

The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 18, 2022



The Fourth Sunday in Advent this year could be called “Immanuel Sunday.” The Old Testament Lesson from Isaiah and our Gospel Lesson for today give us this most cherished name for our Savior. Jesus is truly “God with us!” He did not come to be with us as a terrible judge but He came to save His people from their sins.

The Hymn of the Day for the Fourth Sunday in Advent is “Oh, Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel.” Let us remember Jesus’ promise in Matthew 29:20 to be our “Immanuel” when He said, “Lo, I am with you always.”

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

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates Lutheran Service Book 341, Lutheran Worship 24, The Lutheran Hymnal 73

1 Lift up your heads, ye might - y gates! Be - hold, the
2 A righ - teous Help - er comes to thee; His char - iot
3 How blest the land, the cit - y blest, Where Christ the
4 Fling wide the por - tals of your heart; Make it a

King of glo - ry waits. The King of kings is draw - ing
is hu - mil - i - ty, His king - ly crown is ho - li -
rul - er is con - fessed! O peace - ful hearts and hap - py
tem - ple set a - part From earth - ly use for heav'n's em -

near; The Sav - ior of the world is here. Life and sal -
ness, His scep - ter, pit - y in dis - tress. The end of
homes To whom this King in tri - umph comes! The cloud - less
ploy, A - dorned with prayer and love and joy. So shall your



va - tion He doth bring; There-fore re - joice and glad - ly sing.
all our woe He brings; There-fore the earth is glad and sings.
sun of joy is He Who comes to set His peo - ple free.
Sov - 'reign en - ter in And new and no - bler life be - gin.



To God the Fa - ther raise Your joy - ful songs of praise.
To Christ the Sav - ior raise Your grate - ful hymns of praise.
To God the Spir - it raise Your hap - py shouts of praise.
To God a - lone be praise For word and deed and grace!

5 Redeemer, come and open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
O enter with Thy grace divine;
Thy face of mercy on me shine.
Thy Holy Spirit guide us on
Until our glorious goal is won.
Eternal praise and fame
We offer to Thy name.

Public domain

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 FOURTH CANDLE:

L As we light the Fourth candle on our Advent wreath, we rejoice that Joseph believed the angel and took Mary to be his wife and so became the earthly father of Immanuel, God with us, our Savior, Jesus. May we, like Joseph, always believe God's promise that Jesus came to save His people from their sins.

C O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!

Introit Psalm 130:5–8; antiphon Isaiah 64:1

- L** Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence.
- C** I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
- L** my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
- C** O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.
- L** And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.
- 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** Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence.

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 Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** Amen.

Isaiah 7:10–17

¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹“Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria.”

- 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 24

- L** ¹The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,
- C** ²**for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.**
- L** ³Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?
- C** ⁴**He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.**
- L** ⁵He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.
- C** ⁶**Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.**
- L** ⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
- C** ⁸**Who is this King of glory?**
The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!
- L** ⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
- C** ¹⁰**Who is this King of glory?**
The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!

Romans 1:1–7

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Verse Matthew 1:23a

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.
- C** **Alleluia, Alleluia. And they shall call his name Immanuel. Alleluia.**

Matthew 1:18–25

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

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you

shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us).²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

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.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel Lutheran Service Book 357, Lutheran Worship 31, The Lutheran Hymnal 62
Stanzas 1-3



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
2 O come, Thou Wis - dom from on high, Who or - d'rest all things
3 O come, O come, Thou Lord of might, Who to Thy tribes on



Is - ra - el, That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
might - i - ly; To us the path of knowl - edge show,
Si - nai's height In an - cient times didst give the Law



Un - til the Son of God ap - pear. Re - joice! Re - joice!
And teach us in her ways to go. Re - joice! Re - joice!
In cloud and maj - es - ty and awe. Re - joice! Re - joice!



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

Public domain

Devotional thoughts:

Here we are! It's the Fourth Sunday in Advent! Christmas is a week away! This leads me to ask, "How did we get here?" I'm not asking, "How is it that time seems to pass so quickly?" I'm not going to wax eloquent about the beauty and benefit of the Church Year. No, I'm asking, "How did we literally get here?"

For you to be here today, you had to make countless decisions in just the right way. For example, you had to decide to get out of bed this morning. You chose the clothes that you are wearing. The list goes on.

Some choices in life are made for us by others. Some choices are unambiguously clear. When God's law speaks on a matter, the issue is settled. We are not free to make sinful choices.

However, other choices are not so clearly laid out for us. Most decisions that we make are neither commanded nor forbidden by God.

Some are simple. You may freely choose to wear socks with stripes or solid colors. The adventurous may even choose to wear no socks at all!

Decisions concerning socks are seldom life-changing. But sometimes we are required to make life-altering decisions.

Young people may fret over career choices. High school students must choose a college to attend or they may choose to forego college and enter immediately into their life's vocation. These are difficult decisions.

We all have to make life-transforming decisions. Reflect for a moment on the important choices you have made to get to where you are today.

Did you struggle to choose a career? Did you ever have to contemplate relocating to a different community? A different state? Or a different country?

Likely, there was no right or wrong answer. You weighed your options and made your best decision by using all of your human wisdom.

For those of us who are married, the most important decision in life was choosing your spouse. How did you know for sure that you had made the right choice? Did you have any doubts?

When you are faced with difficult choices, wouldn't it be nice if God would just tell you what to do? We are all virtuous people who want to do what is right in the eyes of God.

Long ago, there was a virtuous, righteous man who had doubts about the young woman he had chosen for his bride. His name was Joseph. He believed that he had met the love of his life. He couldn't imagine sharing his life with anyone other than his beloved Mary. But now he had doubts.

He had just discovered that Mary was expecting a child and he was not the father. What was he to do? He weighed his options and made the best decision that he could by using his human wisdom. Mary could not be his wife. He would quietly and honorably end their relationship. It was the right thing to do. Or was it?

God had plans for Joseph and Mary and her little baby. Before Joseph finalized his life-changing (no world-changing decision), God intervened by sending an angel to Joseph.

I began today by asking, "How did we get here?" We are here today because long ago, God sent an angel to Joseph and Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his beloved Mary to be his wife and he cared for her Son as his own.

There is a much-loved Christmas song written by Mark Lowry in 1984 titled "Mary Did You Know?" It conveys a heart-warming sentiment that ponders Mary's thoughts about her baby boy. But it contains this curious line, "Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?" It is curious that Mark Lowry should ask such a question because the answer to that question is precisely why God sent the angel to Joseph.

By God's grace, I was given the privilege of teaching confirmation classes to seventh and eighth graders for more than 40 years. Every one of my students learned Question and Answer number 115 and Bible passage number 377 from the Catechism. You probably recall that Question 115 is "Why is He named Jesus?" and Answer 115 is "The name Jesus means 'the Lord saves.' Jesus is His personal name."¹ Bible passage 377 is Matthew 1:21, "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

God did not want Joseph to have any doubts about his decision to wed Mary. God had eternity-changing plans for Mary's Son. He would be the Savior! Not only did they know that He would save His people from their sins, but they were also reminded of it every time they said His name! Jesus means Savior!

We don't know how Joseph met Mary. We don't know how long they knew each other before they were betrothed. But we do know that they had been part of God's plan all along.

Matthew tells us that the angel's visit to Joseph to reveal God's plan of salvation through Mary's Son was the fulfillment of a centuries-old prophecy given to Isaiah. He declares, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)."

You know the rest of the story. Joseph did take Mary to be his wife. She gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. He fulfilled the promise of the angel to Joseph and saved his people from their sins. He still keeps His promise to be Immanuel, God with us.

How did we get here? It's a long story. It begins with God's plan of salvation given in promises throughout the Old Testament. It continued with God fulfilling His promises through His servants Joseph and Mary. Jesus never wavered from His mission. He took it upon Himself to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil. He overcame the sharpness of death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

But there is one more part of the story. How did you get here? God sent His angel to you! Not in the form of a heavenly being, but He sent you messengers with His holy word. Through word and sacrament, the Holy Spirit has brought you to faith and keeps you in the faith. You know and believe God's plan of salvation:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost" (1 Timothy 1:15).

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

We will continue to face choices in life. We will be forced to make difficult decisions. We will use every gift of wisdom that God has granted to us to make the right decision. Through all of this, like Joseph, we are convinced "that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We can face the future with confidence because Jesus, Immanuel, has promised "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20 KJV).

"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).

Prayers

L Lord God, You promised the virgin-born Son to reluctant King Ahaz, and in the fullness of time, the Word became flesh. Open our hearts and strengthen our faith gladly to receive Your Son in the Word and Sacraments.

C Amen.

¹Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism With Explanation*, Contains the basic principles of the Lutheran religion with some explanation.; Translation of: *Kleine Katechismus - English.*, electronic ed., 3 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997, c1986).

L Lord God, preserve the Gospel and its ministers. Cause the name and the resurrection of Jesus to be proclaimed among all the nations, including among us who are called to belong to Him so that faith may abound everywhere.

C Amen.

L Lord God, You sent Your angel to announce that Your Son would be named “Jesus” because He was born to save us from our sins. Give us repentant hearts. Do not let us bow to temptation or abuse His name by seeking our own way, but lead us to confess our sins and rejoice in His salvation.

C Amen.

L Almighty God, send Your holy angels to watch over all of our loved ones, especially those who live in distant places. Strengthen all those who serve us in the medical field. Give Your comfort and peace to all who are suffering from illness. Be with those who mourn. Grant to them the hope and assurance of a blessed reunion in heaven.

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.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel Lutheran Service Book 357, Lutheran Worship 31, The Lutheran Hymnal 62
Stanzas 4-7

4 O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree,
Free them from Satan's tyranny
That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. Refrain
ref Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

5 O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery. Refrain

6 O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight. Refrain

7 O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace. Refrain

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.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Some liturgical portions are adapted from Lutheran Service Book © 2006 Concordia Publishing House. Lutheran Service Book License: 10002731 Christ Lutheran Church, Stevensville, Michigan

Hymns are in the public domain. The remainder of this work including adaptations and the Devotional thoughts © 2022 Philip G. Quardokus. All rights reserved.

Picture of the Advent Wreath: Lutheran Advent wreath with one rose and three blue candles around a decorated white central candle, all lit, the Wikimedia Commons, used by permission,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Adventwreath.jpg>

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 Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 19 - 24, 2022

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.

Introit Psalm 130:5-8; antiphon Isaiah 64:1

- L** Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence.
- C** **I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;**
- L** my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
- C** **O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.**
- L** And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.
- 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** Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence.

Verse Matthew 1:23a

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.
- C** Alleluia, Alleluia. And they shall call his name Immanuel. 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.

It may be hard for you to believe but I didn't know that I like Chinese food until I was a fourth-year student at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. My sister and her husband, my mom and dad, Valerie and I had dinner at a Chinese restaurant. I was nervous thinking that I wouldn't find anything on the menu that I would like. That all changed with the first course, sizzling rice soup. Everything that followed was delightful.

I've learned that I like many different Chinese dishes. However, I must admit that I haven't tried them all. But there is one thing that I can't quite understand. How can food be both sweet and sour at the same time? It is one of the great mysteries of life.

Our introit for this week is like a sweet and sour dish. It's about impatient patience.

It begins with an antiphon from Isaiah 64:1, "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence." There is no hint of patience in this statement. God cannot act too soon.

This is followed by these wonderful verses of patient waiting from Psalm 130:5-8.

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
 and in his word I hope;
⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
 more than watchmen for the morning,
 more than watchmen for the morning.
⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord!
 For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
 and with him is plentiful redemption.
⁸ And he will redeem Israel
 from all his iniquities.

What makes it possible for us to transform our impatience into patience? It is this one little word, hope!

God's word reveals that with the Lord there is steadfast love. In this assurance, we have hope. His redemption is plentiful.

Not only do we trust that God loves us and that His will for us is always best. We also know that He will always do things at just the right time. His blessings are worth waiting for. Paul put it this way in Galatians 4:4-5 NIV):

"But when the set time had fully come [at just the right time], God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."

In Him, we place our hope.

L Let us pray. O Lord, thank You for the gift of hope. Grant us patience as we wait for the time when the heavens are opened wide and Christ returns to take us to be with Him forever.

C Amen.

Tuesday

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

Verse Matthew 1:23a

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. And they shall call his name Immanuel. 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 Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
C Amen.

This is the last of our “Stir up” collects for Advent. It provides insight into our greatest plight—sin. Sin weighs us down. It steals our joy. It makes life gloomy and cheerless.

We tend to blame everyone and everything else for the melancholy that invades our lives. But problems that come from outside ourselves are nothing compared to the distress that comes from our own personal failings and transgressions.

We know that God is able to protect us from external threats. But more than that, He is able to lift the overwhelming burden of guilt that wounds us to the core of our being. His grace and mercy in Christ lifts the crushing weight of our sin and restores the joy of our salvation.

Prayer: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; 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 1:23a

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. And they shall call his name Immanuel. Alleluia.

Psalms 24

- L** ¹The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,
C ²for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.
L ³Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?
C ⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.
L ⁵He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.
C ⁶Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
L ⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.
C ⁸Who is this King of glory?

The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!

L ⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!

And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

C ¹⁰**Who is this King of glory?**

The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!

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.**

Verses 7-8 and 9-10 of Psalm 24 are this great Advent refrain:

Lift up your heads, O gates!

And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle!

Advent is the time to welcome the coming King. Some suggest that Psalm 24 may have been written by David to be sung when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem through the city gates. There are no records to prove this. But it is appropriate for us to use it whenever we celebrate the coming of our heavenly King.

We sing it now in Advent as we welcome the one “who has been born king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). We remember it when our King comes riding on a donkey to shouts of hosanna. We hear its distant echo when we see the superscription on the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

During Advent, we open the gates of our hearts so that the King of Glory may come in with forgiveness and grace. We look forward to the time when King Jesus returns in all of His glory with His angels on the last day.

Prayer: O Lord, we praise You for being our King of Glory, strong and mighty. Thank you for being mighty in battle and winning the victory for us over sin, death, and the devil. Send Your Holy Spirit that the gates of our hearts would be open to receive the babe born in Bethlehem as our Savior and King. Amen.

Thursday

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

C **Amen.**

Verse Matthew 1:23a

L Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.

C **Alleluia, Alleluia. And they shall call his name Immanuel. 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 7:10–17

¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹“Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria.”

Some years ago, I was trying to help a pastor who was struggling to serve a nearby congregation. He was a personable young man but he just couldn’t understand the problems that he had caused for himself or how to fix them. He seemed to be going out of his way to torpedo his ministry. I was frustrated that I was unable to help him.

I sought input from an older pastor who also knew this young pastor and had worked with him a few years before. I expressed my frustration that I had run out of ideas for helping him. I concluded my comments by saying, “He’s a good guy but he can’t seem to get it together.”

At this point, my older and wiser friend touched my arm and exclaimed, “Phil, he’s not a good guy.” He then went on to explain what happened to lead him to that conclusion.

I don’t want to detail the rest of that conversation but I learned an important lesson that day. Not every person who seems to be friendly and pleasant is “a good guy.”

It is not friendliness or intelligence that makes a person “a good guy.” Ahaz was such a person. He was politically astute. He negotiated for protection from the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser. I’m sure the media loved him. But he was “a bad guy.” He didn’t trust God. He trusted his negotiating skills and an alliance with an idolatrous nation. He even went so far as to swear allegiance to the false gods of Assyria.

Despite all of that, God didn’t give up on him. He sent Isaiah to tell Ahaz to believe and trust the Lord. Isaiah wanted Ahaz to be a successful and faithful ruler of Judah. But it wasn’t to be. Ahaz was not “a good guy.” He rejected Isaiah and he also rejected God.

Nevertheless, Isaiah told him, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Ahaz didn’t want a sign. He didn’t want anything to do with God. He was not a good guy.

God fulfilled the promise of a sign a second time with the birth of Jesus. He was the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. The Baby born of the Virgin Mary was the sign of “God with us,” Immanuel, Jesus, our savior.

It doesn’t matter how intelligent or friendly you are, only those who recognize the salvation that is ours in Mary’s Son are the truly “good guys.” We have become “good” in Jesus because He forgives our sins and gives us His righteousness and eternal life.

Prayer: O Lord God, thank You for eternal life that is ours in Jesus. We ask for You to turn us from our sinful and idolatrous ways and move us to trust in You and believe the sign of salvation granted to us through the Virgin Mary’s Son. Amen.

Friday

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

G Amen.

Verse Matthew 1:23a

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia. And they shall call his name Immanuel. 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.

Romans 1:1–7

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

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

Paul's epistles were formatted differently than our letters are today. We begin with a salutation to the addressee and end with a valediction or closing by the sender. Paul began his letters by introducing himself. He followed that with his salutation to the addressee.

Paul's introduction of himself in the epistle to the Romans is the longest and most elaborate of any of his epistles. As you read through it, you will notice that it is not so much about him. Rather, it's mostly about Jesus! The prophets had long before promised that a descendant of David would come into the world to be our savior. This descendant of David is Jesus, the very Son of God who rose from the dead. The goal of Paul's apostleship was to bring people of all nations to faith in Jesus.

Then Paul writes this most significant statement. He says, "including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ." Paul's ministry was not just for "those people" out there. His ministry was for you! His work of bringing the Gospel was centered on bringing you to faith so that you would belong to Jesus! When you read Romans keep this in mind.

These words were written for you: "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Romans 3:22-25).

If you are distressed because of your sin, you are not alone. All have sinned! But do not despair. You are freely justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus!

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus to be our savior. Grant us faith to know that we belong to Him. Amen.

Saturday – Christmas Eve

[There is also a service of Lessons and Carols for you to download.](http://quardokus.com/homeworship/ChristmasEve24December2022.pdf)
<http://quardokus.com/homeworship/ChristmasEve24December2022.pdf>)

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

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

- L** Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
- C** **Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father: We worship You, we give You thanks, and we praise You for Your glory.**
- L** Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, You are Lord and God, You are the Lamb of God:
- C** **Lord Jesus Christ, You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.**
- L** Lord Jesus Christ, You are seated at the right hand of the Father; and we ask you to graciously receive our prayer.
- C** **For You alone are the Holy One,
You alone are the Lord,
You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

Collect of the Day

- L** Let us pray: O God, You make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold Him when He comes to be our Judge; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** **Amen.**

Isaiah 7:10–14

¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹“Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” ¹³And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 1:21

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, Alleluia.
- C** **Alleluia, Alleluia. For he will save his people from their sins. Alleluia.**

Matthew 1:18–25

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Many homes with children have an Elf on the Shelf. Our children grew up with the Cheese Ball Fairy.

Living in a home where dad is a pastor and mom sings in the choir means that the children attend all of the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services. Each year, we would return home from our second Christmas Eve service and find a cheese ball at our front door! It was the perfect addition to our tradition of snacking and opening gifts on Christmas Eve.

This happened year after year. Soon our children had a name for this mysterious Christmas Eve visitor and so the Cheese Ball Fairy was born.

When our children were old enough, they would attend the first Christmas Eve service and then return home while mom and dad participated in the second service. They developed the tradition of regularly checking the front step to see if the Cheese Ball Fairy had made her annual visit. Without fail, on one of those expeditions, a cheese ball would magically appear! This continued every Christmas Eve until just a few years ago when our now adult children encountered the Cheese Ball Fairy face to face!

Children love mysteries at Christmas. The wonder of a visit from Old St. Nick, his little spy on a shelf, and a red-nosed reindeer are all part of this mysterious season. And let us not forget the most amazingly marvelous visitor of all, the Cheese Ball Fairy!

While children and adults love mysteries, in a sense, Christmas is not about mystery. It is about pulling back the curtain to reveal the truth of God's love for all.

The first Christmas did not have a Cheese Ball Fairy. It was filled with angels! Gabriel visited Zachariah and Mary. The Angel of the Lord visited Joseph and the shepherds. Angels are messengers from God. God sent them so that everyone would know that Jesus was coming to save us from sin, death, and the devil. He did not want it to be a secret. Let's review a few of their messages:

The angel said to Joseph:

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20-21).

The angel said to Mary:

"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:18-33).

The angel said to the shepherds:

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:10-12).

Shepherds heard the multitude of the heavenly host say,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14 KJV).

Almighty God, thank You for the message of angels and the message of the Bible. Grant us faith to trust that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh sets us free from the bondage of sin; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Enhancing Your Worship © 2022 Philip G. Quardokus. All rights reserved.