

The Third Sunday in Advent

Gaudete!

December 14, 2025



The Third Sunday of Advent is a Sunday of rejoicing! *Gaudete* is the Latin name for this Sunday. It means “rejoice!” The third candle on the Advent wreath is traditionally pink or rose colored to symbolize the joy that comes with the knowledge that we are about to celebrate Christ’s birth. The historic introit for today begins with the words of Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord, Always.” The rose candle reminds us of “The Rose of Sharon” (Song of Solomon 2:1) which is one of the names of Christ.

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 Third Sunday in Advent, we light the blue candle directly across from the rose candle, the blue candle next to it clockwise, and the rose candle. You may choose to light them now or in the service where indicated.

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Lutheran Service Book 338, Lutheran Worship 22, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a

1 Come, Thou long - ex - pect-ed Je-sus, Born to set Thy peo - ple free;
2 Born Thy peo - ple to de - liv - er; Born a child and yet a king!

From our fears and sins re - lease us; Let us find our rest in Thee.
Born to reign in us for - ev - er, Now Thy gra - cious king - dom bring.

Is - rael’s strength and con-so - la-tion, Hope of all the earth Thou art,
By Thine own e - ter - nal Spir - it Rule in all our hearts a - lone;

Dear de - sire of ev - 'ry na-tion, Joy of ev - 'ry long - ing heart.
By Thine all - suf - fi - cient mer - it Raise us to Thy glo - rious throne.

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 THIRD CANDLE:

L As we light the third candle on our Advent wreath, we rejoice that God chose to send forth His only-begotten Son to become fully man. He was born of the virgin and under the Law to redeem us so that we may receive adoption into the family of God through faith. May the Lord use this Advent time to lighten the burdens of our hearts as we prepare for Jesus, the Light of the World, to come as the baby born in Bethlehem.

C **O peaceful hearts and happy homes
To whom the King in triumph comes!
The brightest light of joy is He
Who comes to set His people free.
May we to Jesus raise
Our happy shouts of praise.**

Introit Psalm 71:14–18; antiphon Philippians 4:4

L Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.

C **I will hope continually
and will praise you yet more and more.**

L My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all the day,
for their number is past my knowledge.

C **With the mighty deeds of the Lord God I will come;
I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.**

L O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.

C **So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.**

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 Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.

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: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** Amen.

Isaiah 35:1–10

¹The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;

²it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

³Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴Say to those who have an anxious heart,

“Be strong; fear not!

Behold, your God

will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.

He will come and save you.”

⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.

It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

⁹No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,

but the redeemed shall walk there.

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

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 146

L ¹Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
C ²**I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.**
L ³Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.
C ⁴**When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.**
L ⁵Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,
C ⁶**who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;**
L ⁷who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;
C ⁸**the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.**
C **The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.**
L ⁹The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
C ¹⁰**The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations.**
Praise the LORD!

James 5:7–11

⁷Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. Who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Matthew 11:2–15

- L** The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 11th chapter.
C Glory to You, O Lord.

²Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” ⁴And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

⁷As 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? ⁸What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is he of whom it is written,

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

¹¹Truly, 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. ¹²From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

- L** This is the Gospel of the Lord.
C Praise to You, O Christ.

The Apostles’ Creed

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

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

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

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

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

Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding

Lutheran Service Book 345, Lutheran Worship 18, The Lutheran Hymnal 60



1 Hark! A thrill - ing voice is sound - ing! "Christ is
2 Star - tled at the sol - emn warn - ing, Let the
3 See, the Lamb, so long ex - pect - ed, Comes with
4 So, when next He comes in glo - ry And the
5 Hon - or, glo - ry, might, do - min - ion To the

near," we hear it say. "Cast a - way the
earth - bound soul a - rise; Christ, its sun, all
par - don down from heav'n. Let us haste, with
world is wrapped in fear, He will shield us
Fa - ther and the Son With the ev - er -

works of dark - ness, All you chil - dren of the day!"
sloth dis - pel - ling, Shines up - on the morn - ing skies.
tears of sor - row, One and all, to be for - giv'n;
with His mer - cy And with words of love draw near.
liv - ing Spir - it While e - ter - nal a - ges run!

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Devotional thoughts:

Before playlists and online streaming, there was something called "radio." Many of us grew up listening to music on our favorite radio stations. If you are like me, you can even remember the stations' call letters. Mine were WLS and WCFL in Chicago.

I include this little bit of trivia to prepare you for a small joke. (I probably should have thought of something better to begin with.) There was a time when it was considered clever to say, "I can't play the piano but I can play the radio." (Ha, ha, ha. I can hear my daughter saying, "Daaaaaaaad.")

All of my children can play the piano to a greater or lesser extent. They grew up with a piano in our living room. Thinking about the Gospel lesson for this week reminded me of how we got our piano.

Valerie and I had our first real tax rebate check in our hands. We decided to buy a piano. I read an ad for a used piano that seemed to fit our budget. I called the number and talked to the seller.

We lived in Northwestern Ontario at the time and the piano was in the next town, 75 miles away. I didn't want to take the trip unless I was fairly certain that I would make the purchase so I asked quite a few questions. One important question was, "Has this piano spent time in the basement?" I didn't want a piano that suffered from moisture damage. They assured me that this was not the case.

Off we went with our infant son in the car to buy a piano. 75 miles later, we laid eyes on our long sought piano in all its glory. There it sat IN THE BASEMENT! You can imagine our disappointment. We turned around and drove home. (For the curious, in the end, we bought a new piano.)

Are you disappointed with the length of this introduction? Are you wondering if you wasted your time reading this far? What things in your life have led to disappointments?

Our Gospel lesson begins with what seems like a very disappointed John the Baptist. (I will give you an alternate explanation for John's inquiry below**.) His entire ministry was dedicated to preparing the way for Jesus. He did it with complete and unreserved passion and commitment.

His uncompromising devotion to the message of repentance and preparation for the long-awaited Messiah landed him in prison. Now, John the Baptist seems to be disappointed that Jesus isn't bringing the expected judgment. Could he have been mistaken? Should he expect someone else?

It turns out that, if John the Baptist was disappointed, it was because he had a false expectation regarding the coming Savior. Have you ever been disappointed in God? Has He ever failed to meet your expectations? Is it possible that like John the Baptist, you also may have held false expectations?

It is true that the Day of Judgment is coming. Jesus himself tells us this in Matthew 25:31-46. But that was not the reason for His first advent. Jesus explained to John's disciples that He was doing exactly what John should have expected. He was fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies about Him. He told them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

Let's review the Bible passages that Jesus wanted John the Baptist to remember. First, consider Isaiah 61:1-2:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to **bring good news to the poor**;
he has sent me to **bind up the brokenhearted**,
to **proclaim liberty to the captives**,
and the **opening of the prison to those who are bound**;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to **comfort all who mourn**;

Next, reflect on Isaiah 35:5-6:

Then **the eyes of the blind shall be opened**,
and **the ears of the deaf unstopped**;
then shall the **lame man leap like a deer**,
and the tongue of **the mute sing for joy**.
For **waters break forth in the wilderness**,
and **streams in the desert**;

Finally, and most importantly Isaiah 26:19:

Your **dead shall live**; their **bodies shall rise**.

You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!

For your dew is a dew of light,
and the earth will give birth to the dead.

What do you expect from Jesus? Are you looking for judgment on your enemies? Do you want a perfect government?

Jesus came to bring good news and to bind up the brokenhearted. He did this by sacrificing Himself as payment for our sins. His death brings us life, life eternal. He heals our souls. He makes our blind spiritual eyes see.

Gaudete Sunday is a day to rejoice. Today is a day to rejoice that God sent us a Savior and does not condemn us for our sins. We come to Him in repentance and He grants us forgiveness, life, and salvation. Rejoice. Everything else is secondary to this greatest blessing of all.

Because we live in a world of sin, we will continue to experience disappointments. People will disappoint us. Our bodies will let us down. We will continue to disappoint others. We will let ourselves down. But God

never lets us down. He is always there for us. He always welcomes us back when we disappoint Him and let Him down.

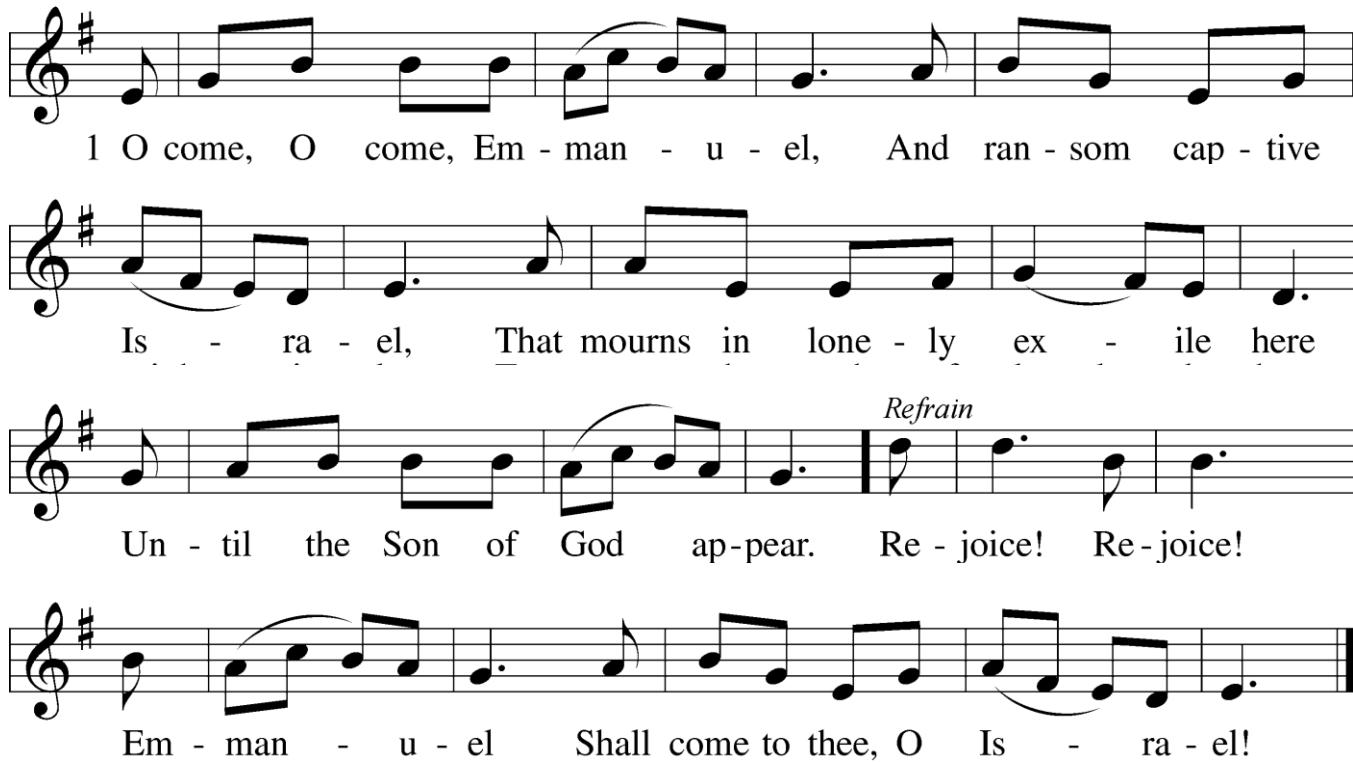
One day, sin and all of its effects will be gone. Our bodies will be renewed in the resurrection because of Jesus our Savior. Rejoice!

“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).

**Another explanation for the reason that John the Baptist sent His disciples to inquire of Jesus. When I was a vicar for Pastor Eldor Haake, he explained that John, himself, did not doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Rather, he sent his disciples to Jesus to calm their doubts so that they would believe in Jesus.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

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



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
Is - ra - el, That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
Un - til the Son of God ap-pear. *Refrain* Re - joice! Re - joice!
Em - man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

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Prayers

- L** Lord, You are the source of all joy. Even the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad at Your appearance. Sustain us in the time of waiting for Your will and purpose to unfold in these latter days. Give us patience under trials and hope to endure the changes that we experience in life.
- C** Amen.
- L** O God, You have sent messengers to prepare the way of Your Son’s coming. Grant us ears to hear and hearts to believe the words delivered by your faithful servants.
- C** Amen.

L O God, Your love invites us to rejoice in Your goodness. In every circumstance of life, teach us the joy that comes from knowing Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and eagerly expecting His gracious visitation.

C Amen.

L O Lord, give us vigilant and wise leaders. Be with all who serve to keep us safe. Bring peace and harmony to our nation in this time of contentiousness. Protect those in harm's way because of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East that cause innocent men, women, and children to suffer. Grant that the new found peace in Gaza would be sustained.

C Amen.

L Visit us in Your compassion, O Lord. Deliver the sick from their infirmity, the troubled from their afflictions, the grieving from their sorrow, and the dying from their fear. May all who cry to You receive grace according to Your will. Help each of us to bear our crosses with patience and grace.

C Amen.

L Merciful Lord, You give strength to those who are anxious. Give us hearts that trust in You at all times. Grant us courage to confront our doubts and fears with Your Word, and give us strength to fulfill our callings of love, service, and witness in our world so that more people would believe and rejoice in the salvation You won for us.

C Amen.

L With great jubilation, O Lord, we rejoice at Your Son's advent. Grant us faith to receive Him worthily as He comes in word and sacrament.

C Amen.

L O God, Your love invites us to rejoice in Your goodness. In every circumstance of life, teach us the joy that comes from knowing Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and eagerly expecting His gracious visitation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

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.

In Thee Is Gladness

Lutheran Service Book 818, Lutheran Worship 442, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a

1 In Thee is glad - ness A - mid all sad - ness, Je - sus,
2 Since He is ours, _____ We fear no pow - ers, Not of

sun - shine of my heart. By Thee are giv - en The gifts of
earth nor sin nor death. He sees and bless - es In worst dis -

heav - en, Thou the true Re - deem - er art. Our souls Thou
tress - es; He can change them with a breath. Where - fore the

wak - est, Our bonds Thou break - est; Who trusts Thee sure - ly Has built se -
sto - ry Tell of His glo - ry With hearts and voic - es; All heav'n re -

cure - ly; He stands for - ev - er: Al - le - lu - ia! Our hearts are
joic - es In Him for - ev - er: Al - le - lu - ia! We shout for

pin - ing To see Thy shin - ing, Dy - ing or liv - ing
glad - ness, Tri - umph o'er sad - ness, Love Him and praise Him

To Thee are cleav - ing; Naught can us sev - er: Al - le - lu - ia!
And still shall raise Him Glad hymns for - ev - er: Al - le - lu - ia!

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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 Week of The Third Sunday in Advent December 15—20, 2025

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

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

Verse Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. Who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Introit Psalm 71:14–18; antiphon Philippians 4:4

- L** Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.
C **I will hope continually**
and will praise you yet more and more.
L My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all the day,
for their number is past my knowledge.
C **With the mighty deeds of the Lord God I will come;**
I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.
L O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
C **So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me,**
until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.
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 Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.

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. |

Every spiritual journey is different. All of our lives are distinctly unique. On the other hand, shared experiences help us relate to each other in meaningful ways.

Our Church Year is designed to help us have these shared experiences on our spiritual journeys. Advent is a time calculated to assist us in preparing for celebrating Jesus' birth on Christmas Day. An important part of this preparation is a focus on John the Baptist's call to repentance.

True repentance is a somber experience. An extended focus on repentance can become exhausting. *Gaudate* Sunday (The Third Sunday in Advent) gives us an opportunity to pause and remember that even in the midst of solemn repentance, we are called upon to "Rejoice in the Lord always" (The opening words of the introit from Philippians 4:4.)

Gaudate means rejoice. It is the first word of Philippians 4:4 in Latin from the Vulgate translation of the Bible. For centuries Christians have sung "*Gaudete in Domino semper*" ("Rejoice in the Lord always") on this Sunday.

It might surprise you to know that not everyone loves Latin. In fact, many people are completely against it. If you are one of those people, read on. We're not going to be focusing on Latin. We are going to learn something important from the Greek word for "rejoice."

The Greek word for "rejoice" in Philippians 4:4 is *Chairete*. *Chairete* is the imperative of *chairo*. It is a directive to rejoice. Now here's the good part. *Chairo* shares its root with *charis*, the Greek word for "grace." It's almost impossible to make that connection in our English translations. But in its most true and basic sense, "to rejoice" means "to experience God's grace and to be truly glad for it."

Our pause to rejoice in the middle of Advent is the most natural thing for Christian people. God's grace is the gift of forgiveness and salvation given to us by Jesus. True repentance always results in forgiveness which leads to rejoicing! Imagine that!

You may have noticed that in recent years some churches have begun observing a Blue Christmas Service. This time of year can magnify the grief, pain, and heartbreak experienced by people who have suffered a significant loss in their lives. Decking the halls, Jingle Bells, and Frosty the Snowman cannot bring relief. This is a service designed especially for these hurting people. I have never personally attended one of those services but I can understand how Christmas can be a difficult time.

Gaudate Sunday is a perfect time for such a service. Christian rejoicing is not a façade of happiness that papers over a hurting heart. Christians rejoice knowing that Jesus has come to bind up the brokenhearted. Sin has brought sadness to each one of us at one level or another. But Jesus has come to overcome sin and death.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!

- L** Let us pray. O Lord, thank You for the gift of Your grace that leads us to true rejoicing. In the days ahead, Grant that we can help people around us rejoice in the love that is theirs in Christ Jesus our Lord.

C Amen.

Bonus: There is a 16th Century Christmas carol titled *Gaudate* that links rejoicing with God's grace. Here is the Latin text with the English translation. Follow this link to hear a beautiful version of this carol sung by The King's Singers. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KSxg9Ij5r8>

Gaudete, gaudete!
Christus est natus
Ex Maria virgine,
gaudete!

Tempus adest gratiæ
Hoc quod optabamus,
Carmina lætitiæ
Devote reddamus.

Deus homo factus est
Natura mirante,
Mundus renovatus est
A Christo regnante.

Ezechielis porta
Causa pertransitur,
Unde lux est orta
Salus invenitur.

Ergo nostra contio
Psallat iam in lustro;
Benedicat Domino:
Salus Regi nostro

Rejoice, rejoice!
Christ is born
Of the Virgin Mary –
Rejoice!

The time of grace has come—
What we have wished for;
Songs of joy
Let us give back faithfully.

God has become man,
With nature marvelling,
The world has been renewed
By the reigning Christ.

The closed gate of Ezekiel
Is passed through,
Whence the light is risen;
Salvation has been found.

Therefore, let our assembly
Now sing in brightness
Let it bless the Lord:
Greetings to our King.

Tuesday

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

Verse Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. Who will prepare your way before you. 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.

Collect of the Day

- L** Let us Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C Amen.

All the collects in Advent, except for the Third Sunday in Advent, include the words “stir up.” This week our prayer asks God to “lighten the darkness of our hearts.”

One of the blessings of serving as a pastor is working with people from all walks of life. I have discovered that every vocation or profession has its own set of expressions and buzzwords. Educators, business executives, farmers, retail workers, repair people, and restaurant personnel salt their language with terminology and jargon. Pastors are included in this list.

Here are sample of expressions used by business executives that are not common for the rest of us: synergy, bandwidth, circle back, low-hanging fruit, paradigm shift, and the like. As I read the collect for this week, a helpful business expression from a few years ago came to mind: “We don’t know what we don’t know.” This phrase was popularized by Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense from 2001-2006. He used it in a press briefing in 2002.

Some may be thinking that this is ancient history. You may be surprised to learn that “You don’t know what you don’t know” is found in the chorus of “You Don’t Know,” a song from the soundtrack of Monster High 2, released in 2023!

We all have blind spots in our knowledge. Even the most brilliant people don’t know what they don’t know!

When it comes to spiritual matters, all of our hearts are darkened by sin. We are unaware of the true nature of God and His plan of salvation.

Otherwise intelligent people can deceive themselves into thinking that they can figure out God or arrogantly cling to atheism. The truth is that “they don’t know what they don’t know.”

When Jesus came into the world, He enlightened the darkness of our sinful hearts. Without Him, we would still be living in darkness. John 1:4 tells us, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

While others may be content to walk in darkness, let us use this Advent and Christmas season to allow the light of Christ shine into our hearts. May the Holy Spirit use God’s word to bring us to repentance and faith. Let us be reminded of God’s grace and love: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16 NKJV).

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father 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 Matthew 11:10b

L Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. Who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Psalm 146

L ¹Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD, O my soul!
C ²I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.
L ³Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.
C ⁴When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.
L ⁵Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,
C ⁶who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;
L ⁷who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;
C ⁸the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.

- ¶ 9 The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
- ¶ 10 **The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations.**
Praise the LORD!

Kyrie

- ¶ O Lord, ¶ **Have mercy on us.**
¶ O Christ, ¶ **Have mercy on us.**
¶ O Lord, ¶ **Have mercy on us.**

You may recall that the last five psalms all begin with “Hallelujah” in Hebrew. In English, Hallelujah means “Praise the Lord.” Let’s carefully examine Psalm 146, the first of these “Hallelujah Psalms,” to understand why we are praising the Lord with this psalm on the Third Sunday in Advent.

First, it is the height of folly to praise any prince, president, or human leader in the same way that we are bound to praise God. No human being can bring salvation to us. Only God can bring us salvation.

On this week of the Third Sunday in Advent, we recall that Jesus assured John the Baptist that indeed, He is the one who brings salvation. While all humans must succumb to death, Jesus is the one who brings the dead back to life! The psalm tells us God is the only one who brings us help and hope! This is absolutely true about Jesus!

The Lord gives food to the hungry, sets prisoners free, and opens the eyes of the blind. Jesus told John’s disciples, “Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.” With this information, John’s disciples could reach only one conclusion: Jesus is exactly who the angel said He was when he told the shepherds, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

The psalm concludes, “The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!” During this week in Advent, we praise God with Hallelujahs, because King Jesus will reign forever! One day, we will join Him in the mansions of heaven because Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews offered Himself on the cross for us.

- ¶ Let us pray. O Lord, we praise You for sending Your only-begotten Son into the world to be our Savior. We thank You that King Jesus came to reign forever in our hearts. Amen.

Thursday

- ¶ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
¶ Amen.

Verse Matthew 11:10b

- ¶ Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
¶ **Alleluia, Alleluia. Who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.**

Kyrie

- ¶ O Lord, ¶ **Have Mercy on us.**
¶ O Christ, ¶ **Have Mercy on us.**
¶ O Lord, ¶ **Have Mercy on us.**

Isaiah 35:1–10

¹The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;
²it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and singing.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

³Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴Say to those who have an anxious heart,
“Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you.”

⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

⁶then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

For waters break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;
the unclean shall not pass over it.
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.

⁹No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

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

Our reading from Isaiah 35:1 brought to mind this scene from William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. [Feel free to skip the Shakespeare if you wish.]

Romeo and Juliet Act II, Scene II:

Juliet:

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

Romeo:

[Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

Juliet:

'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
**What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;**

The feud between the Montagues and Capulets led to tragedy for Romeo and Juliet. In this famous balcony scene, Juliet contemplates what their romance would be like if they had other names. She declares that Romeo is not defined by his name. Then she says, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

The ESV translation of Isaiah 35:1 says, "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the **crocus**." The Hebrew word translated as crocus in this verse is *chabatstseleth*. The King James Version translates this word as "rose." Some other versions translate it as "lily." In addition to crocus, rose, and lily, a Hebrew lexicon also gives "meadow saffron" as an acceptable translation.

I'm not knowledgeable enough to decide which translation of *chabatstseleth* is best. This leads me to exclaim with Juliet, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet!"

This minor translation issue shouldn't occupy much of our time. But unless you are aware that the King James Version translates *chabatstseleth* as rose, you may have missed something significant about our worship on the Third Sunday in Advent.

Did you notice that the third candle on our Advent wreath is rose-colored? If the ESV had used rose rather than crocus, the connection would have been obvious.

Rose is the color of joy (*Gaudate*) because Isaiah 35:2 goes on to say, "It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with **joy** and singing. This third week of Advent is a time for joy because Jesus is the Messiah who comes to save us! (Isaiah 35:4). Joy abounds because the eyes of the blind are opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, the lame leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy!"

Isaiah tells us that when the Savior comes, "everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:10). We live in this time of great joy! That's why the third candle on our Advent wreath is the color of *chabatstseleth*!

Prayer: O Lord God, thank You for the everlasting joy that is ours in Jesus. We ask that You would make all of our sorrow and sighing flee from us through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friday

- 〔L〕 In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
〔C〕 Amen.

Verse Matthew 11:10b

- 〔L〕 Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
〔C〕 **Alleluia, Alleluia. Who will prepare your way before you. 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.**

James 5:7–11

⁷Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

James begins our Epistle lesson for this week with this highly appropriate Advent admonition, “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.” This led me to ponder patience.

Advent is a time to learn patience. The world has been celebrating Christmas since before Thanksgiving. (I may have already watched more than my fair share of Hallmark Christmas movies.) But in the Church, we don’t celebrate Christmas until Christmas. Imagine that. This takes self-discipline and patience.

As I pondered patience, I thought of children at Christmas. It is so hard for them to wait for Christmas. The days pass so slowly. Christmas Eve is the longest night of the year!

This gives us insight into an aspect of patience. When we are waiting for something to come or to pass, time slows down to a crawl.

For us elderly folk, waiting for Christmas doesn’t require as much patience as waiting for the doctor to come into the exam room. During a recent visit to the doctor, I felt like I was checking my watch every 30 seconds. I was pretty sure that I was in some kind of time warp.

In the early Church, this same feeling was experienced by Christians longing for Jesus’ Second Advent. Time seemed to pass so slowly as they waited for the wonderful day of Christ’s return. James understood this yearning to be with Jesus so he urged them to be patient.

There is no doubt that patience is hard. There is a certain amount of suffering involved. That is why being patient is sometimes described as being long-suffering. But enduring this adversity pays its rewards. James uses the example of a farmer. He plants his crop but must wait the proper length of time for the growing season to be over before he can harvest the precious fruit of the earth. But it is worth the wait.

The coming of Jesus is worth the wait. Jesus’ first Advent came at just the right time. The Old Testament people were required to wait patiently for the Savior to come. Jesus’ second Advent will be at just the right time. Until then, we will have to wait patiently.

While we are waiting, there is plenty to do. There is no need to check our watches every 30 seconds. Jesus has given us His Great Commission to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching (Matthew 28:18-20). When the days are long and your patience runs short, remember that Jesus has promised to be with you always!

Prayer: O Lord, Your compassion and mercy have caused you to be patient with us. Grant us patience as await the coming of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday

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

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 Matthew 11:10b

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, Alleluia.
C **Alleluia, Alleluia. Who will prepare your way before you. 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: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C Amen.

For the Third Sunday in Advent our prayer is an appeal for light in the darkness.

In many ways, we seem to be living in dark times. We are not the first and in all likelihood, we will not be the last to feel this way. But our prayer isn't about the darkness of the world around it. It is a prayer about a darkness that is far, far worse. It is a prayer about the darkness of our hearts.

Darkness in our hearts can take the form of evil desires. It can include thoughts of ill will and a wish for harm to befall our enemies. It is evidenced by selfishness. This darkness is easy to identify.

But there is a more subtle darkness of the heart that is just as deadly. It is the darkness of self-righteousness. It is the darkness of claiming to not need God and His law. It is the darkness of self-determination and being your own ultimate authority.

There is great danger in following the desires of a darkened heart. Darkened hearts do not know God and His love. They lead us away from eternal life. They lead us on a dead-end path of eternal loneliness and separation from all that is Good, Noble, and True.

The first flicker of light that shines into our darkened hearts is the recognition of the darkness. This comes to us in the form of God's law. Secularists believe that every individual should be a law to themselves but this is the ultimate definition of darkness. The Holy Spirit must do what Martin Luther calls, His foreign or alien work. This is the work of convicting us of sin through God's holy law. Light dawns in our hearts when God brings us to repentance.

But this is just the glow upon the horizon before sunrise. Darkness is truly and completely removed when the bright light of Christ's love for us shines into the deepest corners of our hearts through the Gospel. The light of Christ is incomprehensible to a self-serving and self-centered world. The light of His love is found in the cross. There Jesus showed us the opposite of self-centeredness by His self-sacrifice for us. It is something that none of us deserve. We didn't earn His love. He gives it to us freely despite who we are or what we have been.

When Christ enlightens our hearts by His gracious visitation, we know true joy that lasts for eternity. May this light and joy be ours at Christmas and always.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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