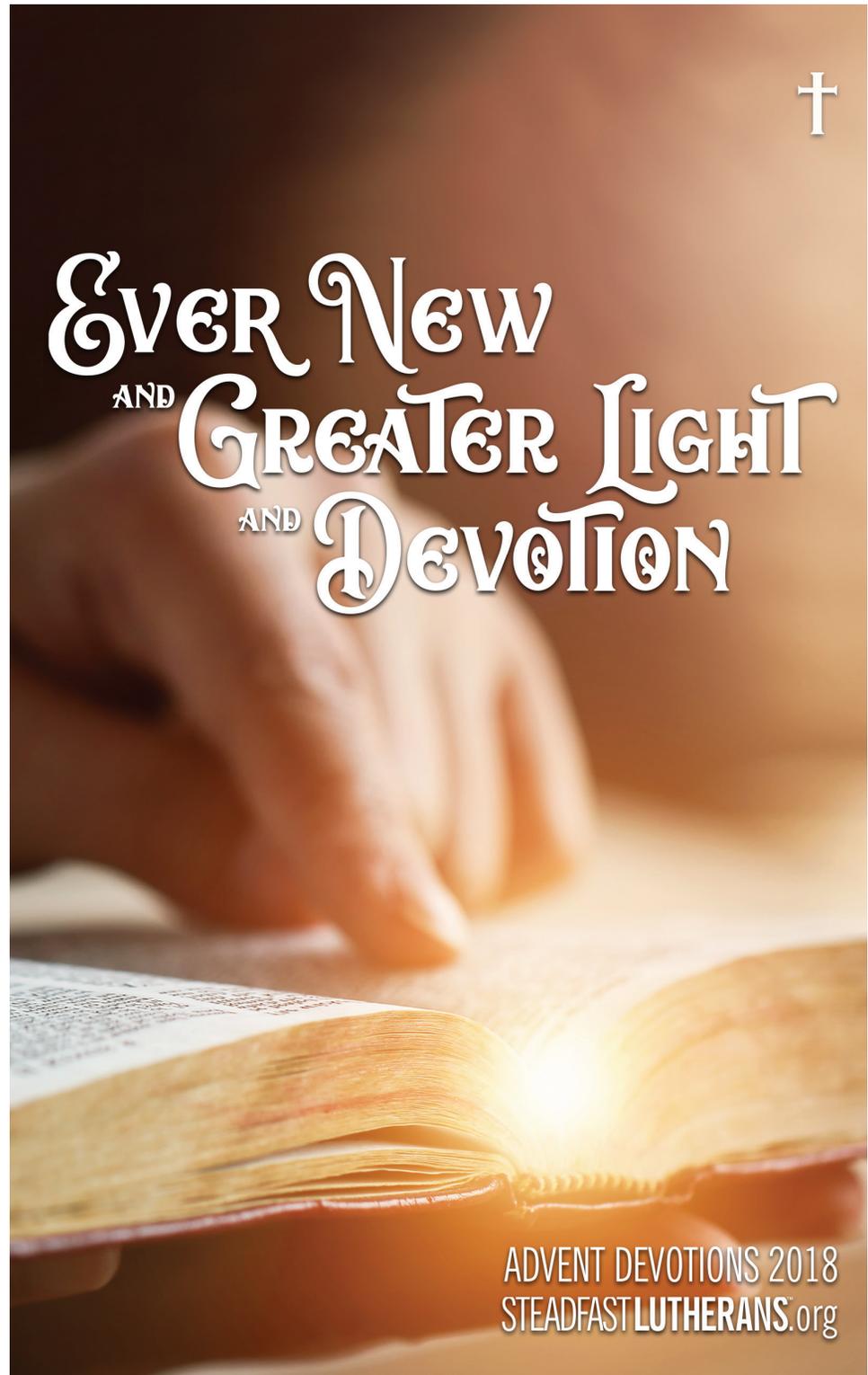




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# EVER NEW AND GREATER LIGHT AND DEVOTION



ADVENT DEVOTIONS 2018  
STEADFAST LUTHERANS.org





EVER NEW  
AND GREATER LIGHT  
AND DEVOTION  
ADVENT DEVOTIONS 2018

HE CAME TO THAT  
WHICH WAS HIS OWN.  
BUT HE WAS NOT RECEIVED:  
YET STILL THROUGH HIM  
GOD'S GLORY SHONE.  
AND SOME HIS NAME BELIEVED.  
TO THESE HE GAVE THE RIGHT TO BE  
THE HEIRS OF HEAV'N ABOVE.  
BORN NOT OF HUMAN ANCESTRY.  
BUT BORN OF GOD IN LOVE.

LSB 362:3



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“Ever New and Greater Light and Devotion”

Advent Devotions

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O SING OF CHRIST.  
WHOSE BIRTH MADE KNOWN  
THE KINDNESS OF THE LORD,  
ETERNAL WORD  
MADE FLESH AND BONE  
SO WE COULD BE RESTORED.  
UPON OUR FRAIL HUMANITY  
GOD'S FINGER CHOSE TO TRACE  
THE FULLNESS OF HIS DEITY.  
THE ICON OF HIS GRACE.

**LSB 362:1**

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## NATIVITY OF OUR LORD – CHRISTMAS DAY

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. 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 bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ”) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

John 1:1-18

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

*And for the Glory of God*

This advent devotion takes us as Lutherans back into very familiar ground, the Small Catechism. Here we find the foundations of our faith, the basics upon which the rest of our beliefs and practices are built. There is always a temptation to think these things are too basic or that we have mastered them already and can learn no more. This is actually a sin against the Third Commandment to think such things. Each of us have a sinful nature, an Old Adam, and he is a horrible theologian – and yet too often we listen to his teaching.

Dr. Luther spoke of pastors who treated the Small Catechism with contempt. These pastors were pastors after all – what need did they have of a basic instruction book for children? But to such an arrogant understanding Luther speaks thus:

*Therefore, for God's sake I beg such lazy bellies or arrogant saints to be persuaded and believe that they are truly, truly not so learned or such great doctors as they imagine! They should never assume that they have finished learning the parts of the catechism or know it well enough in all points, even though they think that they know it ever so well. For even if they know and understand the catechism perfectly (which, however, is impossible in this life), there are still many benefits and fruits to be gained, if it is daily read and practiced in thought and speech. For example, the Holy Spirit is present in such reading, repetition, and meditation. He bestows ever new and more light and devoutness. In this way the catechism is daily loved and appreciated better, as Christ promises in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them." (Large Catechism, Preface, par 9)*

O JESUS CHRIST,  
THY MANGER IS MY PARADISE  
AT WHICH MY SOUL RECLINETH.  
FOR THERE, O LORD,  
DOETH LIE THE WORD  
MADE FLESH FOR US:  
HEREIN THY GRACE FORTH SHINETH.

LSB 372:1

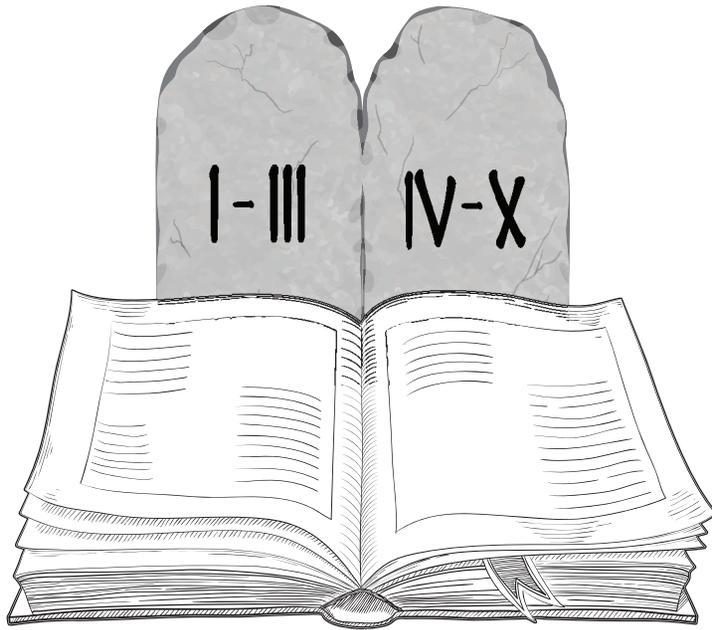
## NATIVITY OF OUR LORD – CHRISTMAS EVE

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.”

Luke 2:1-20

So like Dr. Luther, we go back to the Small Catechism each day. The underlined section is the foundation to the theme of this series. The Holy Spirit works through the Word, and the Catechism is a pure confession of that Word. This Advent hopefully is just a continuation of this practice for your household, but in case it is not, let this be a fresh start. There is much blessing to be found in such practice, not the least of which is the passing on of the faith to the next generation. May God indeed do that for you and yours this Advent.

Rev. Joshua V. Scheer  
Editor in Chief  
Steadfast Lutherans



THESE ARE THE HOLY  
TEN COMMANDS GOD GAVE TO US  
BY MOSES' HANDS  
WHEN HIGH ON SINAI'S  
MOUNT HE STOOD.  
RECEIVING THEM FOR OUR GOOD.  
HAVE MERCY, LORD!  
LSB 581:1

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

And this is the testimony of John... He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."... John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.""  
John 1:19a, 23, 26-27

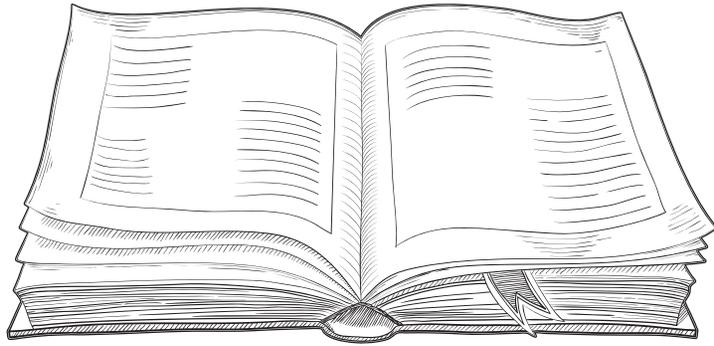
John the Baptizer was the forerunner. The Scriptures pointed to his office to precede and prepare the way for Jesus. The theme of this devotion has been "Ever new and greater light and devotion". John was used by the Holy Spirit to do this and His testimony still does so today. At Church today this lesson is still read and taught. The Spirit uses it to bring ever new and greater light and devotion.

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight your paths. Repentance is the order of every day for the Christian. The Holy Spirit does this new thing in us by His Word. The Commandments bring the knowledge of sin. The Gospel found in the Creed brings us knowledge of what God has done to earn the forgiveness of our sins and how they are forgiven richly and daily by the Spirit through the Church. The Lord's Prayer teaches us that our lives as forgiven sinners are to be lived in piety, in devotion to the things of God. John is a picture of godly piety. He confessed Christ. He knew Scripture. He did not cease to humble himself and lift up Christ.

As you move into the season of Christmas, take this piety of John and pray the Spirit to work in your household by the Word to instill such repentance, faith, and humility that we see pictured in John.

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*Lord, help us as Your baptized children to confess our sins, believe in Jesus Christ for our forgiveness, seek to hear Your Word, make regular and faithful use of absolution and the Lord's Supper, and lead lives of prayer and devotion. Amen.*



ON JORDAN'S BANK  
THE BAPTIST'S CRY  
ANNOUNCES THAT THE LORD IS NIGH:  
AWAKE AND HEARKEN.  
FOR HE BRINGS  
GLAD TIDINGS OF THE  
KING OF KINGS!  
LSB 344:1

## FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

Matthew 21:1-5

God never works arbitrarily. When God acts, it is always with a purpose. Because God is good, His purposes are always good. Moreover, they are always for the Christian's good, as Paul writes in Romans 8, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." Yes, even that which the world intends for evil God means for good for His beloved people (Genesis 50:20).

When Christ sent His two disciples to untie the donkey and colt and bring them to Him, they may have wondered why the Lord needed them specifically. But it was necessary for Jesus to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Zechariah, just as He fulfilled all the Scriptures, that He might offer Himself once and for all on the cross, the perfect fulfillment of God's Word spoken through the prophets of old.

During this Advent season, the focus of our meditations will be the good purposes of God in the Law, Doctrine, and Prayer, as we learn them in the first three chief parts of the Small Catechism. May God bless your Advent preparations as you consider how His purpose is to bestow on you ever new and greater light and devotion through these chief parts of the Catechism.

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*Almighty God, grant us faith to confess with Your servant St. Paul that You have done all things for our good, even unto eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

## FIRST MONDAY IN ADVENT

“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.”

**Deuteronomy 6:1-3**

Ask Lutherans what the purpose of the Law is, and many will say that the Law shows us our sin. Indeed it does! But the Law does not only speak a word of condemnation. It also speaks a word of promise. In Leviticus 18:4, the Lord declares, “If a person does [my statutes and my rules], he shall live by them.” And in our text for today, Moses tells the Israelites of the promises of the Law: They will possess the land, their days will be long, it will go well with them, and they will multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Yes, the Law comes with many and blessed promises. But the promises of the Law are conditional. They are based on an “if”: if you keep the Law, you will receive the promise. But for the sinner, “the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me.” (Romans 7:10)

Thanks be to God He gives us the unconditional promise of eternal life through the Gospel! “Apart from the Law” we have the promise of eternal life through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:21, 24). So the Law promises life only to the righteous; the Gospel promises life to the sinner for Jesus’ sake.

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*Lord, grant that we delight in Your Law day and night, and hold fast to Your Gospel all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.*

## THIRD SATURDAY IN ADVENT

“But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

**Luke 21:36**

We heard this verse on the Second Sunday in Advent. Jesus told of all the distress on earth leading up to His coming at the Last Day. He warned of the danger of becoming entangled with the world, of being “weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap” (Luke 21:34). He tells us in today’s verse to stay awake at all times, that is, to remain faithful to Him all the way to the end and thereby await His appearing.

And what do we do while we wait for the Lord? We pray. We pray because of ourselves we are not sufficient to remain faithful unto the end. We pray because we do not by nature have the strength to escape the wrath of God or the snares of the world. We pray because we do not have the strength to stand before the Son of Man when He comes to judge the living and the dead.

But by telling us to pray, Jesus directs our attention and our hope away from ourselves and toward Him. He will give us the escape from the wrath of God and the snares of the world. He will give us strength to stand before Him. He will hear and grant our prayers because He wants us to escape wrath and be able to straighten up and lift up our heads before Him. He was so set on giving us escape from God’s wrath that He became one of us in order to suffer wrath in our place and be the propitiation for our sins. He was so set on giving us strength to stand before Him that He humbled Himself in weakness in order to grant us confidence in the Judgment. And so we stay watchful in prayer and hope in our Savior.

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*O Jesus, give us strength to escape the coming wrath and to stand before You on the Last Day. Amen.*

### THIRD FRIDAY IN ADVENT. FEAST OF ST. THOMAS

“Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.’ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

John 20:24-29

Sometimes the Apostle Thomas is called “Doubting” Thomas. That’s a bit harsh, given that he lived life marked by faith. He is rather “Believing” Thomas, and what we learn from this account is not so much one man’s temporary doubt, but the fact that our Lord strengthens the faith of us all.

Doubt is the enemy of prayer. James writes that if a man desires to receive wisdom from God: “let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7).

We are unable to conjure up the faith necessary to pray. But as with Thomas, the Lord dispels our doubt, and He does it by His Word. If we doubt that God wants to hear our prayers, there stands His command: “Ask!” If we doubt that God will answer our prayers, there stands His promise: “and you will receive!” And if we doubt that we’re saying the right words, there stands Jesus teaching us His very own prayer.

*Lord Jesus, keep us mindful of Your command and promise to pray, that we would not doubt and that our prayers would not be hindered. Amen.*

### FIRST TUESDAY IN ADVENT

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 5:18-21

The Law promises life to the one who lives by it. But all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All are children of Adam, who trespassed against the Law of God in the Garden by eating the fruit he was commanded not to eat. From this man original sin passed into all, and thus condemnation as well. Therefore, by works of the Law no human being will be justified in God’s sight.

But there is one exception to this “all”—one Man who did not sin and who did not fall short of the glory of God. From the moment of conception He was without sin, for he was not conceived according to the natural order. In His flesh this Man lived a perfectly righteous life to the point of death. As the Law requires complete, holy, pure, and perfect obedience, this Man rendered it fully.

This Man is our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He not only obeyed the Law perfectly in his thoughts, words, and deeds all the days of His life, He also satisfied the Law’s just condemnation of sinners in His righteous suffering and death on the cross. By this act of righteousness accomplished by the only perfect Man, we who are sinners are justified by faith apart from works of the Law. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

*Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for fulfilling the Law on our behalf by Your perfect obedience and satisfying its just condemnation by Your death on the cross. Amen.*

## FIRST WEDNESDAY IN ADVENT

Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:17-20

Romans 10:4 says, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Is the Law then abolished by the Gospel? “By no means!” writes Paul, “On the contrary, we uphold the law.” (3:31) The Law remains the eternal will of God, which the Gospel by no means abolishes. Rather it confirms the Law: unless the Law is kept with perfect obedience, God is not merciful to any sinner.

But God willed to send His Son Jesus into our flesh to fulfill the Law in our place and to make satisfaction for our transgressions against the Law, so that by his obedience and satisfaction God would be merciful to us.

In order that the Law’s fulfillment would be sufficient for all, Christ must be both true God and true Man, that his human obedience might have divine worth. Jesus is indeed God and Man, and He has done all things for us freely, by grace alone without our works, and it is received solely through faith.

The Law remains eternally, for God’s will is eternal. But Jesus Christ has satisfied its demands for us by His perfect life of obedience and by His perfect death on the cross. By His righteousness alone we will enter the kingdom of heaven.

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*Lord God, Your will is perfect and eternal. Forgive our attempts to relax your commandments, and grant that we trust in Christ alone for our salvation. Amen.*

## THIRD THURSDAY IN ADVENT

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”

Luke 11:9

Jesus gives three pictures of prayer. Yesterday we looked at the first two, the request and the search. The third picture is of someone knocking on a door of a house. This is like Luke 11, sometimes called the Parable of the Friend at Midnight. Jesus said to His disciples:

“Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.” (Luke 11:5-8).

And what does Jesus conclude from this? That we should be more polite when we pray? No, He concludes with the words of today’s reading: “Ask, seek, knock.” See how impudent this man was? Be like him. Knock away! If the neighbor who doesn’t really want to do anything does something anyway, how much more will our Father in heaven grant your requests since He *desires* to hear and grant them!

Putting the three images together, Jesus teaches us that prayer means asking for something, and we will receive what we request. Jesus teaches that prayer often involves persistence, and when it does, we end up finding more than we were seeking. And Jesus teaches that when it comes to prayer, impudence is a virtue, not a vice, because what man considers impudence God simply considers faith.

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*Our Father in heaven, we are not worthy to ask anything of You, but we have confidence to approach You through Your dear Son. Make us to desire those things that are pleasing to You, grant us all things beneficial, and protect us from all things harmful. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## THIRD WEDNESDAY IN ADVENT

**“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you”**

**Matthew 7:7**

Jesus gives three pictures of prayer. The first is someone making a simple request. This is like Mark 10, when Jesus was processing through Jericho and blind Bartimaeus was crying out along the road, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47). Jesus ordered that Bartimaeus be brought before him, and then asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” And Bartimaeus said, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight” (Mark 10:51). Jesus said, “Go your way; your faith has saved you” (Mark 10:52), and Bartimaeus immediately regained his sight. In this case prayer was a simple request with a quick gift that followed.

The second picture is of someone diligently seeking. The search is lengthier than the simple request. And it’s important to note, the Lord is the one who decides whether a prayer is a simple request or a search, whether He’ll grant a speedy answer or delay. We have the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 who asks Jesus to have mercy on her daughter who is oppressed by a demon. Jesus ignores her, and puts her off, and acts like He wants nothing to do with her. But she has heard the report about Him and knows who He is. He doesn’t hate us. He is God in the flesh who came because He wants to have mercy on us. She persists in her prayer, and Jesus finally says, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire” (Matthew 15:28). And not only does Jesus heal her daughter, but He Himself makes the woman’s faith great by putting her off and leaving her only with the Word that she had heard. So it is when Jesus turns our prayers into hunts that He ends up giving more than we were seeking in the first place.

Tomorrow we will look at the third picture of prayer that Jesus gives.

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*Dear Jesus, give us persistence in prayer so that when we seek we may find. Give us also great faith so that we never doubt Your goodness toward us. Amen.*

## FIRST THURSDAY IN ADVENT

**Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.**

**1 Timothy 1:8-11**

**B**ecause the Law is not abolished by Jesus but fulfilled, it is good for us to review the three uses of God’s Law. The first use is known as the civil use or the “curb.” Regarding this use the Formula of Concord states, “The Law of God was given to people...that by the Law outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient people.” (*Concordia*, p. 486)

Jesus says, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” (Matthew 15:19) If indeed the sinful desires of our corrupted hearts were to come forth unchecked, our world would devolve into utter chaos. And if that were the case, how could the Gospel be proclaimed for the salvation of souls?

So God has given His Law to restrain sinners from carrying out their wicked desires. He has written the Law on every heart, that men’s consciences might bear witness. He has also given civil authorities to promote order and justice in this life.

The first use of the Law is indeed for our good, so that the truth of the Gospel might have free course among us all: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

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*Lord, bless our civil authorities, that our land may have peace and quiet so that the Gospel may be preached without hindrance; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

## FIRST FRIDAY IN ADVENT

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

**Romans 3:19-20**

The second use of the Law is known as the accusing use, or sometimes called the theological use. This is the Law used as a “mirror.” Regarding this use the Formula of Concord states, “The Law of God was given to people...that people may be led to the knowledge of their sins by the Law.” (*Concordia*, p. 486)

By this use the Law places all people under God’s condemnation for their failure to keep His Law. If you “consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments” honestly, it quickly becomes apparent that you have not kept them as you ought. Even more troubling is the realization that because of your sins, you have not feared and loved God and thus broken the First Commandment. And worst of all, your sins are truly damning, and you justly deserve God’s temporal and eternal punishment. Yes, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All deserve the wages of sin, which is death.

For this reason, the second use is the most important use, since it drives the sinner to repent of his sins, fear God’s wrath, and seek the only Savior from death and hell. But that Savior is not found in the Law. He, our Lord Jesus Christ, is found only in the Gospel, the good news that Christ bore all our sin upon Himself on the cross and paid for them all that we might have peace with God and declared righteous through faith alone.

“The Law reveals the guilt of sins and makes us conscience-stricken. But then the Gospel enters in the sinful soul to quicken. Come to the cross, trust Christ, and live.” (LSB 555:8)

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*O God, we confess to You all our sins and iniquities. For the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord, be merciful to us poor sinners. Amen.*

## THIRD TUESDAY IN ADVENT

“The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

**Philippians 4:5-7**

Thanksgiving and prayer go together. As we call to mind the Lord’s mercies, the natural response is thanksgiving. Thanksgiving means acknowledging our Father as the source of every good. This thanksgiving strengthens our faith in God since it focuses us on what He has given us through His Son. As our faith increases, we become confident and bold to ask for all manner of things. And so as we give thanks to God, this leads to prayer.

Martin Luther highlights the relation of thanksgiving and prayer in his Morning and Evening Prayers. In the evening we say, “I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night.” And in the morning the first thing we say is, “I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger.” Our Father heard and answered our prayer in the evening, in spite of our sins and for the sake of His Son. We thank Him for this gracious act. And having given thanks, we’re confident to ask for more of the same: “and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You.”

In the evening we find that He has again answered our prayer, and we give thanks again and pray again: I thank you that you have graciously kept me this day; graciously keep me this night. Thanksgiving begets prayer, and, when the Lord answers our prayers, He begets thanksgiving. Thus we come to a greater knowledge of the Father’s love for us in His Son, and we become confident to ask Him for many and great things.

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*Heavenly Father, thank You for the mercy You have shown us in giving Your Son for us. Give us confidence to pray, and continually teach us Your mercy. Amen.*

## THIRD MONDAY IN ADVENT

“O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name”

Daniel 9:18-19

These are the last few lines of a prayer that the prophet Daniel prayed while in exile in Persia. Daniel began his prayer with a confession of the Lord’s nature and of the people’s sin: “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and just decrees” (Daniel 9:4-5). The Lord keeps steadfast love. His people have sinned.

Now with these words in mind, for whose sake do we pray? I don’t mean for whose *benefit* do we pray. We pray because we’re seeking a gift from the Lord, not because He needs something from us. I mean *on the basis of whose merit* do we pray? We cannot pray to God for our own sake. We cannot appeal to God on the basis of our own merit. As Daniel says, “To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame” (Daniel 9:7). We can only pray for the Lord’s sake, on the basis of His merit and righteousness.

And so that’s what Daniel does. He prays, “O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:16). Similarly, we pray for Jesus’ sake. That is, we pray on the basis of Jesus’ merits and not our own. And for His sake – and only for His sake – we have assurance that our prayers are pleasing to our Father in heaven.

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*Heavenly Father, You have redeemed us with the mighty hand of Your Son Jesus. For His sake be gracious to us, hear our prayers, forgive our sins, and guard us from all evil. Amen.*

## FIRST SATURDAY IN ADVENT

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes!

Psalm 119:9-12

The third use of the Law is known as a “rule” or “guide.” Regarding this use the Formula of Concord states, “The Law of God was given to people...that after they are regenerate and much of the flesh still cleaves to them, they might on this account have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life.” (*Concordia*, p. 486) In fact, there is an entire article devoted to the third use of the Law in the Formula.

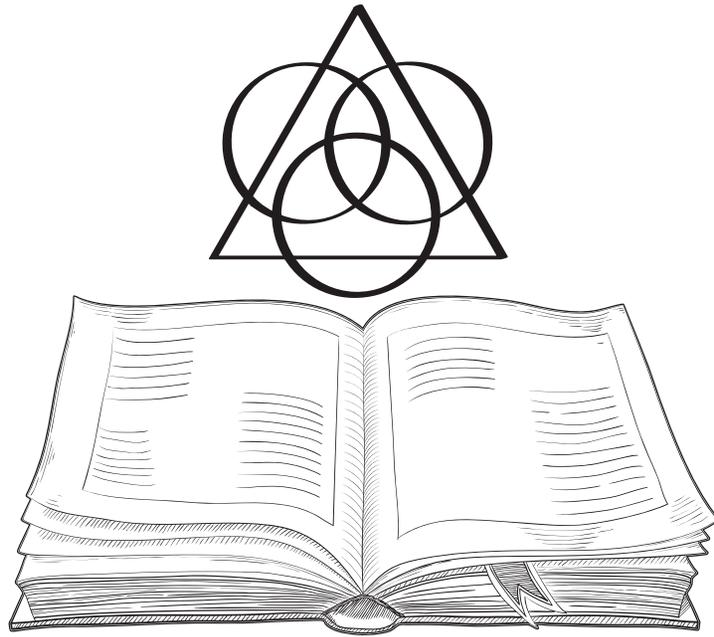
The Scriptures teach that the Law remains one and the same for Christians and unbelievers, since it is God’s unchangeable will. There is a change in the person, however: the unbeliever obeys the Law unwillingly and only by constraint, but the believer, insofar as he | is a new creation, obeys the Law with a willing and joyful spirit.

The Christian is indeed released from the Law (Romans 7:6). He is free from the obligation of keeping the Law unto salvation. He is free from the curse and condemnation of the Law. He is free from the constraint of the Law. Nevertheless, the Christian confesses the Law of God as good and wise, for it shows us the works that please God, it reminds us that good works are indeed necessary, it sanctifies those good works it prescribes, and it reminds us still of our imperfection under the Law.

Thus the Law has a good purpose from God for the Christian, who exercises himself in it daily, willingly, and gladly, as one justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

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*Almighty God, grant that we seek not our own ways and works, but love You and our neighbor according to Your holy commandments; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*



**YOU ONLY ARE THE HOLY ONE  
AND OVER ALL ARE LORD ALONE.**

**O JESUS CHRIST.**

**WE GLORIFY YOU AND THE SPIRIT.**

**LORD MOST HIGH:**

**WITH HIM YOU EVERMORE SHALL BE  
ONE IN THE FATHER'S MAJESTY.**

**LSB 948:5**

### THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

“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.’”

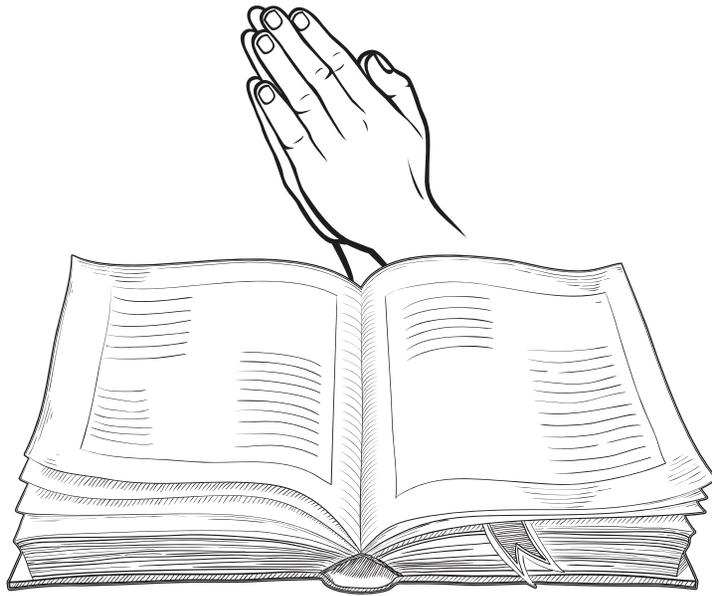
**Matthew 11:4-6**

God’s people had long prayed, “Stir up your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!” (Psalm 80:2-3). The Father answered that prayer by sending His Son to become flesh and dwell among us.

While in our midst, Jesus showed that He is more willing to give than we are to ask. Blind men asked to receive their sight, yes, and lepers asked to be cleansed. But no one ever asked Jesus to raise someone from the dead. In Luke 8 Jairus asked Jesus to come heal his daughter. Before they made it to the house, someone came and reported, “Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more” (Luke 8:49). Everyone assumed that if she was dead, that was the end of the matter. Prayer ceased. Similarly, no one asked Jesus to raise Lazarus, or the widow’s son at Nain. But Jesus was more willing to give than they were to ask, and the dead were raised up.

In Christ we see that our Father loves us with a lavish and generous love. He holds nothing back, as Paul writes in Romans 8:32 “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?” Through Jesus the Father has taught us to ask Him for more than we would ever think to ask. And through Jesus we therefore pray to our Father in heaven and ask for enormous and glorious things: the forgiveness of sins, resurrection from the dead, eternal life, and the coming of Christ on the Last Day.

*Stir up Your might, O Lord, and come to save us. Restore us, O God; let Your face shine, that we may be saved. Amen.*



**OUR FATHER,  
WHO FROM HEAV'N ABOVE  
BIDS ALL OF US TO LIVE IN LOVE  
AS MEMBERS OF ONE FAMILY  
AND PRAY TO YOU IN UNITY,  
TEACH US TO THOUGHTLESS  
WORDS TO SAY BUT FROM OUR  
INMOST HEARTS TO PRAY.**

**LSB 766:5**

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

**“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”  
Luke 21:33**

**V**DMA is an acronym which was heavily used in the time of the Reformation. In Latin it reads *Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*. It is translated to say “the Word of the Lord endures forever”. This is what Jesus is telling us in our selection from today’s Gospel lesson. His Word will remain forever. It is surer than heaven or earth.

Frankly this is not how people live. It’s probably not how you live either. The cares of this world make it appear to be so much more important the words on a page. This week we are going to be looking at the purpose of doctrine – and the first lesson we need to learn is that doctrine is eternal, it remains forever.

Doctrine is what the Word of God teaches. It is the Word of God. When Jesus speaks, out of His mouth comes doctrine. When the Holy Spirit inspired men of God to write Scripture, doctrine was the result. Yes, there are more things in Scripture, but in the end the teachings of the Scripture are primary, especially to us as Christians.

Doctrine shall remain forever. This is because it is from God. Jesus says “my words”. Doctrine belongs to Christ. Doctrine is truth. In John 8 Jesus teaches that by abiding in the Word, we abide in the truth, and that the truth sets us free. This is quite contrary to the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh which want us to view doctrine as strict or restrictive. Yes, there is only one true doctrine and the rest are false, but the purpose of true doctrine is to set you free.

If it is meant to set you free, then why wouldn’t you want to study it? That’s the devil’s old trick, to get you to give up on the eternal Word of God and to focus on the here and now from the selfish perspective of the Old Adam. Repent of this, dear Christians. Christ our Lord’s doctrine is liberating, because it brings us Christ.

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*Lord, help us to regard Your doctrine as liberating truth. Amen.*

## SECOND MONDAY IN ADVENT

“Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there.” And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.””

Isaiah 48:16-19

In the Creed we learn who our God is and what He has done for us. We confess the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and their work in creating, redeeming and sanctifying us. This teaching is fundamental to the whole of Scripture. This “who” and “what” is doctrine. It’s the teaching of Scripture. It’s what God has revealed to us openly.

God’s Word makes some strong claims about doctrine. In Isaiah we see that those who pay attention to the Lord’s Commandments will have peace, righteousness, and a blessed progeny. These are just some of the blessings for paying attention to doctrine. The Second Commandment teaches this.

The Large Catechism says the Second Commandment is broken in the worst way by false doctrine. If you stop for a moment to think about it, it makes sense. To teach false doctrine is to say God is saying something He has not said. It is to lie about the Scriptures and thus to lie about the God who has given us the Scriptures. False doctrine is evil. We should flee from it.

This is why we pray that God’s name would be hallowed among us. It involves true doctrine and godly living. This is what Isaiah is saying in this section about our Triune God and the doctrine, the words, the teaching that He has given.

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*Lord, help us to flee false doctrine and cling to Your true doctrine. Amen.*

## SECOND SATURDAY IN ADVENT

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

2 Timothy 4:1-4

St. Paul charges St. Timothy to preach and teach at all times with pure doctrine. He then warns him about what is to come. Christ is the judge of the living and the dead and will return. Before that time, people will not endure sound doctrine. They will want teachers who teach them only what they want to hear.

This has been going on from the time Christ ascended. People do not like to endure sound doctrine. It goes against us. It might not make sense. It may not be logical. It may make us feel bad. It may create some guilt. It may challenge us. It offers correction for the things we do.

This following after passions is very evident in so many churches today being founded upon emotional matters. Note how many people talk about “feeling” rather than “thinking” nowadays. The corruption of sin no longer just messes with thoughts but has gone deeper into a more raw category of our existence – with emotions. This is what God’s Word warns us against.

The remedy is to learn your doctrine. Brush up on it. Learn who God is and what God does. Learn the proper place of thoughts and emotions in relation to God’s Word and our Church practices. Support your preachers in doing as St. Paul exhorts St. Timothy to do. For the day is here when people have not endured sound doctrine and the Day of the Lord also draws near.

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*Lord, mercifully grant us a humble heart and mind that gladly learns Your doctrine and endures in it. Amen.*

## SECOND FRIDAY IN ADVENT

**“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”**

**Acts 2:37-42**

The Holy Spirit used Peter’s doctrinal preaching on Pentecost to convert 3,000 people. Peter had taken the doctrine of the Old Testament and preached it in relation to Jesus being the Messiah. The people are struck to the heart and Peter teaches them about Holy Baptism and the forgiveness of sins.

The church in the Book of Acts then devotes itself to the Apostles’ teaching (doctrine), to the fellowship, to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and to the public liturgical prayers of the Church. The Apostles’ doctrine was a focus of the early Church’s devotion. That’s because the doctrine of the Apostles was the doctrine that the Father had given the Son to teach (John 7:16). It was the doctrine that the Father and Son sent the Spirit to remind them of (John chapters 14-16). The teaching of Christ handed to the Apostles was foundational to the Church and its growth.

Doctrine does not change. What was true for the Church of Acts 2 is also true for us today. Doctrine, the teachings of the Scriptures, is important and an object of devotion for the Church. That’s because doctrine reveals again who our God is and what He has done for us. Doctrine brings us life. We would not know God or what Jesus has done for us without it.

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*Lord, help us be devoted to the Apostles’ doctrine. Amen.*

## SECOND TUESDAY IN ADVENT

**“But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”**

**Romans 10:8-10**

With the heart one believes, with the mouth one confesses. Justification and salvation wrapped up in these two things. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The Word which is implanted in the heart by the work of the Spirit becomes the Word that is spoken among Christians and before the world.

Doctrine is confessed in our Creeds. They are summaries of what Christians believe. They are the fruit of hearts that have been given the Word of the Scriptures, the teachings that fill their sacred pages. The doctrine is then confessed to help encourage each other and to let the world know what the true doctrine is.

Doctrine is a beautiful gift from God. It is His gift and He gives it to us through preaching and also teaching. Romans 10 is quick to praise the preaching of the Word for the creation of justifying faith, but from this also comes the fruit of faith—the confession of that faith in words for others to hear. From hearts that are justified comes words of salvation.

When people ask you what you believe, it is God opening the way for your mouth to confess that which He has given in your heart. It is your opportunity to confess the truth, the doctrine of who our God is and what He has done for you and also for others. We have the Creed so that no matter our age or mental ability we have sacred, sound, and saving words to speak to each other.

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*Lord, thank You for giving us saving faith. Help us to confess it faithfully among ourselves and the world around us. Amen.*

## SECOND WEDNESDAY IN ADVENT

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

**Matthew 28:19-20**

Teaching the doctrine of the Scriptures is a key part of what Christ commands His Church through her pastors to do. Here in Matthew we have the Divine Institution of Holy Baptism and the Office of the Holy Ministry. Christ is telling His Church to teach doctrine.

It is common to find folks who both love this passage of Scripture and also speak ill of “doctrine”. Such an inconsistency can only come from hearts that are too often prone to sin and disregard Christ’s Words of Life. Let us put such sinful understandings aside and take Christ’s Word, His doctrine as the truth that it is.

This is the most explicit reference to our Triune God in all of Scripture. The gift of baptism is always tied to the Triune God. Here Jesus, the Son of God, commands how disciples are to be made. First, baptism in the name of the Triune God. Second, the teaching to observe all things. The content of this teaching is doctrine. May we repent for thinking doctrine is a bad thing. Doctrine is essential to our Lord’s command to make disciples.

Like young children, a disciple wants more teaching, more explanation, more depth in the teachings of Jesus. Simple, childlike faith is not faith which says “that’s enough, I don’t need more”. That’s a spiritual sickness called willful ignorance. Simple childlike faith desires and even demands more depth and knowledge of our Lord’s teachings.

We generally have no trouble pondering how Christ is with us as the baptized children of God. This is a great truth. We however also need to realize that Christ is also with us through the teaching of doctrine as well. He is where His Word is purely taught. May we ever seek to find Him there.

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*Lord, as Your baptized children help us to learn Your doctrine. Amen.*

## SECOND THURSDAY IN ADVENT

**“Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”**

**1 Timothy 4:11-16**

Doctrine is the teaching of God and is commanded by God to be done by pastors in the Church. St. Paul lays this out in this passage to St. Timothy. In this passage the word “teaching” is better rendered as “doctrine”. St. Timothy the pastor is to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture (note this is given to the pastor to do), to exhortation, and to the doctrine. The pastor is to practice these things, immerse himself in them so that others can see it.

Why? Many people would find so many “better” things for the pastor to do than to immerse himself in doctrine. Those people are wrong. They haven’t learned what a pastor is there for. St. Paul here gives us to clue as to the pastor’s task – to keep a close watch on himself and the doctrine he teaches, because by teaching pure doctrine the pastor saves both himself and his hearers.

Is this teaching that people are saved by works? By no means. The content of pure doctrine will include the pure Gospel – the good news of Christ and the salvation He has won for all. Pure doctrine will instruct Christians on what preaching should be, where the means of grace are to be found and how to rightly prepare and receive them. In this way, that pure doctrine brings the pure Gospel it saves both preacher and hearer alike. False doctrine does the opposite and robs Christians.

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*Lord, by Your mercy grant that we have faithful pastors who are devoted to and teach pure doctrine. Amen.*