

“FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES, HE CHASTENS”

AN ADVENT THROUGH MALACHI



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For Whom the Lord Loves, He Chastens – an Advent through Malachi

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Introduction

Advent is a penitential season. This means that the preaching of Advent is bound to bring with it the rebuke of God's Law and the response of the Christian to that Law. This can mean responding faithfully, that is with contrition and repentance. This is the most God pleasing thing and indeed is itself a work of God in the Christian. A person upon hearing the Law has a few other options of reaction. First, the person may be upset at the speaking of the Law because it uncovers sin in them (or in someone they care about – thus revealing the idolatry of the friendship/familial relationship). This usually shows fruit of anger at the speaker of the Law (which is anger at God since He is ultimately the author of the Law). Defensiveness is a horrible spiritual condition that is rooted in pride. The devil, the world, and the sinful flesh want a person to react to the Law this way – because if sin can get such mastery over them and once again make them a slave to sin, then faith in Christ will suffer and die. If this is you, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Deny the world a voice in your conscience, where only the Word of our Lord ought to reign. Drown the flesh rather than let it rise up to slay the New Man created in your baptism. The second harmful way a person may react to the Law is to view it as accomplished by themselves already. As this devotion will touch upon sins of worship, marriage, and offerings, the temptation may be put before every reader will be to consider themselves to have accomplished rightly the things of worship, marriage, and offerings all by themselves. This is just another form of pride, and it is a firm denial of what God's Word teaches and every person's need for a Savior. The Law will reveal sin and the need for a Savior. If a person has no sin, they need no Savior.

The final way a person may respond to the Law being spoken sternly is to despair of any help, to accept the sentence of the Law and go into the pit. This too is not what God would have the hearer to do with hearing the Law. No, the speaking of the Law reveals sins, and the confession of those sins is meant to receive God's response, the glorious words of absolution. This is what this year's theme is meant to be - that you would see your sins, your faithlessness, and repent, that is to confess those sins and turn to Christ for the forgiveness of those sins. God does not want you to despair, but to trust in Christ and His

forgiveness for the end of all despair, bringing a hope that does not and will not ever disappoint.

The theme of this devotion is meant to remind us that many of the difficulties we are facing are actually signs of God's love for us. He is refining, purifying, and working on His Christians. He is chastising as a good and loving Father will do. He will not leave us as spoiled brats to squander what has been given to us, but He will discipline us because He loves us – and that discipline is also a sign of His love. The flesh hates discipline because discipline kills the flesh. So our sufferings, our hearing rebukes, our chastising from God's hand are meant to help us mortify the flesh and its passions.

More than once, upon visiting one of God's dear saints (usually a rather gruff older saint) I will ask them how they are doing and receive the response "better than I deserve". What a wonderfully pious statement of faith this has been. May we understand all of the chastening we receive from our God in the same mind and faith. The Lord loves you. He will not leave you to your flesh or the mastery of sin - for whom the Lord loves, He chastens.

May you have a blessed Advent filled with the hearing of Law and Gospel this year.

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First Sunday in Advent Week One - "The Lord's Love for His People"

Matthew 21:1-9

"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 21:5

The gospel tells us that Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey. This was foretold hundreds of years before by the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah was a child of the post exile period. He returned, with Persian blessing, with a group to rebuild Solomon's temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonian empire 67 years before. This was a difficult time for the church. David's family was bereft of lordship. The temple was in ruin, fit only for owls and jackals. And few came back to the Promised Land to undertake this great work.

And so, Zechariah gives courage and comfort to his people. In chapter 9, Zechariah first preaches against the Persians. The Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon shall be deprived of their wealth. The Philistines, the traditional enemies of God's people, shall be afraid and then cut off. There is still a promise here for those who are a remnant chosen by grace, they shall be for our God and like a clan of Judah. The Lord reigns in the midst of His enemies. He destroys those who refuse to submit, but He always gains some too.

And then, we hear the bold promise: Behold! Your King comes! David's line shall rule again! But He will not rule like the Babylonians, clad in purple. He will not rule like the Persians, painted with gold. He will not rule like the Romans, with an iron fist. No, this King is humble. And the sign of His humility is the vehicle: the lowly donkey.

This great comfort is spiritual. If you desire a worldly, conquering king, you've come to the wrong place. This King comes in gentleness and lowliness to win the hearts of His people. And so He comes to us today, hidden under simple preaching, water, bread and wine. He comes in such a lowly way so that you might be comforted forever.

Dear Jesus, You came in meekness and lowliness. Take away our fleshly thoughts of power and pride and help us to ever rest in Your humility and gentleness. Amen.

Monday of Advent 1

Psalm 47

“He subdued peoples under us, and nations under our feet. He chose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom he loves.” Psalm 47:3-4

Psalm 47 is a psalm about the Messiah. It comforts us with Jesus’ exaltation, especially His glorious ascension into heaven. The ascension is the peak of Christ’s state of exaltation. It is a great and glorious promise. Christ, God, would go up with a shout. Christ would sit at the right hand of the Father, reigning over all the universe as King. That promise is fulfilled.

But this psalm is not just about Jesus ruling over the kingdom of power. We also see the kingdom of grace, the church. The princes, those who believe in Christ, will be gathered as the children of Abraham. By faith, they will be true children of Abraham as Paul’s epistles attest. And those who do not believe shall be subdued and placed under the feet of the church. This is a spiritual victory since we by faith have overcome the world.

And our Lord Christ does all of this because He loves us. This is why Christ has chosen a heritage for us. This heritage is not the perishable land of Canaan, but it is the eternal heritage of heaven. We Christians shall dwell where our Lord Christ is. Where He is, there we shall be too. He has gone up with a shout. And when He comes down with a shout like that of an archangel, we shall meet Him in the air and be with the Lord forever.

These are the great and precious promises found in the Old Testament. Christ rules over all the universe for our benefit. We Gentiles shall be included among the children of Abraham. And the heathen shall be put under our feet. Because of these promises, we clap our hands and rejoice. All praise and all psalms flow from what our God has done for us in Christ. Thanks be to God!

Dear Jesus, You have gone up with a shout in Your glorious resurrection. Gladden our hearts by Your gracious rule, Your inclusion of the Gentiles, and Your subjection of the heathen so that we might sing, clap our hands, and rejoice. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 1

Nehemiah 13:1-31

“Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.” Nehemiah 13:22b

There is always a need for reformation. Ezra began his work in 458 B.C., and was still active when Nehemiah arrived in 445 B.C. After his initial work, Nehemiah was made governor of Yehud for 12 years. When he was gone, the people fell away. They married Ammonites and other heathen women, who led them away from the true worship of God. The priests were terrible examples. The priest Eliashib used temple space for his relation, Tobiah the Ammonite. The Levites and the singers, God’s ministers, were not compensated and so they abandoned their church work. The Sabbath was changed from a holy day of rest and meditation on God’s Word into a day of filled with busy, worldly concerns. This is what Malachi prophesied against. When Nehemiah was absent, Malachi called the people on their sin, but to no avail.

And so, Nehemiah did the right, hard thing. He fixed these abuses. He began with the Word of God. That is how every reformation begins. The people heard the Word, understood it, and rightly believed it. And their faith worked in love. The Levites and the singers were provided for, for a worker is worthy of his wages. Everything foreign, wives and all, was put away.

But the flesh still remained. The Old Adam must be put down daily. Nehemiah tried to do the work that Malachi prophesied about and against. But Nehemiah’s work was necessarily incomplete. He was not the second Elijah, who would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. He was not the Sun of Righteousness, who brought healing in His wings.

But Nehemiah was faithful. He did the right, hard thing. He taught the Word of God. He called people on their sin. He did what God had given him to do. Was it perfect? It never is. But God sees our incomplete good works and He blesses and rewards them for Jesus’ sake. This is why Nehemiah’s prayer is our prayer.

Remember our good works, O God and spare us by Your steadfast love. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 1

Malachi 1:1-5

“Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.” Malachi 1:2-3

Justification by faith alone, apart from any work, is the heart of the Christian religion. This doctrine can only be taught by the Holy Spirit. Our default position is legalism. We want there to be something in us that merits God’s love. We want there to be something that we do or think that will earn God’s favor. Why does God choose us for eternal life? Well, I must have deserved it!

The people of Malachi’s time were under that same delusion. They were blind to how God had chosen them, above all the nations of the world, to be a cradle for His Son. He chose them, not because they were numerous or mighty or holy, but because He was steadfast and merciful. He made a promise to Abraham and He was going to keep it. And God did all of this for Israel out of His boundless, incomprehensible love. He did all this without any merit or worthiness in Israel. They were full of ingratitude.

And that’s what Malachi brings out. Esau and Jacob were brothers. They were both descended from Abraham through Isaac. They were from the same womb. They were even twins, born almost at the same time. The babies had done nothing yet. They had done no good. They had done no evil. There was nothing in Jacob that would make God prefer him over Esau.

If anyone deserved God’s love, it was Esau. All other things being equal, he was the firstborn. But God does not choose Esau. He preferred the younger to the older. Why? “[I]t depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

God does not love us because we are loveable. The great comfort and promise is that, before we were born, God chose us in Christ. Our salvation does not rest in our own hands, but in the hand of God, from Whose hand no one can snatch us (John 10:29).

Heavenly Father, through the prophet You have taught us about your gracious election. Help us to believe that we are saved by Your grace alone and to give thanks for your incomprehensible love. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 1

Hosea 11:1-12

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Hosea 11:1

Hosea's name means "the LORD has redeemed." He was the son of Beerī, a citizen of the kingdom of Israel. He was an early contemporary of Isaiah and Micah. Hosea's prophecies were very colorful and powerful object lessons. He married a prostitute to show that Israel, the northern kingdom, had gone after other gods. He named one child "no mercy," and the other, "not my people." The reason for this is found in chapter 11: "The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols." The northern kingdom could never get rid of its golden calves. The sin of Jeroboam always polluted their thinking. Even when Jehu destroyed the temple of Baal and made it a toilet, he did not go the full way and destroy the syncretistic worship going on in Dan and in Bethel.

Despite this spiritual adultery, the LORD still loved the northern kingdom. He remembered when He called Israel out of Egypt and made him a son. He remembered teaching Israel to walk in the ways of righteousness. God's fatherly heart still burned bright and overshadowed His great anger. God will not destroy them like He destroyed Admah and Zeboiim, the towns which were destroyed alongside Sodom and Gomorrah.

This fatherly love for a prodigal son leads our God to send His only begotten Son into the flesh. While God called Israel out of Egypt for deliverance and salvation, God will call Jesus out of Egypt to suffer and die on the cross for our sake. The first son was saved from death by the only begotten Son's death. The first son was freed from bondage because the only begotten Son put on a servant's form. And because of this, God will not destroy them for the sake of Jesus. God will not destroy us for the sake of Jesus.

Heavenly Father, out of Egypt You have called Your Son to suffer and die. Turn Your fatherly heart toward us, teach us how to walk, and lead us with the cords of kindness. Amen.

Friday of Advent 1

Deuteronomy 7:1-26

"It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers."

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

Faith works itself out in love. Deuteronomy 7 reveals this. The children of Israel are commanded by God to eradicate idolatry. All idolatry is an abomination before the Lord, and He wanted Israel to turn away from every evidence of it with extreme loathing. Even the jewelry should be destroyed and shunned. God expects Christians to shun intimacy with unbelievers too, lest they lose the precious jewel of their faith. Faith must always be gregarious, never promiscuous.

God also promises great blessings if they should obey His commandments. They shall have abundant crops. No disease shall touch them. Is this not what God promises us in the close of the commandments? God promises grace and every blessing to those who keep His commandments.

But the exhortations and the rewards are always built upon the loving promise of God. God loves Israel. There was nothing in Israel for Him to love. They were not a numerous nation. They were not holy or righteous. Israel did nothing to deserve such a unique position, to be favored above every nation by God.

God chose them because He made a promise. In the beginning, God made a promise in the Garden of Eden that the Seed of the woman shall crush the demonic head of the serpent. Four hundred years before Moses, God made a promise to Abraham that, through him, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

And God keeps His promises. He doesn't renege on His promises. He is faithful. He is true. Even though we lie and break our promises, God is faithful. He promised to bless the world through Israel. And He did. He sent His Son, born of a virgin Jewess called Mary, so that we might be redeemed, bought back with His precious blood.

Lord Jesus, reveal Your sheer and boundless love to us so that we might love God and our neighbor. Amen.

Saturday of Advent 1

Isaiah 54:1-17

“In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord, your Redeemer” Isaiah 54:8

Chapter 54 reveals the fruit of the Messiah’s sufferings, which is lovingly given to the church. The church is not barren but overflowing with spiritual children who shall be taught by the Lord. The Maker of All is the church’s husband. The church, afflicted by the tempest of her sins, shall have a firm foundation of sapphires and a gate of crystal. No one shall defeat the church by force or by guile; in fact, the church shall condemn such people.

This is the heritage that God in Christ has given us. Our righteousness comes by faith in the work of Jesus. There is not a drop of condemnation or judgment in this whole section. All of the judgment in the first chapters is gone. The thunder and lightning against hypocrisy and formalism is spent. All of that is just a moment. But now, God has had compassion on us. He has had compassion on us because He is our Redeemer. He has bought us back. He has paid for our sins. He has blotted out our iniquities. He has suffered for our hypocrisy and formalism. All of that anger was poured on Jesus, and we receive everlasting love and compassion.

The Lord then uses a biblical precedent. This is like the days of Noah. God swore not to flood the earth anymore. Now, He makes a new oath. God swears that He shall not be angry with us. And this promise will last forever. The mountains may disappear. The hills may vanish. But God’s kindness and peace shall never depart from us.

All of this is ours because of the Suffering Servant. Christ suffered so that we might have everlasting love and compassion. Christ was bruised and made a sin offering so that we might have everlasting peace. Read Isaiah 54, but first read Isaiah 53. And then, you will truly know how much the LORD loves you, His people.

Heavenly Father, Your anger lasts but a moment but Your compassion endures forever. Remind us of this joyful fact, even as we continue to struggle and contend with our sinful flesh. Amen.

Second Sunday in Advent

Week Two - “The Lord’s chastening of faithless worship”

Luke 21:25-36

[Jesus said:] “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. 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 21:34-36

The Son of Man, Jesus, will return. No one knows the day nor the hour. Yet, we are told that when the things that Jesus describes in Luke 21 “begin to take place,” we are given to “straighten up and raise your heads because your redemption is near.”

What are some of those signs that will precede Jesus’ return? Some include panic among those without hope in Christ: distress because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, and people fainting with fear because of what is happening in the world. We’re quite familiar with the latter.

The “being afraid” kind of fear is a poor teacher. People make poor decisions out of fear. Some people fear things in this world more than they fear the one true God. We should repent of such fear, and instead “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” “Reverent awe” is a better kind of “fear” than the “being afraid” kind.

In addition to fear of things of this world, we can be distracted by cares of this life, intoxication, and indulging our every whim. Those distractions, Jesus warns, could lead to “that day [coming] upon you suddenly like a trap.” It should not be so among the baptized, those with faith in Christ.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away,” Jesus says. His Word abides with us and within our hearts, minds, and lips. This is how we “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.”

Lord Jesus, grant that we may be continually awake in faith by the work of Your Spirit and Word within us. Amen.

Monday of Advent 2

Psalm 50

Our God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest. He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!" The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge!
Psalm 50: 3-5

In Genesis 28, the Lord gives Jacob a dream about a ladder between earth and heaven with angels ascending and descending. The Lord said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."

Psalm 50 reveals that the Lord's ancient people often forgot about the Lord, His Word, His covenant with them, and "despised preaching and His Word. They did not "hold [His Word] sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Further, they did not "call upon [Him] in every need, pray, praise and give thanks." They broke the Lord's First, Second, and Third Commandments, even though the sacrificial system continued. Their hearts, minds, and lips were not filled with His Word.

How many of us have thought about Jacob's ladder as being connected to the Divine Service or to our hour of need? The Lord has gathered to Himself a people around His Word and Sacraments. He cut a new covenant in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for us and for our salvation. The Resurrection of Jesus also declares His righteousness. Repent! One day, Christ Himself will return as Judge.

Almighty, ever-living God, grant that we may gladly hear Your Word and that all our worship may be acceptable unto You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 2

Malachi 1:6-2:9

⁷ For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. ⁸ But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, ⁹ and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction.” Malachi 2:7-9

We're not used to reading Malachi. This prophetic book of the Old Testament is a neighbor of Matthew, but most Christians are more familiar with the New Testament than the Old. Time in this book, the help of a devotional book like this, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit can overcome ignorance about part of the Bible.

We're just not used to the language of priesthood and sacrifice, unless we have dug into Leviticus and other Old Testament books. Hunters may be used to processing meat for food, but most Americans get their meat at the store. Preparing animals for sacrifice? That's unfamiliar territory, thanks to the sacrificial offering of Christ Jesus as our substitute.

We can be unsure at times what Old Testament passages apply to us. The Ten Commandments summarize succinctly God's Moral Law, which can only be kept perfectly by Christ. We can learn about how God cared for His ancient people by reading the Ceremonial Law and Civil Law, but they no longer bind us.

Our extended reading from the first and second chapters of Malachi highlight problems among sinful human beings. People run after other gods, mere idols. People fail to follow God's Word, even deliberately. People go through the motions of religion without faith in the heart. The priests the Lord rebukes offered polluted, imperfect, dishonest, and faithless sacrificial offerings. They abused their office, blasphemed the Lord, and failed to faithfully serve the Lord's people.

The Lord grant us faithful servants of His Word and ears eager to hear and heed the Word!

Grant, we beseech You, Almighty God, that the Word which we have heard this day may through Your grace be so engrafted in our hearts that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 2

1 Peter 2:1-12

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9

Given the way the word “priest” has been used in other Christian traditions, we do not often consider the Biblical data about priests and priesthood. Melchizedek is only mentioned in a few places in Scripture. The Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament dealt with sacrifice. The accounts of our Lord’s Passion make frequent references to the High Priest and chief priests. Our Lord Himself is declared to be our great High Priest, but nowhere is the term for priest given to the Office of the Holy Ministry—to pastors. It is reserved for you, the baptized.

A congregation calls a pastor, another baptized priest like themselves, to publicly administer the duties given to all Christian priests, on their behalf, in the Office of the Holy Ministry. There is no such thing as an emergency Communion, but in case of emergency, any Christian can baptize. All Christians are priests, but for the sake of good order, not all priests publicly exercise the Office of the Holy Ministry as pastor. Pastors are priests not because of ordination, but by virtue of baptism into Christ.

In Christ, by virtue of His action of washing you in Holy Baptism, you are a holy priesthood. You can pray directly to the one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. And you are given to offer spiritual sacrifices. You offer the sacrifice of praise. You present your bodies as living sacrifices well-pleasing to God. You offer your prayers to God. Christ, our High Priest, offered Himself as a sacrifice once for all. The Lord’s Supper is the Lord’s gift, His sacrament to you, not our sacrifice to Him.

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, unto Thy Church Thy Holy Spirit and the wisdom which cometh down from above, that Thy Word, as becometh it, may not be bound, but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve Thee and in the confession of Thy name abide until the end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 2

Ephesians 5:15-21

... be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... Ephesians 5:18b-20

The Lutheran theology of worship is rather simple to understand:

“Our Lord speaks and we listen. His Word bestows what it says. Faith that is born from what is heard acknowledges the gifts received with eager thankfulness and praise. Music is drawn into this thankfulness and praise, enlarging and elevating the adoration of our gracious giver God.

Saying back to Him what he has said to us, we repeat what is most true and sure. Most true and sure is His name, which he put upon us with the water of our Baptism. We are His. This we acknowledge at the beginning of the Divine Service. Where His name is, there is He. Before Him we acknowledge that we are sinners, and we plead for forgiveness. His forgiveness is given us, and we, freed and forgiven, acclaim Him as our great and gracious God as we apply to ourselves the words He has used to make Himself known to us.

The rhythm of our worship is from Him to us, and then from us back to Him. He gives His gifts, and together we receive and extol them. We build one another up as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Our Lord gives us His Body to eat and His Blood to drink. Finally His blessing moves us out into our calling, where His gifts have their fruition.

How best to do this we may learn from His Word and from the way His Word has prompted His worship throughout the centuries. We are heirs of an astonishingly rich tradition. Each tradition receives from those who went before and, in making that tradition of the Divine Service its own, adds what best may serve in its own day—the living heritage and something new” (Lutheran Worship, p. 6).

God’s Words are His Words of Service to us. The Holy Spirit works with the Word of God to create, sustain, and nourish faith within us. The Spirit fills us through God’s Word: living, active, holy, and true. The Word of God prepares us to walk as children of the light, according to our vocations.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Thy Holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Savior Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Friday of Advent 2

Psalm 141

*O Lord, I call upon you; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to you!
Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as
the evening sacrifice! Psalm 141:1-2*

From underneath the incense altar of Revelation 6 come the petitions of the martyrs to the throne of God. “How long...?” they cry out. This passage has given us to confess that the dead in Christ of the first heaven are aware for the passage of time—even as they have no more involvement in the world of the living other than calling upon the Lord to bring about Judgment Day.

Christians are still dying for the faith. Why are we surprised when crosses come our way—when suffering, pain, disappointment, tragedy, and tribulations trouble us? We are often discouraged by mere peer pressure, unpopularity, the desire to fit in. And we are tempted to fall away, to make things easier for ourselves, to pretend there is no difference between world religions. The truth of the gospel, the very forgiveness of sins is at stake, and we are often ashamed of Christ, His cross, and the name Christian.

Christ’s passion and death were not meaningless. He was raised from the dead. Nor are our sufferings meaningless. Our Heavenly Father chastens those He loves, preparing us for His temporal and eternal purposes, especially that of testing and strengthening faith, so we may be better able to defend it.

The Lord has given you many more precious promises. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He is with you always, even to the end of the age. And, where He has placed His name, there He has promised to be. He placed His triune name upon you by water and word in Holy Baptism. He is faithful to you, just as He was to the martyrs of old.

Let the incense of our repentant prayer ascend before You, O Lord, and let Your loving-kindness descend on us that, with purified minds, we may sing Your praises with the Church on earth and the whole heavenly host and may glorify You forever. Amen.

Saturday of Advent 2

2 Timothy 4:1-8

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 4:3-4

A Christian funeral is an occasion for joy. We will continue to miss our loved ones because we love them. We mourn, but we do not mourn as those who have no hope. Our lives are turned upside down by our loss, but we have hope. We Christians will see our Christian loved ones after this life. We are separated now by the pain of death, but that is only temporary.

There is laid up for all of us the crown of righteousness. Jesus won the race. We run the victory lap. Running on our own, we finish dead last, at best, but usually do not even finish. That is why the pure teaching of the Gospel and gifts of Christ were so dear to Paul. Without Jesus, there would be no hope.

Do the pressures and stresses of life distract you from a faith focused upon Jesus? Paul dealt with struggles in his day. Being stoned, kicked out of town after town, being shipwrecked, arrested, put on trial, and being imprisoned were all part of Paul's experience, all suffered for the sake of the Gospel.

The Gloria Patri, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit," was based on the death-march song of the early Christian martyrs. They knew that they would die, but they faced their end with conviction, knowing "whom they had believed and...were convinced that the Lord was able to guard until the Last Day, what been entrusted to Him." The word "Amen" shows the confidence of faith. Yes, yes, it shall be so!

Dear Savior, upon Your gracious invitation we come to Your altar tomorrow. Let us find favor in Your eyes that we may approach Your Table in true faith and receive the Sacrament to the salvation of our souls. Amen.

Third Sunday in Advent

Week Three – “The Lord’s chastening of faithless marriage”

Matthew 11:2-10

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.’ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”
Matthew 11:7-11

The title of our Advent devotion is “For Whom the Lord Loves He Chastens,” and it is indeed out of love that God sends preachers to chastise us with His holy Law. For God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance, and such repentance begins with contrition worked by the Law, which reveals the guilt of sin.

The preaching of the Law stings. It hurts when your sins are laid bare. That’s why those who preach God’s Law often suffer for it. John was imprisoned and eventually beheaded because he rebuked King Herod for taking his brother’s wife. Still today faithful preachers are mistreated for preaching the Law of God without compromise against the lies of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh.

Good Lord, send us faithful preachers like John, who will not bend to the world’s ideas of right and wrong but boldly and faithfully proclaim Your Law in all its sternness! For only when the Law has done its work of killing can the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified for sinners do its work of making alive, for “it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16)

Lord Jesus Christ, grant us humble hearts, so that when Your Word is preached we might repent of our sins and trust in You alone for our salvation. Amen.

Monday of Advent 3

Psalm 128

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel! Psalm 128

The rite of Holy Matrimony states that marriage “is an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity’s fall into sin. In marriage we see a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church. Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee. This estate is also commended to us by the apostle Paul as good and honorable.” (*Lutheran Service Book*, p. 275)

The great honor given by God to marriage is perhaps the reason why marriage has constantly been under assault. Marriage has been the target of the devil’s attacks throughout the centuries in many and various ways.

Yet this institution will remain until the end of time, and it will remain blessed by God. He created it in the Garden of Eden, He still joins husbands and wives together to this very day, and He blesses their union with children. God even bestows on marriage the honor of representing Christ and His sacrificial, forgiving love for His bride, the Church.

Therefore, let us as Christians uphold marriage as a godly estate and pleasing to our Lord. Even if we are not in this estate, we may rejoice and give thanks for it, for in it God brings forth new life, and we are reminded of Christ’s everlasting love for us.

Almighty God and Father, thank You for the gift of holy marriage, which You give to us for our help and support, for our delight, and for the procreation of children. Help us to live in purity, as You have called us to do. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 3

Malachi 2:10-3:5

The LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.” Malachi 2:14-16

The New King James Version translates Malachi 2:16 in all its severity: “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce.” Is it any wonder that God should hate divorce, as He Himself is the one who joins man and woman together as husband and wife? To separate what God has joined together is to stand in opposition to God and His work as His enemy.

If we truly recognized marriage for what it is, an image of Christ and His Church, then divorce would be absolutely unthinkable. For who could dare to imagine Jesus Christ divorcing His Church? If Christ were to reject His Bride, we would all be lost and condemned forever. The gift of His righteousness, given by grace alone, would be removed from us, and our sins, which were taken away from us, would be given right back. What a horrible thought!

Thanks be to God that Christ our Lord has remained faithful to His Bride, despite our many sins. Christ remains devoted to us, forgiving our sins and presenting us to Himself holy and without blemish. Let us likewise hold fast to our spouses in holiness and honor, holding fast to them alone in pure love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us.

Lord God, preserve us from the sins of faithlessness and divorce. Grant us Your Holy Spirit, that we might rejoice in the one You have given us, even as we cling to Jesus Christ alone as our only Savior. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 3

Matthew 14:1-12

He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus. Matthew 14:10-12

In Matthew 10, Jesus says, “The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward.” The prophet’s reward is not earthly riches, honor, or comfort, but persecution. Thus John’s reward for faithfully preaching the Law of God against Herod’s lawless marriage to his brother’s wife was imprisonment and beheading. If you receive the prophets and apostles as they speak to you in the Word of God, don’t be surprised if you face a similar fate—maybe not beheading, but suffering for Jesus’ sake.

After all, Jesus Himself suffered and died at the hands of sinners. He was not honored or rewarded by men for His preaching and miracles, but He was arrested and falsely accused and mocked and mistreated and crucified. If they did this to the Lord, how much more will they do this to those of His household.

But our Lord did not remain in death. On the third day He rose again from the dead, and now He lives and reigns to all eternity. So also will all those who are in Him, including John the Baptist, will live and reign with Him eternally. For while a prophet’s reward here on earth may be nothing more than persecution and martyrdom, in heaven it is glory and life and peace forevermore. It may not be treasures on earth, but it certainly is treasures in heaven. Let us therefore follow the example of John the Baptist and remain faithful unto death, that we may receive the crown of life that will never fade away.

O Christ, grant us steadfastness in the midst of trial and persecution, that we may inherit from You the treasures of heaven by Your grace alone. Amen.

Thursday of Advent 3

Mark 10:1-12

And Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Mark 10:5-9

In the beginning, when God saw everything that He had made, He beheld that it was very good. But in the goodness of creation there was something that was not good: “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone.’” (Genesis 2:18) God immediately fixed what was “not good” in His good creation by making a helper fit for Adam: a wife, Eve.

From this account we learn two things about marriage. First, it has existed from the very beginning, even before sin entered the world. True, in this fallen world, one of the purposes of marriage is to keep us from burning with the passions of the flesh, but marriage was not given after the Fall only to serve as a remedy for lust. It was a blessing given by God before the Fall for the mutual companionship, help, and support of both husband and wife. From Eden God intended husband and wife to find delight in one another.

Second, marriage is a divine act. As it was in the beginning, so it is now and until the end of time. The man and woman may agree to it, the parents may consent to it, the pastor may solemnize it, and the state may certify it, but it is God Himself who works through these means to join the two together and make of them one flesh. He who brought Eve to Adam that he might hold fast to her still brings men and women together in holy marriage to this very day. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

O Lord God, bless the unions that You have formed. Grant that husbands and wives hold fast to one another as You will. Amen.

Friday of Advent 3

Malachi 2:10-16

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! Malachi 2:10-12

Many assume that matters of marriage, family, and the home are private matters that do not affect those who are outside of it. But this is not the Lord's view of marriage and family and the home, as proclaimed by the prophet Malachi. The marriages of the men of Judah with foreign women who were addicted to idolatry harmed the whole people. By becoming unequally yoked with unbelievers, the men of Judah were acting faithlessly with one another, profaning the covenant of their fathers. So also today, the sins of Christians in the estate of marriage and family often bring spiritual harm to their brothers and sisters in the Church. We should therefore be on guard, lest our offenses put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Thanks be to God that His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our Brother according to the flesh, has not been faithless toward us. Instead, the Apostle Paul writes, "if we are faithless, He remains faithful." (2 Timothy 2:13) In faithfulness to us, He bore all our sins and iniquities, our profanities and abominations, offering Himself as the perfect atoning Sacrifice to the Lord of Hosts. In Him therefore we will not be cut off, but remain as sons in the house of the Lord forever.

Forgive us our trespasses, O Lord, and grant that we may never become a stumbling block to our fellow Christians. Instead, let us encourage one another and build one another up through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saturday of Advent 3

Malachi 2:17-3:4

You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?" "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. Malachi 2:17-3:4

Because faith concerns things not seen, it is hard to be steadfast in faith in the midst of suffering. When those who do evil prosper, it is easy to think that the Lord delights in them. When trials and tribulations are prolonged, it is easy to wonder where the God of justice has gone.

But the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises. In the fullness of time He came as the Baby born in Bethlehem and presented in His temple in Jerusalem. By His death and resurrection, He purified His people that we might serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Neither has Jesus forgotten His promise to return in glory. Though it may appear that the wicked prosper while the Church suffers, God remains the God of justice. In His good time He will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead, and His kingdom, of which we are members through faith, will have no end.

Blessed Jesus, grant us faith to remain steadfast in all circumstances, that we might cling to Your promises by faith, even in the midst of trial. Amen.



Malachi by Virgil Solis

See Malachi preaching, and the one Malachi prophesied would come - John the Baptist pointing to Christ in background.

-courtesy of Pitts Theological Library Digital Image Archive

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Week Four – “The Lord’s chastening of faithless offerings”

John 1:19-28

“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 1:23

The Word of God for this Sunday brings us the words of the prophet Isaiah and the words of John the Forerunner in the face of an investigation as to who he was and what he was doing. The preaching of John had captured the attention of many people, including the ruling elites of the Pharisees (who were lovers of money – see Luke 16:14) in Jerusalem. The whole account from John 1 is their investigation into this new preacher in the wilderness.

John was fulfilling what God’s Word had said about him. He was preparing the way for Christ Jesus, as both Isaiah (Isaiah 40) and also John’s father Zechariah (Luke 1) had said. How was he preparing the way? He was proclaiming repentance, the conviction of sin and the declaration of forgiveness of sins to those who believe in Christ, whom John rightly called the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John spoke the hard truth, much the same as Malachi did. Much the same as this devotion has attempted to do. You have sinned against God. Whether in matters of worship, marriage, or as we will hear this week in matters of offerings (money!). John’s message was not just about the conviction of sins however, but the glorious proclamation of the Christ, of God coming into the world in order to redeem it. Those who heard the message and believed it sought to change their sinful ways by the power that God supplied to them. This is what it is to make straight the way.

As you hear preaching this day, may God grant you full repentance, not just sorrow over your sins, but also faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

Dear Jesus, grant us to hear the preaching of Your Word and repentance over our many sins. Turn our hearts away from the sinful idols in our lives toward You, the only God and Savior. Amen.

Monday of Advent 4

Psalm 96

“For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!” Psalm 96:5–9

Mammon is an idol. Jesus says you can’t serve him and God, no matter how hard you try. The Psalm describes Mammon as a worthless idol. In contrast it says that God made the heavens. It describes God in terms of splendor, majesty, strength, beauty, glory, and holiness.

Ultimately a person ensnared by the evils of mammon worship denies these things of God, most especially that God created all things and sustains all things by His own power and might. Worries and anxieties over having enough, stoked by covetousness (which is idolatry) serve as devotions and prayers to this worthless idol of mammon. They deny the true God who actually provides and takes care of His creation.

When the psalm speaks of families coming into the Lord’s courts (going to church) it speaks of bringing offerings. Those offerings are a confession of trust in the Lord who made the heavens and the earth. Offerings are directly tied to the people of God worshipping God. This is because the flesh cherishes its own treasure and wants to hoard it. It is a matter of denying the flesh and the idol mammon to bring an offering unto the Lord. It is a militant act against a favorite idol of the sinful nature.

On top of this we know that offerings are a good work and serve our neighbor. They support the ministry in your congregation. The eternal work that goes on in the sanctuary, in classrooms, in the homes of members, at hospital beds, nursing homes, and at the deathbed – those offerings support it all. They provide for the blessing of God’s ministrations among you by your pastor.

Dear Jesus, help us put away worthless idols like money and put our trust in You Who created all things. Amen.

Tuesday of Advent 4

Malachi 3:6-4:6

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.” Malachi 3:6–9

Our offerings to support the Church can become a blessing or cursing. As God puts it here, to not give, or to not give what you can, what you’ve resolved to give (for them at least 10%) is to rob Him. The result of such robbery affected the whole nation of Israel. Ingratitude always reaps a harsh reward from God. God’s Word calls this punishment a curse.

That word “always” however is brought out in this text. “I the LORD do not change.” Always. This is yes, a threat to those who wish to turn aside from God’s Word (even His Word about supporting the Church), but also a comfort to those who turn to God in repentance and true faith. The children of Jacob were not consumed. God had mercy on them. Part of that mercy is His calling them to repentance through the prophet Malachi. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful.

This means you. It means how you support your congregation. How do you care for the congregation God has made you a part of? How do you support the ministry of the Word and Sacrament in that place? Is there room for some repentance in how you handle money and time regarding the Church? God does not change. He both calls out sin and promises grace and every blessing for the penitent.

You see, ultimately your offerings are not really between you and the financial secretaries of your congregation. They aren’t between you and a budget made by a Voter’s Assembly. They aren’t between you and the pastor God has sent to you. They are between you and the God who has saved you. They reap accordingly. That is both a warning and a comfort, depending on where your heart is at this moment.

Dear Jesus, help us to be grateful to You and generous in support of the ministry of the Word and Sacrament in Your Church. Amen.

Wednesday of Advent 4

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, ‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’”
2 Corinthians 9:6–9

The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul uses 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 to address Christian giving. Here, he describes the voluntary offering of the Christian as a good work. For this good work, as the Scriptures do for many of them, it places God’s example before the Christian to emulate or copy.

Along with the example of how generous God is toward us, the Spirit warns us about being stingy towards the support of the ministry that goes on in the name of God in the place God has gathered you into. He also gives words of promise concerning generosity.

Notice here Who it is who makes you have all sufficiency. It is God. Notice the fruit of having all this sufficiency provided by God – you may abound in every good work. Offerings are a good work. Alms and helping fellow Christians are good works. We don’t gain heaven by them, but the faith in Christ that already possesses heaven is also active in doing good for others. Good works help our neighbor and supply the proof that faith is living as one of our hymns puts it nicely.

Look at what God has done for you. From that we will find our generosity toward others. This is good and God-pleasing. Be generous as your Father in heaven has been generous.

Dear Jesus, help us to trust in You, give thanks for all that You have generously given us, and do good for the sake of others, most especially the people in our church. Amen.

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” 2 Corinthians 8:9

Right smack dab in the middle of talking about Christian offerings and generosity there is this great treasure of the Gospel. As we look at the Christmas season this is our reminder of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done. Here, St. Paul uses it as a motivation and example for Christians to be generous to one another.

Those words “for your sake” should be pondered and meditated upon. Christ did all of this for your sake. The Creator of all things came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man. He who possessed all things in heaven and on earth, the God from whom everything lives, moves, and has its being, became poor. The purpose – that by His poverty, you might become rich.

The flesh will want to read this “rich” in some idolatrous monetary way. The riches of the Christian are the things that are treasures in heaven. This chiefly is the righteousness of Christ, that which Christ earned “for your sake” by His coming under the Law to fulfill it for you. What’s an earthly fortune going to do for you when you die? It may take care of those who come after you, but it could also easily divide them if they cater to their flesh and its greedy idolatries. For you, at death, the true eternal riches will become apparent. Christ’s righteousness, apprehended by faith in Jesus, brings eternal life. Earthly life is not even comparable to that. So why devote yourself to the treasure of this earthly life? Seek instead Christ’s righteousness. Make the money God gives to you serve that instead of your flesh. Let the earthly and decaying riches serve the treasure that does not diminish or fade away. With heaven as your home, store up riches there instead.

Lord Jesus, thank You for becoming poor for our sake in order that by Your poverty we might become rich in the true treasure of Your righteousness. Help us to show our faith in lives of generosity. Amen.

Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Eve

Matthew 1:18-25

“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).” Matthew 1:21–23

When prophets preach, sin is revealed. Malachi has served to point out several sins in our faithless worship, marriages, and offerings. The prophets do this to prepare for what God does next, God’s proper and primary work – forgiving sin.

This is the joy of this Christmas season as it begins. God saves. He forgives sins. This is why we gather with other sinners to hear the Word of God. Yes, by the Word we are convicted of our sins as the Holy Spirit works through that Word. That Word doesn’t leave us there however. The Holy Spirit brings the Gospel for sinners. This is what Joseph is told by the angel. The name this miraculous Child is supposed to be given is a description of what this Child will do. Jesus. He will save His people from their sins.

Many parents have devised many varied ways to pick names for their children. For Joseph, the matter was settled here by the angel. Jesus is the Savior. This Child, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary is born to save people from their sins. He is God with us, Immanuel.

The joy of Christmas is not found in what the world would try to promote but it is found in Jesus, the Savior of the world. As you gather with other Christians during these Holy Days, take heart, for Jesus is named for what Jesus does. He saves. He is the God who is with us.

Dear Jesus, thank you for being born for our salvation. Thank you for forgiving our sins. Help us to rightly praise Your most holy and precious name. Amen.

Nativity of our Lord – Christmas Day

John 1:1-14

“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 1:9–14

From reading the prophet Malachi this Advent we have found how hard it is for someone to hear the Word of God and believe it. The prophets all experienced this. The hardness of men’s hearts is profound. The corruption of Original Sin is so deep that we can really only know it from what the Bible teaches. And yet, looking around we can see the rotten fruit of Original Sin all over. We can see it in ourselves.

John’s Gospel speaks of this. Jesus, the Word, the True Light, came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. We know these stories from the Gospels, how when presented with the pure Gospel many rejected Christ, whether in pride over the pointing out of their many sins, or in pride for rejecting the free salvation which Christ came to achieve for them.

It’s no different today. We know this. We see it. We are tempted in the same way. This is where we must remember the verses after the news of His rejection. To those who believed in His name (that is how we receive), they are now children of God, born of the will of God. Our Savior has saved us. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. All of this without any merit or worthiness in us.

Gather around the Word. Gather with other Christians during this season of the Church Year (Christmas is more than a day, it’s a whole season). Celebrate what God has done.

Dear Jesus, thank you for dwelling among us. Help us to always receive You by believing in You. Amen.