

The Third Sunday in Advent

Gaudete!

December 17, 2023

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 clockwise from the first candle, and the rose candle. You may choose to light it now or in the service where indicated.

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 color 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) that is one of the names of Christ.

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.

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 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

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates, st. 3b

Introit Psalm 85:8–9, 12–13; antiphon Psalm 85:7

L Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

C Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.

L Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,
that glory may dwell in our land.

C Yes, the Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

L Righteousness will go before him
and make his footsteps a way.

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 Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

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.

Gloria in Excelsis ~ Glory to God in the Highest (omitted during the season of Advent)

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 61:1–4, 8–11

¹The 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;
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.
⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations. . . .

⁸For I the LORD love justice;
I hate robbery and wrong;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.
⁹Their offspring shall be known among the nations,
and their descendants in the midst of the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge them,
that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to sprout up before all the nations.

- 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** Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
- C** From the house of the Lord we bless you.

Psalm 126

- L** ¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.
- C** ²Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."
- L** ³The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.
- C** ⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!
- L** ⁵Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!
- C** ⁶He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil.
²³Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

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

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

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

John 1:6–8, 19–28

- L** The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 1st chapter.
- C** Glory to You, O Lord.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. . . .

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²²So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

²⁴(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

L This is the Gospel of the Lord.

G Praise to You, O Christ.

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:

The historic introit for today begins: "*Gaudete in Domino semper.*" Those who endured having me as a confirmation teacher probably will be able to translate this phrase with little effort. In fact, some may snicker when they read the word "*semper.*" [If you weren't in my class and want to get in on the joke, research the Latin phrase, "*Semper ubi sub ubi!*."]

For the curious, the entire Latin introit for today is, (It's okay to skip ahead if you're not curious.) "*Gaudete in Domino semper: iterum dico, gaudete. Modestia vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus: Dominus enim prope est. Nihil solliciti sitis: sed in omni oratione et obsecratione cum gratiarum actione petitiones vestrae innotescant apud Deum. Benedixisti Domine terram tuam: avertisti captivitatem Jacob*".

The English translation is Philippians 4:4-6 and Psalm 85:1:

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. (Philippians 4:4-6) Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. (Psalm 85:1)

Okay, so you are not thrilled with Latin. I hope you are thrilled with the message of **Gaudete Sunday!** Rejoice in the Lord always. This message of rejoicing has rung in the ears of Christians on this Third Sunday in Advent for centuries. It was proclaimed first in Greek and then Latin, eventually, German, English, French, Italian, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, Swahili, and countless other languages of the world.

For many people and in many places, 2023 has been a tough year. Interest rates continue to rise. Some have lost their jobs. Calamities and disasters of life are reported every day. Hurricanes, fires, and floods have damaged many parts of our country. Tornadoes have devastated many communities. There is war in the Holy Land and Ukraine. The list goes on.

We can add to this our personal struggles with disease, pain, and discomfort. We have been grieved by the loss of loved ones. Both friends and enemies have hurt us.

Worst of all we are caught in our own sin and failings. How can we rejoice?

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Philippians. Pause for a moment and recall his first encounter with this Roman city, named Philippi (Acts 16:6-40).

Not many Jews lived there. There was no synagogue, therefore when the Sabbath Day came; he went outside the city to the riverside looking for a place of prayer. There he met Lydia. He baptized her and her whole household! Indeed, this was a reason for rejoicing. Unfortunately, things quickly went downhill from there. Soon, Paul and Silas were falsely accused of disturbing the city. The crowds attacked them. The magistrates ordered them stripped of their clothes and beaten with rods! Next, they were thrown into jail! You can read about this in Acts 16. After baptizing the jailer and his family, they were expelled from the city. My experience of 2023 seems pretty tame compared to that.

Those familiar with Paul's life know that his experience in Philippi was not unique. He endured much more. Here are a few other things that happened to him. He spent two years imprisoned in Caesarea. He was shipwrecked. Many of his friends and companions abandoned him. Finally, while under arrest in Rome, he wrote these words to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."

Paul had dark days, but his life was filled with rejoicing. I wonder why?

Later in this chapter in verse 12, Paul says, “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” Paul is saying that rejoicing does not depend on his present circumstances. In spite of everything he has endured, he rejoices. Understanding this context, it is interesting to read the very next verse: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” This verse does not mean that Paul will ultimately prevail in earthly endeavors as some have used it. Rather, Paul is saying that he can endure whatever hardship God puts in front of him. More than that, with God strengthening him, he can rejoice.

What was your life like a year ago? Most of us cannot remember the details of life from last year, even if they consisted of anxiety and worry. Next year may be different. We will remember the pandemic for a long, long time. Nevertheless, with St. Paul, we rejoice.

We rejoice because the Lamb of God has come to take away the sins of the world. We rejoice that God’s word has come to us with the message of light and life.

We rejoice because we have a Savior. We rejoice that in Christ our eternity is secure. We rejoice because long ago a baby was born in Bethlehem who is Christ the Lord. We rejoice because we are forgiven children of God on the way to our heavenly home.

It may seem like we are mourning in lonely exile here but we rejoice. I will say it again, we rejoice because the Son of God, Emmanuel has appeared to ransom us from sin, death, and the devil.

“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

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

Refrain
Un - til the Son of God ap - pear. Re - joice! Re - joice!

Em - man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

Prayers

L Almighty God, You sent John the Baptist to proclaim the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Grant that we, who prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, may die to sin and rise to new life, that we may treasure up and ponder in our hearts the Christ announced by the messenger You sent to bear witness about the Light of the World.

C Amen.

L Gracious Lord, You sent John to proclaim the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. In our day, let the proclamation of faithful pastors and teachers lead Your people to trust in Your salvation.

C Amen.

L Heavenly Father, be the source of strength and comfort in every home. Bless the children of our families, that every darkness would be lightened by Your Son's gracious visitation. Preserve them from dangers to body and soul, guide them by Your Word into wise paths, and keep them firm in the faith until life's end.

C Amen.

L Heavenly Father, bless the homes of Your people, that parents may train their children with wisdom and love that children may know Your love and the salvation You have granted to them through faith in Your beloved Son, Jesus.

C Amen.

L O God of peace, during this time of war in the ancient land of Israel and in Ukraine, we pray that You would grant a swift end to the conflict, that right and justice would prevail, and that You would grant Your mighty hand of protection to the innocent and helpless.

C Amen.

L Righteous God, You give leaders to every nation and people. Grant us good and wise public servants to defend the innocent and punish evil. Guard those who protect us, especially our armed forces, police, and firefighters.

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.

C Amen.

L O Lord, heavenly Father, we gratefully remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Rejoicing in His victorious resurrection from the dead, strengthen our faith each day by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit through Your holy word.

C Amen.

L Almighty God, prepare our hearts and minds for Christmas with true repentance and faith during this Advent season and always.

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



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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 *Gaudete!* December 18 - 23, 2023

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 meditate 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 of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

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

Introit Psalm 85:8–9, 12–13; antiphon Psalm 85:7

- L** Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.
- C** Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.
- L** Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,
that glory may dwell in our land.
- C** Yes, the Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
- L** Righteousness will go before him
and make his footsteps a way.
- 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** Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

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.

If you read my thoughts from yesterday, you might assume that I'm a little disappointed with the introit provided for us this week by the Lutheran Service Book. While most of our congregations are lighting the rose candle this week (And some more zealously liturgical pastors are wearing rose-colored vestments.), our introit has lost the word rejoice this year. Fortunately, it is preserved on this Sunday in the other two years of our three-year lectionary.

This brings to mind a comment by a seminary professor when asked, "What do you think of our new hymnal." He replied, "I give it a B+ which is the best you can expect from something produced by a committee." I would have preferred that Philippians 4:4 would have been the antiphon. Then I might have given it an A-.

But do not despair! This introit gives us reason to rejoice! In Jesus, we have God's steadfast love and salvation! Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I say, "Rejoice!"

Mary's famous song, the Magnificat, begins with these words, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Mary's advent was one of rejoicing. So is ours.

Psalm 85:9 declares, "Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him," Mary sings, "His mercy is for those who fear him" (Luke 1:50). God's salvation, His mercy, His steadfast love is ours now and forever! Rejoice!

L Let us pray. O Lord, show us your steadfast love and grant that we rejoice in your salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
C Amen

Tuesday

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

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

L 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

We take a break this week from our "Stir up" collects. This week we bring our plea to Jesus that He would lighten the darkness of our hearts.

It is entirely appropriate that Advent is a dark time of year. It reminds us of the darkness of sin in our lives and in our world.

I am often dismayed at the rudeness displayed by our public officials and media stars. I am troubled by the arrogance of newscasters and journalists. I am saddened by the negative attitude of the people around me. I am disappointed and distressed at the unrest in our cities and all the finger-pointing.

Of course, I am not like these people! Or maybe I am. God's word in Advent is not meant for me to use as a tool for evaluating the people around me. It is a light to examine the deep recesses of my heart.

Only when I recognize the darkness of sin dwelling in me that I can be made ready for the Light of the World. *Gaudete* Sunday is a time to see the light of Jesus and the joy He brings to the darkness of our hearts through the forgiveness of sins that we do not deserve.

I pray that someone in the world will rejoice because they see the light of Jesus in your heart.

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 of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

L 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.

Psalm 126

L ¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

C ²Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

L ³The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.

C ⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!

L ⁵Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!

C ⁶He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Psalm 126 is a psalm for *Gaudete* week if there ever was one! The Lord has restored our fortunes! It is so wonderful that it feels like a dream. We are so happy with God's blessings that we are filled with laughter and shouts of joy! Why? Because the Lord has done great things for us!

These great things have made us glad. It is like finding a bubbling spring in the desert! Our tears have turned to joy!

All of this finds its source in Jesus! Yes, I am happy that the Covid-19 pandemic has waned. Yes, I am happy that I have a place to live, I am warm, and I have enough to eat. But true joy comes from knowing the love of God in Christ! It is more wonderful than anything else we can imagine!

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for true joy! Grant that our mouths would be filled with laughter and happiness when we recognize the blessing granted to us in Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Thursday

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

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

L 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.

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

¹The 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;

²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

³to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.

⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations. . . .

⁸For I the LORD love justice;
I hate robbery and wrong;
I will faithfully give them their recompense,
and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their offspring shall be known among the nations,
and their descendants in the midst of the peoples;
all who see them shall acknowledge them,
that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
my soul shall exult in my God,
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,
so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
to sprout up before all the nations.

There is more than a week's worth of sermons in our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah. However, let us be brief.

One day, Jesus came to Nazareth on the Sabbath Day and went to the synagogue (Luke 4:16-20). A first-century synagogue was a rectangular room with a table at the front for reading from the Scriptures.

On that day Jesus stood up to read and the scroll of Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and read from Isaiah 61, our reading for today! Then He rolled up the scroll. Sat down and declared, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

All that Isaiah had promised is fulfilled in Jesus! The poor receive the good news. The brokenhearted are bound up. The captives receive liberty. Those who mourn receive gladness. Today is the day of the Lord's favor!

We are the poor. We are the brokenhearted. We are the captives. We are the ones who mourn! We are delivered from every sin and evil. Jesus has clothed us with the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness. We have every reason to rejoice in the Lord and the day of the Lord's favor!

Prayer: O Lord, let us never neglect Scripture, for there we learn of Your anointed, Jesus Christ. Grant that our rejoicing would always be centered on the salvation that He purchased for us on the cross. Amen.

Friday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

L 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.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil.

²³Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Here again, the Apostle Paul directs us to rejoice. Sometimes I do! Of course, his direction is for us to rejoice always. It is to be coupled with prayer and thanksgiving. We do this because it is God's will for us in Christ Jesus!

There is only one way this can happen. The Holy Spirit must bring us to faith and keep us in the faith. It is

only in this way that we will be blameless at the coming of Jesus.

What keeps us from rejoicing? What keeps us from praying? What keeps us from giving thanks? This happens when we are distracted by worldly events and forget about eternity won for us by Jesus on the cross. Bethlehem finds its fulfillment in Jerusalem on Calvary and at the empty tomb!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Your mother, Mary, and Your earthly father, Joseph, waited for Your birth. All the Old Testament people waited for the fulfillment of prophecy, grant that we also may wait with patience for Your second coming. 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 of the Day: Matthew 11:10b

L 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.

John 1:6–8, 19–28

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. . . .

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²²So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

²⁴(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

If you’ve been with me all week, you may have wondered, “Where’s John the Baptist?” Here he is. John and Isaiah are the most significant supporting actors of Advent.

All four Gospels identify John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the voice of one

crying out in the wilderness, “Make straight the way of the Lord.” Our Gospel reading for today makes it clear that John the Baptist recognized himself as this voice.

He is not the Christ! He is the Voice! He is an unworthy voice. He is not even worthy to untie the sandal of Jesus! But he can point to the light!

We live in a time when people dream of being famous. It started with radio. It moved on to television. Now with the internet, people want their fame. They covet followers and “likes” on Facebook, Instagram, and so on. John the Baptist would have no interest in that. He only wanted to point to the light.

When we light the candles on our Advent wreath, let us remember John the Baptist and the Light of the World who came to scatter the darkness.

We live in a world of darkness where few people find a reason to rejoice. You and I know the ultimate reason for rejoicing. We are not worthy but God has called us, too. He has called us to let our light shine. Pray that God would grant you the ability to point someone to Jesus and His love during this Advent season. Let us walk in the footsteps of John the Baptist.

Prayer: O Lord God, grant that we may always rejoice in the Light of the World, the light no darkness can overcome. Grant that we may walk in the footsteps of Isaiah and John the Baptist pointing people to Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

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

Refrain
Un - til the Son of God ap - pear. Re - joice! Re - joice!

Em - man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

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