grace that Christ willingly suffers and dies. It is because of grace that we are given the gifts that Christ won for us on the cross through the Word and Sacraments. God’s grace is a fountain that is always overflowing for us.

In the Smalcald Articles, Martin Luther talks about this overflowing fountain of grace this way, “God is superabundantly generous in His grace...” (III:IV:1) And then he lists all the wonderful ways in which God is gracious through His Word and Sacraments.

There is absolutely nothing we have done or can do to earn it and yet God in His grace keeps giving and giving and giving to us. He is “superabundantly generous in His grace”!

Merciful Lord, You continue to be superabundantly generous toward us in Your grace. Grant that we would continue to receive it all through faith alone; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The First Thursday in Advent

**By grace! This ground of faith is certain; As long as God is true, it stands
What saints have penned by inspiration, What in His Word our God
commands, Our faith in what our God has done Depends on grace — grace
through His Son. (LSB 566:4)**

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:16)

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all grace. So much so that Paul says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people...” (Titus 2:11). When the Word became flesh we can say that the grace of God has appeared. One of the great hymns of the faith puts it this way, “O Morning Star, how fair and bright! You shine with God’s own truth and light, Aglow with grace and mercy!” (LSB 395:1) And as we sang on Wednesday, “Our faith in what our God has done Depends on grace — grace through His son.”

Christ is the source of all grace for you and this is a grace that has no limit or end. Martin Luther said, “Christ...is an interminable well, the chief source of all grace, truth, righteousness, and wisdom, and life without limit, measure or end.” (Luther’s Works 22:129) As long as Christ is living (and He lives and reigns forever!) we can be certain that we will never be without grace.

The very purpose of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ is that we might be justified and saved! That we might be recipients of His grace! From Him we have and will receive grace upon grace.

O Lord God, heavenly Father, we give You thanks that of Your great goodness and mercy Your only-begotten Son became incarnate to redeem us from sin and everlasting death. Amen.

The Fourth Monday in Advent

**Seek Him alone Who did atone, Who did your souls deliver. O seek Him
first, All you who thirst For grace that fails you never. In ev’ry need Seek
Him indeed; To ev’ry heart He will impart His blessings without measure.
(LSB 557:3)**

**But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.”
And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.
(Matthew 17:7-8)**

On the mount of transfiguration, the disciples saw their Lord shining like the sun, the two great prophets Moses and Elijah, and the bright cloud of the Lord God Almighty. But He who spoke to them from that cloud directed them away from their eyes and toward their ears: “This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.”

Not much later, Jesus was again set before them as a spectacle. However, on that day, Jesus did not shine like the sun but was bloodied and battered. He was not flanked by prophets but by two robbers. The glory cloud of the Lord did not cover the mount; rather there was darkness over the whole land. On that Good Friday, what was seen was utterly unlike the transfiguration. Yet the Father’s words remained true: “This is My beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.” For there on the cross, Jesus said, “Father, forgive them...Today you will be with Me in paradise...It is finished.”

Lord Jesus Christ, grant that I listen to You as You speak to me in Your Word, and may I see You by faith alone as You come to me in the means of grace. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

My heart's delight, My crown most bright, O Christ, my joy forever. Not wealth nor pride Nor fortune's tide Our bonds of love shall sever. You are my Lord; Your precious Word Shall guide my way And help me stay Forever in Your presence. (LSB 557:4)

But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. (2 Corinthians 3:14)

In this final week of the Advent season we focus on the final great sola of the Reformation: Solus Christus, which means "Christ alone." Yet this "alone" is found in each of the three previous. For example, we understand the Scriptures alone when we read them in Christ alone.

There are many different ideas about what the Bible is all about, but Jesus tells us quite plainly: "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40) The Jews were right to recognize that the Scriptures bestow eternal life, and yet because they rejected Jesus, the Word made flesh, they did not have life at all.

If we are to have life from God's Word, we must hear it as it testifies to Jesus Christ. The Scriptures are the Good News of Christ, which is powerful to inspire repentance, saving faith, bestow forgiveness, and give life everlasting. It is powerful because it is the Word of Christ.

"Lord, to Whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." Grant that we always seek You where You promise to be found: in the Holy Scriptures. Amen.

The First Friday in Advent

By grace! On this I'll rest when dying; In Jesus' promise I rejoice; For though I know my heart's condition, I also know my Savior's voice. My heart is glad, all grief has flown Since I am saved by grace alone. (LSB 566:6)

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

You have heard that Christ is full of grace and truth, and has redeemed us through His righteousness, innocence, and obedience, so that we also partake of these, as we take from His fullness as He continues to give us grace upon grace.

Here we see that the Law, the books of Moses and indeed the entire Old Testament, were not the final truth, but were pointing to Christ. Christ alone is the final and perfect revelation of God (see Hebrews 1:1-2). And so we now have the fullness of grace and truth revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

We no longer have just a man as our mediator; we have the One who is very God of very God. We have the One who is fully God and fully man as our mediator. It is only through Him that we receive grace and truth. He is the final and perfect revelation of God. All that the Old Testament pointed to finds its fulfillment in Him.

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the full and final revelation of Your grace in Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank You for giving us all grace and truth through Him; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The First Saturday in Advent

By grace to timid hearts that tremble, In tribulation's furnace tried,
By grace, in spite of fear and trouble, The Father's heart is open wide.
Where could I help and strength secure If grace were not my anchor sure?
(LSB 566:5)

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. (Psalm 25:16-18)

In Psalm 25 David cries out to the Lord to be gracious to him in the midst of all his afflictions and for the Lord to forgive him. David cries out for grace alone.

This is a theme that runs throughout the Bible — whenever God's people are hurting, troubled, afflicted, distressed, or weighed down by their sin they call on the Lord to be gracious to them. This is all by grace alone because Christ is our High Priest.

Because Jesus is our High Priest, because He has died for our sin, been raised from the dead, and ascended to intercede for us, because He has sympathized with our weakness, because of Him we can approach the throne of grace with confidence! And not only can we approach with confidence, but we are assured that we will receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Whatever it is we are going through we can boldly go before the throne of grace and know that because of Christ we will receive mercy and grace to help us. This grace is our anchor sure in the midst of all the storms of life.

Gracious Father, thank you for giving us Your Son that we might be able to come to you boldly in any and every time of need; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

The Third Saturday in Advent

"And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

When Jesus wants to teach others about Himself, He goes to the Scriptures. This alone should tell us how to regard the Scriptures. Here, in the wake of Easter Jesus teaches two of His disciples on the road while they walked. Those disciples had become confused. They let other teachings confound their mind about the purpose of the Christ. They had taken some popular worldly notions of success and kingdom-building and put them into their doctrine, their beliefs. Their actions followed their beliefs. They were saddened and shocked by the news coming out of Jerusalem of Christ's crucifixion. Jesus corrected them by pointing them back to God's Word — Sola Scriptura.

Jesus uses Moses and the Prophets (the Old Testament) to show how He had to suffer and die. The Glory of God is indeed different than the glory of man. And the point and purpose of the Scriptures is also shown in this passage. Jesus uses Scripture to teach about Himself and the ways of God — the ways of a suffering Christ and a saved people. He also teaches faith by rebuke their slowness of heart to believe what the Word of God said.

We often fail to let God's Word shape our minds and how we think about things. In troubling times we often get the idea that God has left us (like those disciples in unbelief after the Christ had been killed). But God works in different ways than the world does. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. He doesn't rule as an earthly ruler does. He rules by serving. He rules by suffering. And He has said to us in His Word that we may suffer as well. The life of the Christian may not be filled with all sorts of earthly comfort. There will be trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer, for Christ has overcome the world (John 16). He overcame it by suffering, just as Scripture said He would.

Dear Jesus, help me to know You as You are revealed in the Scriptures. Restrain the world's influence on my thinking and grant that I see all things in the light of Your cross. In Your name I pray. Amen.

Notes

[illegible]

The Second Sunday of Advent

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved! Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself! Psalm 80:1, 3, 14, 17

The Second Sunday of Advent finds us contemplating the second advent of the Christ on Judgment Day. For some, confused by the false teachings of the end of times and mislead to false comfort in the goodness of their works before an almighty God, the second advent of Christ is sadly unsettling. Indeed, some of the words of Christ from the Gospel reading for today may even add to the unwarranted anxiety. It is apt, therefore, that we ponder the glorious gift of our salvation through faith alone (*sola fide*). This basic doctrine and confession of the Christian faith, that man is justified before God by faith apart from works of the Law, not only gives all glory and honor to Christ for the salvation of the sinner, it also gives immeasurable comfort, true comfort in fact, to the Christian in this life and on the Last Day. When Christ comes again with glory to judge the living and the dead, the Christian lifts up his head in joyful, eager anticipation because he knows that what his God has freely given him by faith in this life, namely, forgiveness of sins, true life, and salvation, will be the only thing that avails before the Holy God. What God requires on that Day, He freely gives through His gift of faith. What comfort this sweet sentence gives! It creates the confidence to pray as we do in the Introit, “Turn again, O God of Hosts!” knowing that He hears and turns in love, not wrath.

Dear Father in Heaven, thank you for the gift of faith. Grant that I find comfort only in the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation you freely give through it. Amen.

The Third Friday in Advent

“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:16-21)

Experience can be a good thing in learning lessons for this earthly life. It is a deadly thing when it replaces the Scripture in forming doctrine and practice. St. Peter, who witnessed the Transfiguration teaches that to us here. Even though he had that great experience and saw and heard all that happened, he encourages Christians to hold onto some thing better — “the prophetic Word more fully confirmed”. Scripture alone forms the basis for what should be followed. Not myths, legends, or even experience.

Another safeguard of Scripture alone is that it frees us from “personal interpretation”. Scripture testifies to the truth. It is unified in its truth and doesn’t contradict itself. People are not unified and contradict each other all of the time. Scripture is one like the God who gives us is One. It is the work of God.

St. Peter again confesses inspiration in taking about how men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. God worked through men to write the Word of God. Prophets, Apostles, and those connected to them. And the result of God’s Work is that we have this lamp shining in a dark place. God’s Word is light unto our feet and light for our path (Psalm 119), no matter how dark that path has been or is at present.

Dear Jesus, thank you for Scripture. Help me to put aside my opinions and experiences and so let Your Word teach me Your truth. In Your Name I pray. Amen.

The Third Thursday in Advent

“The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.” (Acts 17:10-12)

The Bereans receive special notice in the Scriptures. As such, “being a good Berean” is a good compliment to any Christian. This is because of how the Bereans received the preached words of the Apostle Paul with eagerness and also examining them against what the Scriptures taught each and every day. The result from this use of God’s Word is that many of them believed.

This is one of the ways how the Christian can and should make use of the Word of God. When eagerly hearing preaching, to review what is heard with what Scripture says. When reading a “Christian book” to review what it says with what Scripture says. When using a devotion like this, examining what is said and comparing it to what Scripture says. When we hear others talk about God or spirituality, using Scripture to tell what is true and what is false. This is because Scripture alone is the source of true doctrine.

The Bereans received the preaching of Paul eagerly because he had shown himself to teach in accord with the Scriptures. This is also why we as Christians can receive the teachings of the Small Catechism or Book of Concord eagerly as well. Their teachings are in accord with Scripture. They can receive with joy because they too confess the same truth that Scripture confesses. The same can be said for faithful sermons that you hear from the pulpit. Scripture is the basis and judge, but these other things can bring the truth of Scripture to us as well.

Dear Jesus, help me to daily examine things according to Your Word. Help me to receive faithful preaching and teaching with eagerness like the Bereans did. In your name I pray. Amen.

The Second Monday of Advent

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:1-6

“And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” The word of promise to Abram from the one true God who does not and cannot lie creates the faith necessary to believe it. Abram has no heir except one who is not of his household, yet at the word of God, Abram believes the word. For many who consider the extraordinary life of Abram and his life after God gives him a new name, Abraham, this act of God’s justification seems too simple. Surely this great man of God has something to offer to God to appease his wrath and turn him in favor towards him? But, no. If this were the case, then justification, salvation would not rest on promise, but on a work — even a work that would be good in the eyes of all men. This is not only good news for Abram, but also for us. Here we Christians find ourselves as the heirs of Abraham by faith alone in the promise. For, as God says through Saint Paul, “the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” (Romans 4:23-25)

Dear Father in Heaven, I thank you that you have made me an heir according to the promise through faith alone, apart from the works of the law. Grant that this good gift never be taken from me. Amen.

The Second Tuesday of Advent

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." Romans 4:1-8

God has always only saved men from their sins by declaring them righteous through faith alone. This is God's simple point through Saint Paul. The promise of God given in the Garden through the cursing of the Devil was believed by our first parents, and God counted it to them as righteousness. So it was for Abraham, and so it is for us. So it was for the children of Israel after the giving of the Law, and so it is for us. So it has always been for the Church of God. Jesus and His apostles consistently set faith alone (*sola fide*) over against works for the salvation of man. One of the clearest places in Holy Scripture is in the fourth chapter of Romans, part of which we meditate on today. Either God is God alone and justifies sinners out of His undeserved favor, or man is God and justifies himself by his work. This is true even if we consider our salvation to be in part by our own works and merit. But we know the blessed truth: we don't even receive the good things of this world by our own worth or merit (see the explanation of the 1st Article of the Apostles' Creed in the Small Catechism), much less our eternal salvation. God's abundant grace is given to us freely for the sake of Christ's merit, not our own, and is received by faith. For this we thank God with happy hearts.

Dear Father in Heaven, I thank you that for the sake of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, you have saved me from my sin. Grant that I may trust in Him always. Amen.

The Third Wednesday in Advent

"When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."" (John 6:60-69)

St. Peter gives a great confession about Christ and about the purpose of Scripture — that people would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him we would eternal life (see John 20:31). Jesus taught from the Word of God, and that meant some difficult teachings. Our sinful nature has its own spirituality and it fights against the spirituality spoken of in the Scriptures.

God fights against our sinful nature. The Spirit-inspired Scriptures give life. Jesus says so. And His Word is life — not just life here and now, but life forever. The words of man are here today and gone tomorrow. They don't have any power behind them. God's Word is quite different. It does whatever it says.

Note in this passage how the Triune God is at work to create faith and give eternal life. The Father grants people to come to Jesus. The Son suffers as the Holy One of God. The Spirit gives the life earned by the Son. The entire Triune God is at work in your salvation. You know that from God's Word.

Dear Jesus, help me to not take offense at your teachings or at you. Forgive me for not always hearing the truth of your Word. Grant me your Spirit and the life He brings. In your name I pray. Amen.

The Third Tuesday in Advent

"You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra — which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:10-17)

"Sacred writings" is how St. Paul refers to the Scriptures. He regards them as holy things from God. In fact he confesses the teaching that all Scripture is inspired by God the Holy Spirit. This means that though it bears the characteristics of the men used to write it, the root of the words, phrases, and teachings — all Scripture — is God Himself.

This makes the words we read in our Bibles different than all others. We cannot sit in judgment over them like we do the newspaper or blog post or classic novel. God's Word is above us because it is sacred — it is God's Word.

This text reminds us of the things that Scripture does. It makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. This means Scripture creates and sustains faith in Jesus. It is also something to be taught by pastors and parents — from generation to generation as pastors catechize the young and old and countless Christian parents do their primary God-given calling to teach their children (or as the catechism puts it — as the head of the household should teach his family). Scripture is useful in reproving and correcting, that is calling out sinful behavior and then training in righteousness, that is faithful living which produced the fruit of good works toward the neighbor. Scripture gives us everything.

Dear Jesus, help me to treat your Word as sacred. Help me to learn from it and use it to care for others. In your name I pray. Amen.

The Second Wednesday of Advent

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. John 5:19-24

If our trust is placed and comfort found in our works for our standing before God, we will not be found worthy of the last day. But take heart! God has purchased us from sin, death, and the devil, not with gold or silver, but with the mighty works of His Son, even death on a cross. None of this done for His sake, but for our sake. Because of this, life is yours - true life as God intended it. A life so lively that the life of this world will be seen to be death because of the cancer of sin. A life so gloriously free from suffering, pain, and sorrow that it alone can truly be called life. All of this, God the Father gives you for the sake of His Son, in Whom you trust. So, Jesus says, quite to the contrary of our desire to save ourselves, "Whoever hears and believes has eternal life." Amen. The result of this gift of faith is that the second coming of Christ will be our passing from the death of this life to the life everlasting. No judgment. God has already rendered that in His Son for us: not guilty. Praise be to God!

Dear Father in Heaven, I thank you that through the work of suffering and dying of your Son Jesus Christ, you have saved me from our sin. Grant that I treasure this gift above the things of this world. Amen.

The Second Thursday of Advent

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. Galatians 5:1-6

Again, we see clearly that faith alone (*sola fide*) is set completely over and against works for the salvation of man. In fact, Paul says, we ought to beware of even a little leaven of works righteousness creeping into our hearts. If we find ourselves thinking highly of ourselves and our own standing before God and not looking to the object of our faith, Christ Jesus, then we find that we have set Christ aside. Put another way, we find that we have placed ourselves into the position deserving of the honor and praise due to God alone. Even a little leaven leavens the whole dough when it comes to trust in the works of the Law. God is quite clear: if we desire to be saved by the Law or even the Law in addition to faith, we have absolutely no need for Christ. God grant us repentance for this, and pray that He turn our hearts instead to true comfort of life and salvation that comes only through faith.

Dear Father in Heaven, according to Your great mercy, keep me from the temptation to trust in myself and my works for my salvation. Turn me, instead, to trust in Your Son Jesus Christ's works for me. Amen.

The Third Monday in Advent

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:6-11)

Scripture alone is sufficient for the knowledge of the Truth. Here in this text we are also reminded that Scripture is God's Word, not ours. This means that it may contain things that are difficult for us to understand or logically make sense according to our way of thinking. This is as it says because God's thoughts are not ours. His thoughts are higher than ours. This can be troubling as we are confused or irritated at situations that come up in life. In these times we must realize that God's Word is also efficacious, powerful to do what God wants it to do.

God's Word has power in all situations of your life because God Himself says so. God's Word makes your Baptism a washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. God's Word stands behind every absolution you hear. God's Word is the basis for the Lord's Supper, where it teaches not only what we receive but why we need it in our lives. God's Word is the cause of your having faith in Christ Jesus. Scripture alone reveals the Gospel to you which is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe it (Romans 1).

Scripture alone has the power of God behind it to create and sustain faith in Christ. That is the purpose for which God sent it. It shall succeed in the thing for which He sent it.

Dear Jesus, help me to realize how Your Word has given me life. Forgive me for not treasuring it and by Your Holy Spirit help me to revere it in my life once again. In your name we pray. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent

"Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, " 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'" (Matthew 11:2-10)

Scripture Alone. It is not just some Reformation era creation. Jesus used Scripture to prove Himself and to teach His hearers. His disciples used Scripture in their teaching and preaching. Their hearers learned this as well. Scripture determined true or false teaching. "Sola Scriptura" means to use Scripture alone to determine doctrine and practice.

The disciples of John the Baptist came and asked Jesus about who He is. They wanted to know about the doctrine of the Christ. Jesus cited Scripture and proved who He is. He cited several verses from the book of Isaiah to show that His works are what Scripture said the Christ will do.

After these disciples went away, Jesus taught sola Scriptura again and cited Malachi to define what the Forerunner (John) was. This reinforced His own claim to be the Christ. John came before Jesus to prepare the way for Him. It was written.

Jesus is the Christ. Scripture says so. Where do you get your doctrine from? What shapes your thinking? This is why it is important for you to be hearing God's Word in Divine Services, attending Bible Studies taught by your pastor and also having a rigorous devotional life centered on reading the Scriptures. Scripture alone teaches us pure doctrine. All pure confession of the Truth comes from it.

Dear Jesus, help me to sit beneath Your Word and learn from it. Let it shape what I believe and how I think about everything in my life. In your name I pray. Amen.

The Second Friday of Advent

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God." John 3:16-21

Faith alone justifies because it receives the love of God shown in Christ on the cross. Christ's death is for all men, or, as the verse so many know by heart puts it, "the world." We are saved from the death of death when we believe that He has died for us. It is this belief in Christ's work of atonement that alone saves us and gives us the promise and sure hope of life everlasting. This is the work that Christ does of bearing our sin and dying on the cross is the work that He comes down from His heavenly throne to do. It is the reason why we wait with eager anticipation during this Advent season. Not just because God has become man, but that God has become man for a purpose: to die in my place so that I can be truly free from the bondage and slavery of sin and live with Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Dear Father in Heaven, I thank You that you sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of the world. I thank you most especially that you have given me faith to trust that His death is sufficient to save me from my sin. Amen.

