

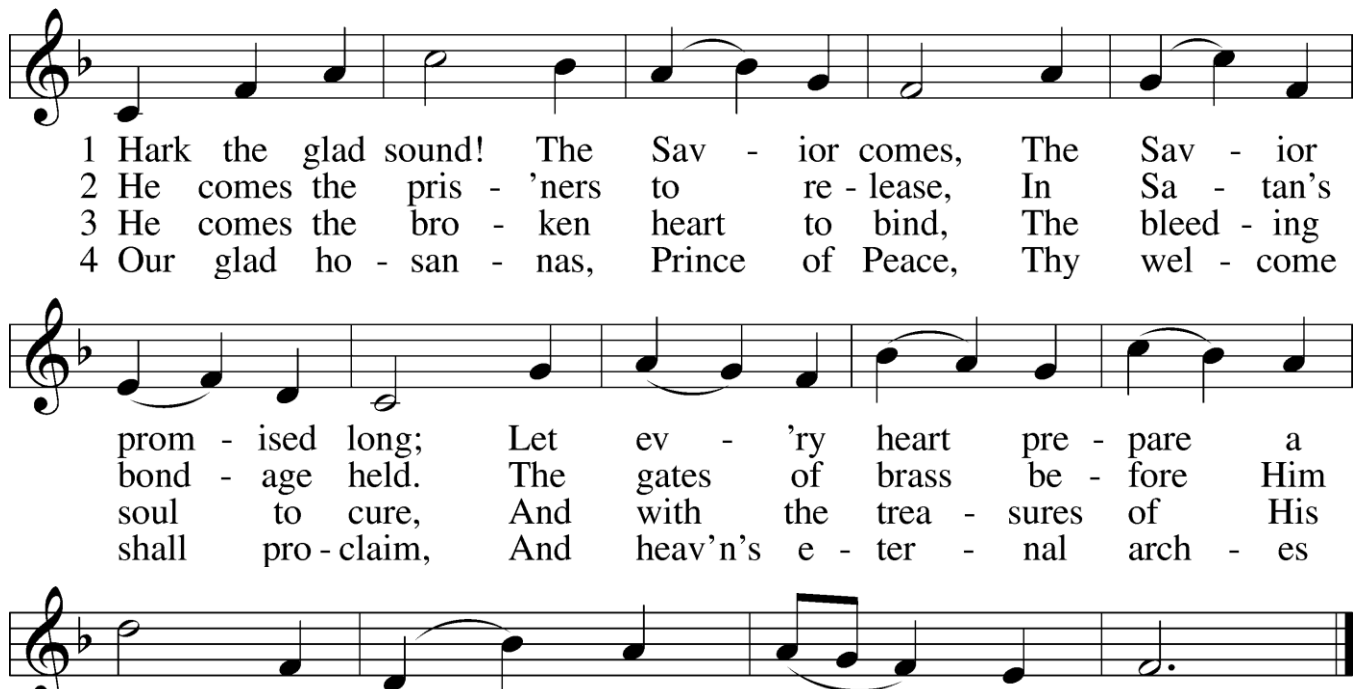
The Second Sunday in Advent December 5, 2021

Note: In preparation for this service, you may choose to use an Advent wreath. The Advent wreath has four candles around its circumference. Three of them are blue or purple. One is rose-colored. A white candle is in the middle of the wreath. On the Second Sunday in Advent, we light the blue candle directly across from the rose candle and the blue candle clockwise from the first candle. You may choose to light it now or in the service where indicated.

The chief and leading theme of all the prophets is their aim to keep the people in eager anticipation of the coming Christ... Likewise in our time, too, whatever we teach and establish in the church, we do with a view to getting the people to await the coming of the Savior. Here we must not act in an ungodly manner, but we must live sober, upright, and godly lives (Titus 1:8; 2:12), not, however, as if we always had to stay here ("for here we have no lasting city" [Heb. 13:14] but through Christ we should await another life to come after this life).

Martin Luther, Preface to Isaiah

Hark the Glad Sound Lutheran Service Book 349, Lutheran Worship 29, The Lutheran Hymnal 66



1 Hark the glad sound! The Sav - ior comes, The Sav - ior
2 He comes the pris - 'ners to re - lease, In Sa - tan's
3 He comes the bro - ken heart to bind, The bleed - ing
4 Our glad ho - san - nas, Prince of Peace, Thy wel - come

prom - ised long; Let ev - 'ry heart pre - pare a
bond - age held. The gates of brass be - fore Him
soul to cure, And with the trea - sures of His
shall pro - claim, And heav'n's e - ter - nal arch - es

throne And ev - 'ry voice a song.
burst, The i - ron fet - ters yield.
grace To en - rich the hum - ble poor.
ring With Thy be - lov - ed name.

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An alternate non-Public Domain hymn is:

Prepare the Royal Highway Lutheran Service Book 343, Lutheran Worship 27, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a
My personal preference is the Lutheran Worship version

L In the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

L Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C who made heaven and earth. (*Psalm 124:8*)

L Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

C Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. (*Psalm 19:12, 13*)

L If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand?

C But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. (*Psalm 130:3–4*)

L Let us, confess before God that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and as His people let us take refuge in His infinite mercy seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, saying:

C God, be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

(*Luke 18:13*)

L Almighty God, merciful Father, in Your holy Church, You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

LIGHTING THE ADVENT WREATH - THE SECOND CANDLE:

L As we light the second candle on our Advent wreath, we remember John the Baptist who prepared the world for the light of Jesus, God's own Son. May the path into our hearts be made straight through repentance and baptism for the forgiveness of sins as we prepare to celebrate the lowly birth of the King of Kings:

C "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" (John 1:6-8).

Introit Psalm 81:8, 10–11, 13; antiphon Luke 3:4b

L The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

C Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!

O Israel, if you would but listen to me!

L I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

C "But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.

L Oh, that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!

C Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

L The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

L O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.

L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

Collect of the Day

- L** Let us pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** Amen.

Malachi 3:1–7b

¹“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. ²But 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. ³He 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. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

⁵“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them.

- L** This is the Word of the Lord.
- C** Thanks be to God.

Gradual Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26, alt.

- L** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.
- C** Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.
- L** Behold, your king is coming to you;
- C** righteous and having salvation.
- L** Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
- C** From the house of the Lord we bless you.

Psalm 66:1–12

- L** ¹Shout for joy to God, all the earth;
- C** ²sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!
- L** ³Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!
- So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.
- C** ⁴All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.”
- L** ⁵Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.
- C** ⁶He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.
- There did we rejoice in him,
- L** ⁷who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations—
- let not the rebellious exalt themselves.
- C** ⁸Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard,
- L** ⁹who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip.
- C** ¹⁰For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.
- L** ¹¹You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs;
- C** ¹²you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water;
- yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.

Philippians 1:2–11

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day: Luke 3:4b, 6

L Alleluia, Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia.

Luke 3:1-20

L The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke, the 3rd chapter.

C Glory to You, O Lord.

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,

⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

⁷He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ⁹Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” ¹¹And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” ¹³And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

¹⁵As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶John answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I

is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reprov'd by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

L This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to You, O Christ.

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

and sits at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty.

From thence He will come to judge the living
and the dead.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry Lutheran Service Book 344, Lutheran Worship 14, The Lutheran Hymnal 63



1 On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry An - nounc - es
2 Then cleansed be ev - 'ry life from sin; Make straight the
3 We hail Thee as our Sav - ior, Lord, Our ref - uge
4 Lay on the sick Thy heal - ing hand And make the
5 All praise, e - ter - nal Son, to Thee Whose ad - vent



that the Lord is nigh; A - wake and hear - ken,
way for God with - in, And let us all our
and our great re - ward; With - out Thy grace we
fall - en strong to stand; Show us the glo - ry
sets Thy peo - ple free, Whom with the Fa - ther



for he brings Glad tid - ings of the King of kings!
hearts pre - pare For Christ to come and en - ter there.
waste a - way Like flow'rs that with - er and de - cay.
of Thy face Till beau - ty springs in ev - 'ry place.
we a - dore And Ho - ly Spir - it ev - er - more.

Devotional Thoughts:

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens;
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens;
Brown paper packages tied up with strings;
These are a few of Maria von Trapp's favorite things.

What are some of your favorite things? I've never thought of making a list. Maybe I should do that someday.

Electronic gadgets and Michigan football;
Summer vacations and old fashion pinball;
Listening to records when Carole King sings;
These are a few of my favorite things.

Among other things, I also like the Bible, learning about Jesus, almanacs, calendars, and ancient Roman history. All of those come together in our Gospel lesson for this week as we meet John the Baptist for the second time in Luke.

Luke is a careful historian and researcher. He helps us understand that the events of Jesus' life in the New Testament are connected to real places, real people, and real events in history. Jesus is not a mythical character from an imaginary alternate reality as found in movies and computer games.

We know from Luke 2, that Mary and Joseph left Nazareth and went to Bethlehem because the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, had issued a decree! God used a powerful individual in a distant place to move forward His plan of salvation. God had foretold in the Old Testament that the savior would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. To make that a reality, God used a pagan emperor! This makes me wonder if God isn't accomplishing His purpose in unknown ways through our current round of executive orders.

Fast forward to Luke 3. Caesar Augustus is no more. Tiberius Caesar is the emperor. He has already been governing the Roman Empire for almost fifteen years. The son of Herod the Great, Herod the tetrarch of Galilee, built a city on the Sea of Galilee named for him (John 6:23). In fact, the Sea of Galilee was renamed the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1; 21:1).

History tells us that Tiberius was an extremely wicked dictator. He was known for his cruelty and perversion. It is reported that most Romans danced in the streets when he died. But that wouldn't happen for eight more years. Into this dark and evil time, God sent His final prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness."

John the Baptist came into a world where every kind of sin was accepted and promoted. The political leaders were pagan and the religious leaders were unfaithful. Even the common folk could be described as a "brood of vipers!"

Yet his task was to announce:

"Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

This was an unenviable task but it must be done. His preaching had an impact! Crowds came to hear him. His message was simple. He came proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Not everyone was happy to learn that their choices in life were sinful. The rich and powerful of the day were celebrities who believed that they weren't bound by rules and traditional morality. No one could tell them what they could or couldn't do. But John the Baptist did!

As hard as it is for us to imagine, in the days before radio, television, or social media, this voice of one crying in the wilderness became famous. His preaching made it all the way to the royal palace. John the Baptist condemned Herod for his disregard of moral living. Herod had divorced his wife and married his half-brother's wife, Herodias among other evil things. Herod couldn't tolerate a preacher calling him a sinner so he locked up John in prison.

John the Baptist's sermons were so impressive that people began to wonder if he was the long-promised savior. But he freely acknowledged that he was only a humble servant of the One who would soon come. Compared to the Messiah, he was not even worthy to untie His sandals. In that day, it must have been that the most insignificant servant of the household would tend the master's feet. John the Baptist didn't even count himself worthy of doing that for Christ.

Certainly, He was speaking the truth. Jesus was about to arrive on the scene. He was more than a master. He was more than a king. He is God of God and Light of Light. He is very God of very God! He is begotten, not made! He is of the same substance as the Father by whom all things were made!

But, despite His majesty, He came down from heaven. He was humbly born of the Virgin Mary for our salvation. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, suffered, and was buried. The grave could not hold Him! On the third day, He rose again according to the Scriptures and now sits at the right hand of God! Indeed, John was not worthy to untie His sandal but Jesus freely and lovingly offered Himself up for us!

We live in difficult times. A fellow pastor recently related to me the decline in church attendance caused by the pandemic and other factors. As Christians, our human nature may cause us to become discouraged. But John the Baptist gives us hope.

The world around us seems crooked. Christian people are experiencing rough places. But all is not lost. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him. God's word is still powerful. God still controls empires.

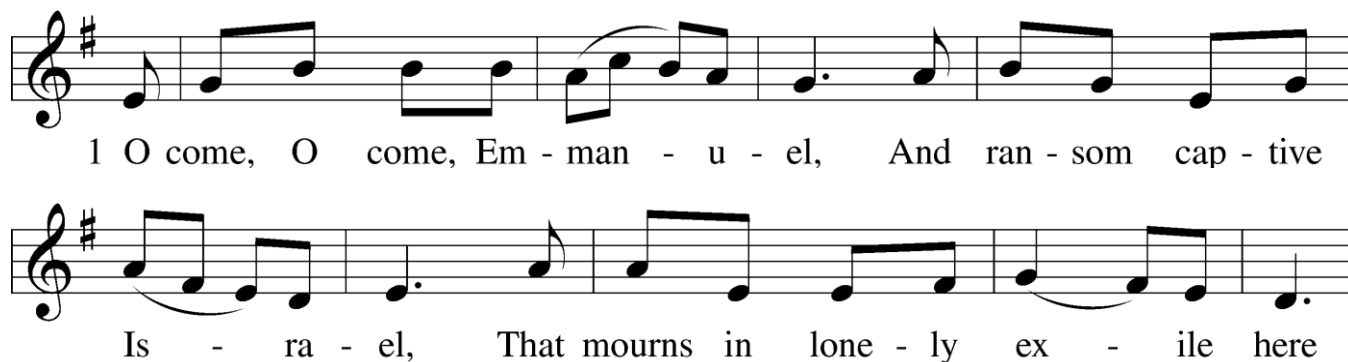
This is the comfort we have in Christ. Salvation and the forgiveness of sins will always triumph over evil. Christ has triumphed over the greatest evil of all, death! It has no more dominion over us. Because He lives, we too shall live for all eternity with Him.

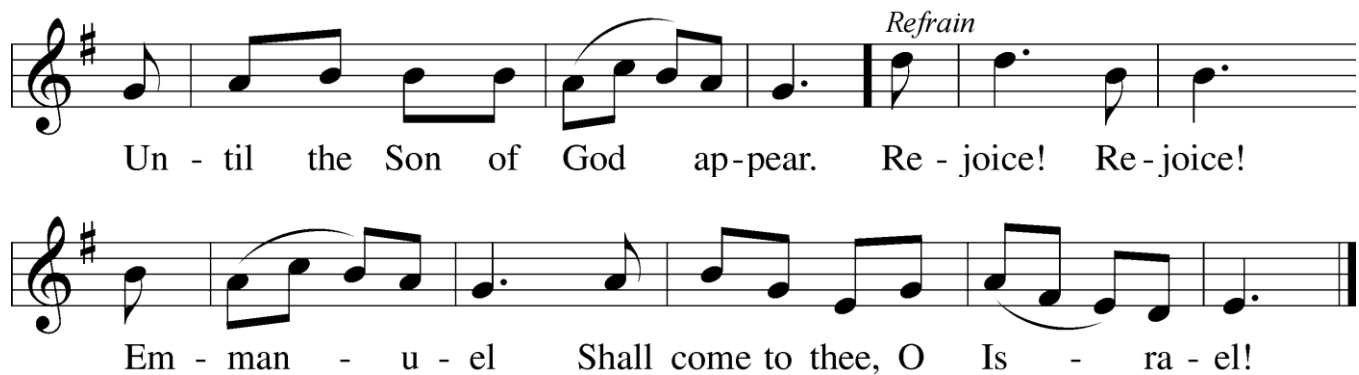
Until then let us prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight. Let make every mountain and hill low and the crooked to become straight. Let us level the rough places so that all flesh can see their salvation in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. 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 4:4-7).

God's richest blessings to you in Christ.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel Lutheran Service Book 357, Lutheran Worship 31, The Lutheran Hymnal 62
Stanza 1





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- L** Heavenly Father, You were once long-suffering toward Israel, calling them to repentance, open our hearts to hear Your Word, bring us to repentance and faith, give us Your gifts forgiveness and life, and move us to gladly submit to Your will.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, You called Isaiah and John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord, bless Your servants today with every good gift as they prepare Your people for Christ's coming in glory.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, we pray that You would cause our love to abound more and more, give us knowledge and discernment of what is excellent, and preserve us blameless for the day of Christ.
- C** Amen.
- L** O Lord, You gather us into Your family of faith. We pray that You would bless our family and all the Christian families around the world; and that our love may abound with knowledge, discernment and the righteousness of Christ.
- C** Amen.
- L** Almighty God, send Your holy angels to watch over all of our loved ones, especially those who live in distant places. We thank You for the protection granted to all who have attended to our needs during the pandemic. As we again experience an increase in infections, we ask for Your continued protection and grace.
- C** Amen.
- C** I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; 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. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.
- C** Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.
- L** Let us bless the Lord.
- C** Thanks be to God.
- L** The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

C Amen.

On What Has Now Been Sown Lutheran Service Book 932, Lutheran Worship 217, The Lutheran Hymnal 46



1 On what has now been sown Thy bless - ing, Lord, be - stow;
2 To Thee our wants are known, From Thee are all our pow'rs;
3 O grant that each of us, Now met be - fore Thee here,



The pow'r is Thine a - lone To make it sprout and grow. Do Thou
Ac - cept what is Thine own And par - don what is ours. Our prais -
May meet to - geth - er thus When Thou and Thine ap - pear And fol -



in grace the har - vest raise, And Thou a - lone shalt have the praise!
es, Lord, and prayers re - ceive, And to Thy Word a bless - ing give.
low Thee to heav'n, our home. E'en so, a - men, Lord Je - sus, come!

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Service Notes:

One person may serve as Leader or this may be shared with a number of individuals.

Read one or more of the lessons. Hymns may be sung or read. Use as much or little of this service as you would like.

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Enhancing Your Worship

Meditating on God's Word and Works

I will meditate on your wondrous works. Psalm 119:27
My eyes are awake through the night watches,
That I may meditate on Your word. Psalm 119:148 NKJV

The Second Sunday in Advent

December 6 – December 11, 2021

Introduction

Most modern forms of mediation turn a person inward. Biblical meditation turns a person outward toward what God has said and done especially what He has said and done through Jesus for our salvation.

Each Sunday has its own special theme directing us to meditate on God's word and actions. This theme is found in the Propers of the Day (the parts of the service that change week to week). From Advent through the Easter season these themes focus our attention on the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. There is always much more in the propers than can be covered in any Sunday service. God willing, I will use the propers for Sunday to provide you with a devotion each day to help you mediate on what God has done for you.

Monday – Saint Nicholas Day

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Luke 3:4b, 6

L Alleluia, Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia.

Introit Psalm 81:8, 10–11, 13; antiphon Luke 3:4b

L The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

C Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!

L I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

C “But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.

L Oh, that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!

C Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

L The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

Kyrie

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| L | O Lord, | C | Have Mercy on us. |
| L | O Christ, | C | Have Mercy on us. |
| L | O Lord, | C | Have Mercy on us. |

Saint Nicholas—the man, the myth, the legend.

Yes, Virginia, there really is a St. Nicholas. He was born in the year A.D. 270 and died on December 6, 343 which is why today is called Saint Nicholas Day.

He was the bishop of Myra (Demre in present-day Turkey). It is believed that he was imprisoned and tortured during the Great Persecution under Emperor Diocletian before Christianity was legalized by Constantine. He is listed as having attended the First Council of Nicaea where the Nicene Creed was approved.

St. Nicholas is mostly remembered for his compassion and generosity as a pastor. One story that has been retold is that he secretly helped three girls with gifts of gold.

In the Netherlands, his generosity was celebrated by giving gifts to children on his day. One version of Saint Nicholas in Dutch is Sinterklaas. It is not hard to connect the dots and see how our English version of Saint Nicholas became Santa Claus.

Unfortunately, much of the American version of Santa Claus has lost its connection to this Christian hero of the faith. Nevertheless, on this day we remember the ultimate generosity of all, the gift of God's own Son. Because of God's love and generosity to us, we become loving and generous people. May God grant us joyful hearts as we share our blessings with those in need as we remember that "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Let us pray: Almighty God, You bestowed upon Your servant Nicholas of Myra the perpetual gift of charity. Grant Your Church the grace to deal in generosity and love with children and with all who are poor and distressed and to plead the cause of those who have no helper, especially those tossed by tempests of doubt or grief. We ask this for the sake of Him who gave His life for us, Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday

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| L | In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. |
| C | Amen. |

Verse of the Day: Luke 3:4b, 6

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|----------|---|
| L | Alleluia, Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; Alleluia. |
| C | Alleluia, Alleluia. all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia. |

Kyrie

- | | | | |
|----------|-----------|----------|--------------------------|
| L | O Lord, | C | Have Mercy on us. |
| L | O Christ, | C | Have Mercy on us. |
| L | O Lord, | C | Have Mercy on us. |

- | | |
|----------|--|
| L | Let us pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. |
|----------|--|

- | | |
|----------|--------------|
| C | Amen. |
|----------|--------------|

This is our second "Stir up" collect of Advent. I like the contrast between the first two. Last week, we prayed for God to stir up His power on our behalf—the action was all His. This week, we pray for God to stir up our hearts—to move us to action.

Our collect reminds us that Advent is primarily a matter of the heart! William W. How wrote in his hymn:

Oh, hearts are bruised and dead,
And homes are bare and cold,
And lambs for whom the Shepherd bled
Are straying from the fold.

We Give Thee But Thine Own, LSB 781, stanza 3
Public Domain

John the Baptist came to make ready the way for Jesus and His work of salvation. Our sinful hearts are just as unprepared for Jesus as was the sinful world that John the Baptist faced. The solution for us is the same as it was for them. Repentance is necessary to prepare for the savior. Unless God stirs our hearts to repentance, we will be totally unprepared for the coming of Jesus.

While no one can see into your heart, John the Baptist knew that true repentance produced fruit! The fruit of repentance is seen in lives where sin is rejected.

The Advent action prayed for in our collect is repentance that leads to pure service to God. In addition to prayer and praise, our service to God includes service to others. The fruit of a stirred-up heart is one of sharing.

When asked by the crowds, “What then shall we do?” John the Baptist responds, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”

William W. How goes on to suggest how people with stirred-up hearts will live.

To comfort and to bless,
To find a balm for woe,
To tend the lone and fatherless
Is angels’ work below.

The captive to release,
To God the lost to bring,
To teach the way of life and peace,
It is a Christ-like thing.

We Give Thee But Thine Own, LSB 781, stanzas 4-5
Public Domain

Let us pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Luke 3:4b, 6

L Alleluia, Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia.

Psalms 66:1–12

L ¹Shout for joy to God, all the earth;

C ²sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!

L ³Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!

So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.

C ⁴**All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.”**

L ⁵Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.

C ⁶**He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot.**

There did we rejoice in him,

L ⁷who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations—
let not the rebellious exalt themselves.

C ⁸**Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard,**

L ⁹who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip.

C ¹⁰**For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.**

L ¹¹You brought us into the net; you laid a crushing burden on our backs;

C ¹²**you let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.**

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**

L O Christ, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**

L O Lord, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**

An often neglected theme of Advent is the conquering of insurmountable problems! Mountains are made low. Valleys are filled. Crooked roads are made straight!

Advent is a time when faith looks to God for triumph over overwhelming problems. You may be experiencing overwhelming problems now. They may look like mountains too high to climb or valleys too deep to cross. But God in His almighty power is able to do far more than we can imagine.

The greatest insurmountable problem we face is sin and death. They are overcome by the salvation of God which is found in Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. Because He lives, we too shall live.

Psalms 66 was written for rejoicing when God defeats the unbeatable foe. It recalls how God parted the sea before the Israelites as they left Egypt for the Promised Land.

When God delivers us, we cannot help but shout for joy to God and sing the glory of His name. Or as the King James Version reads, “Make a joyful noise unto God!”

Let our Advent be filled with the joyful noise of praise to God for the salvation won for us by Jesus.

Prayer: O Lord, our problems often seem insurmountable. Grant us faith to cast all our cares upon You for Your care for us. Move our hearts to make a joyful noise of praise for the salvation that is ours in Jesus. Amen.

Thursday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

Verse of the Day: Luke 3:4b, 6

L Alleluia, Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; Alleluia.

C **Alleluia, Alleluia. all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia.**

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**

L O Christ, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**

L O Lord, **C** **Have Mercy on us.**

Malachi 3:1–7b

¹“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. ²But 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. ³He 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. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

⁵“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them.

This passage from Malachi is particularly appropriate as we consider the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus was well aware of it and says that John the Baptist is the fulfillment of this prophecy.

In Luke 7, we learn that John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Luke 7:19). When they left, Jesus explained to the crowds:

“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?
²⁵ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts. ²⁶
What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.”

²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” (Luke 7:14b-28).

Many have wondered, “Why did John the Baptist send His disciples to ask if Jesus was the Messiah?” There are at least two answers to this question. One is that John doubted and needed reassurance. The second is the one that I prefer. John didn’t doubt but he wanted to reassure his disciples.

But why would John or his disciples doubt? He had twice identified Jesus as “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29 & 26).

This passage from Malachi indicates that when the Messiah comes He will bring judgment “like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap” (Malachi 3:2). John and his disciples were looking for this prophesied judgment to start soon (Malachi 3:5). But they didn’t see that happening in Jesus.

We know what John’s disciples didn’t. There are two comings or advents of Jesus. Jesus first came to be the savior. He will come again to be the judge.

Isaiah had prophesied that when the Messiah came the blind would receive their sight, the deaf would hear, and the lame would walk (Isaiah 35:5-6). The Messiah would be the savior (Isaiah 35:4). You can read more details about God’s plan of salvation through the Messiah in Isaiah 53. Jesus fulfilled all of this in His first coming. He will come again to judge the living and the dead in fulfillment of His own words in Matthew 25:31-46.

During Advent, we remember Jesus and His first coming. The Babe born in Bethlehem came to save us so that we can stand before Him in righteousness when He comes again.

Prayer: O Lord, as we come to You during this Advent season, we humbly pray that You would open our hearts to the preaching of Your Word so that we may repent of our sins, believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior, and grow in grace and holiness as we prepare to celebrate His birth and welcome Him when He comes again in glory. Hear us for His sake. Amen.

Friday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Luke 3:4b, 6

L Alleluia, Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia. all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia.

Kyrie

L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

L O Christ, **C** Have Mercy on us.

L O Lord, **C** Have Mercy on us.

Philippians 1:2–11

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Have you ever promised to pray for someone? I have. From childhood on, Christians learn to pray for others.

My prayers may be similar to yours. Most often, I am praying for healing or divine protection during travel, or guidance to make the right decisions in difficult times.

Have you ever told someone, “I am praying that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment?” This is Paul’s prayer for the Christians in Philippi.

Unfortunately, our churches and homes can become places of conflict and discord. During these months of the pandemic, I have learned of churches disrupted by quarrels about the proper response to disease and government mandates. Instead, wouldn’t it be delightful to go to church and discover that the people there are abounding more and more in love?

When Paul wrote these words to the Philippians, he was concerned about something much more important than Covid-19. He was concerned about their salvation. He was concerned about their knowledge of Christ, the truth of His word, and upright living.

One thing I have learned during this pandemic is that people are easily swayed by false information. Some people that I normally would have recognized as reasonable and intelligent people have made foolish and erroneous statements about disease transmission and prevention. This can be dangerous.

It is even more dangerous when people are swayed by incorrect statements about Jesus and false doctrine. This is why Paul prays that the Philippians’ love would be filled with knowledge and all discernment! In the

early church as today, there are many purveyors of false information concerning Jesus and salvation. He prays that they will be able to discern the truth as they are engulfed in a sea of deceitfulness and corruption. He wants them to approve only that which is excellent so that they will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

There is so much happening during Advent that we sometimes overlook the themes of pure doctrine and of living pure and blameless lives. But these are necessary as we prepare for Christ's return.

Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty that our sins deserve. Through this sacrifice, He gives us forgiveness of sins. However, this is not a license to live in corruption and immorality. Paul deals with this exact thing in Romans 6:1-4:

^{6:1} What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means!

How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

May Paul's prayer of bountiful love with knowledge and discernment be fulfilled in us as we live pure and blameless lives in anticipation of Jesus' return.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for the salvation that is ours in Jesus. As we await His return, grant that we would live lives abounding in love with knowledge and discernment. So fill us with the truth of Your word that by the working of the Holy Spirit we would live lives that are pure and blameless through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saturday

L In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Introit Psalm 81:8, 10–11, 13; antiphon Luke 3:4b

L The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

C Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!

L I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

C "But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.

L Oh, that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!

C Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

L The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

Gradual Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26, alt.

L Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

C Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

L Behold, your king is coming to you;

C righteous and having salvation.

L Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

C From the house of the Lord we bless you.

Verse of the Day: Luke 3:4b, 6

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia.

Kyrie

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| L O Lord, | C Have Mercy on us. |
| L O Christ, | C Have Mercy on us. |
| L O Lord, | C Have Mercy on us. |

On Monday, we remembered St. Nicholas. If you regularly use these daily meditations, you know that on Mondays we generally examine the introit for the week. Let's do that today.

Our introit includes four verses from Psalm 81. Although not in the original, the ESV suggests a title for this Psalm might be "Oh, That My People Would Listen to Me" which is found in verse 13.

This is a great Advent theme. We don't expect that our secular society would listen to God. But, oh, that God's people would listen to Him!

Yesterday, Valerie and I enjoyed listening to a spectacular performance of Handel's Messiah. Almost everyone is familiar with his "Hallelujah Chorus" but the complete oratorio covers God's entire plan of salvation. It begins with the promise of a savior and Jesus' birth. Section two covers Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. It concludes with eternal life for all believers.

The version we listened to was on YouTube and was performed in a spectacular cathedral. I was so impressed that I decided to research this wonderful venue. Disappointment ensued.

Handel's Messiah clearly lays out God's amazing plan of salvation through Christ. Unfortunately, it appears that the clergy of this venue no longer hold to the historic Christian faith—"Oh, That My People Would Listen to Me."

I wasn't totally surprised. For decades many seminaries of mainline denominations have sought to undercut the truth of God's word and the historicity of Christ. They no longer find value in teaching that Jesus suffered, died, and rose again for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

As much as ever, today we need the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

Prayer: O Lord God, thank You for Your wonderful plan of salvation. Grant that each day of our lives we would listen to You through Your holy word and learn of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Amen.

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