

The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 19, 2021

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

God chose a faithful young woman to be the mother of our Savior. She recognized that in the eyes of the world she was not highly regarded but God set the might of the world in motion to bring her and Joseph to Bethlehem for Jesus to be born. He brings down rulers from their thrones but lifts up the humble. During this Advent time and always may we, like Mary, humbly serve the Light of the World.

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!

Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

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

Psalm 24:7-10

Arise, O Christian People Lutheran Service Book 354, Lutheran Worship 25, The Lutheran Hymnal 75



1 A - rise, O Chris - tian peo - ple! Pre - pare your - selves to -
2 Pre - pare the way be - fore Him; Pre - pare for Him the
3 The hum - ble heart and low - ly God rais - es up on
4 Pre - pare my heart, Lord Je - sus; Turn not from me a -



day; Pre - pare to greet the Sav - ior, Who takes your
best. Cast out what would of - fend Him, This great, this
high; Be - neath His feet in ter - ror The haugh - ty
side, And help me to re - ceive You This bless - ed



sins a - way. To us by grace a - lone The
heav'n - ly guest. Make straight, make plain the way: The
soul shall lie. The heart sin - cere and right, That
Ad - vent - tide. From stall and man - ger low Come



truth and light were giv - en; The prom - ised Lord from
 low - ly val - leys rais - ing, The heights of pride a -
 heeds God's in - vi - ta - tion And makes true prep - a -
 now to dwell with - in me; I'll sing Your prais - es



heav - en To all the world is shown.
 bas - ing, His path all e - ven lay.
 ra - tion— It is the Lord's de - light.
 glad - ly And forth Your glo - ry show.

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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:

P As we light the Fourth candle on our Advent wreath, we rejoice that God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of Immanuel, God with us, our Savior, Jesus. May we join with Mary in magnifying the Lord for doing great and mighty things through such a lowly birth in Bethlehem. Let us also humble ourselves to prepare for the Savior of the Nations to come.

C Savior of the nations, come,
 Virgin's Son, make here Your home!
 Marvel now, O heav'n and earth,
 That the Lord chose such a birth.

Here a maid was found with child,
 Yet remained a virgin mild.
 In her womb this truth was shown:
 God was there upon His throne.

Introit 1 Samuel 2:1b, 2, 5b–7; antiphon Luke 1:46b-47

- L** My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
C **My mouth derides my enemies,**
because I rejoice in your salvation.
- L** There is none holy like the Lord;
there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.
C **The barren has borne seven,**
but she who has many children is forlorn.
- L** The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
C **The Lord makes poor and makes rich;**
he brings low and he exalts.
- 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** My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

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.**

Micah 5:2–5a

- ²But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.
- ³Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return
to the people of Israel.
- ⁴And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth.
- ⁵And he shall be their peace.
- 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 80:1–7

- L** ¹Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.
- C** ²**Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us!**
- L** ³Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!
- C** ⁴**O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?**
- L** ⁵You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure.
- C** ⁶**You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh among themselves.**
- L** ⁷Restore us, O God of hosts;
- C** **let your face shine, that we may be saved!**

Hebrews 10:5–10

⁵When Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;

⁶in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.

⁷Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

⁸When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

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

Verse of the Day: 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.**

Luke 1:39–45

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

³⁹In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

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 sits at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty.

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

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

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

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



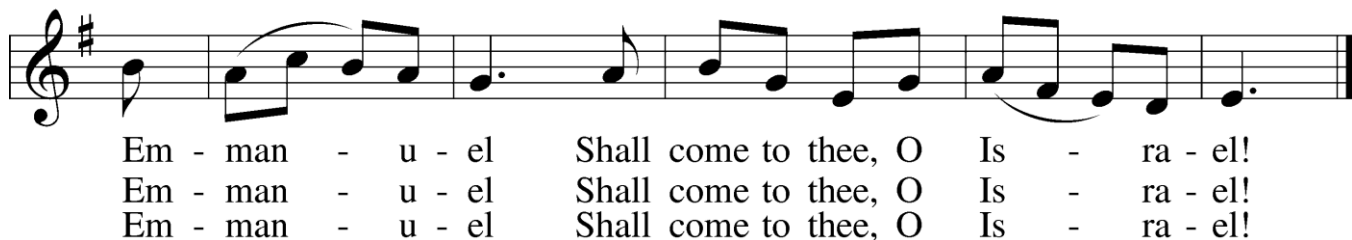
1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
2 O come, Thou Wis - dom from on high, Who or - d'rest all things
3 O come, O come, Thou Lord of might, Who to Thy tribes on



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!



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Devotional Thoughts:

One of the perks of being married to a woman with a beautiful voice is accompanying her to the choir Christmas party. While we were there, I scrutinized the snack and hors d'oeuvre table where I noticed a tray of olives. I did some quick mental calculations and took as many olives as I could without seeming to be greedy.

When the feast was over, I noticed that three olives remained on the tray! I congratulated myself for not depriving anyone of these coveted green gems as I quickly scooped up this orphaned trio.

Yes, I love olives. Unfortunately, I seem to forget that they are in the refrigerator at home. So I mostly eat them at church dinners.

In Israel, I observed that olives of every shape and variety are available for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The last time I was there, I resolved to eat olives at every meal. One day, at breakfast, I couldn't find any olives so my streak was broken. I later learned that I simply had not seen the olives.

So I'm sure it comes as no surprise to you that my favorite reindeer is named Olive. You're familiar with Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, and Vixen. You certainly know Rudolf but I prefer Olive, the other reindeer. She is so famous now that there is a book and an animated musical about her. If you haven't heard of her, I'm guessing that your children have. I first learned of her from the children of Christ Lutheran School.

She comes to mind because it seems that children and adults alike are fully aware of every detail concerning Santa and other Christmas lore. But when it comes to the authentic account of Christ's birth, the facts become a bit foggier.

Most of us remember Gabriel's words to Mary, "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."

We know by heart, "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." We recall the trip to Bethlehem, the swaddling clothes, and the manger.

We are acquainted with the shepherds who were "sore afraid" when the angel of the Lord said to them "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

We sing again and again, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." We joyfully join the shepherds and the Wisemen at the stable. We marvel at their gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh.

Our Gospel lesson for today is just as much part of the Christmas story as angels, shepherds, and Wisemen. Through the centuries, it was simply referred to as the Visitation. It has been the subject of many works of art. Around the world, churches have been named for it. But for many of us, it is less known than Olive, the other reindeer.

Mary had just encountered Gabriel. She not only learned that she would be the mother of the savior, the Son of the Most High, the long-awaited Messiah but she was also told that her elderly relative, Elizabeth had conceived a child! Amazing but true! Just like the shepherds hurrying to the manger, she made haste to visit Elizabeth in the hill country of Judah.

Elizabeth was in about her 24th week. There could be no doubt that Gabriel's revelation was true. Yet Zechariah could still not speak!

It must have been a surprise for Elizabeth when Mary appeared at her door. She hadn't bothered to send a text or an email to announce her visit. Nevertheless, Elizabeth recognized her at once. More astonishing than that, the unborn John the Baptist leaped for joy at Mary's voice. As their eyes met, I can imagine both of them thinking, "Truly, nothing is impossible with God!"

And now for the good part, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit! By inspiration, she took one look at Mary and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” Before her very eyes was the fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Elizabeth immediately knew that standing before her was the mother of God’s own Son! She asked in amazement, “Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Elizabeth became the first person in history to recognize Jesus as Lord! Astonishingly, this remarkable event is little noticed in our retelling of the Christmas story. These two women know what the angels would soon reveal to the shepherds, Jesus is the savior, Christ, the Lord.

Mary remained with Elizabeth for about three months. It would have been wonderful to listen in on the hours of conversations that they shared during that time.

There is something very important for us to learn from this visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. If God had not revealed to them the truth about Jesus, they wouldn’t have known that He would be the savior of the world.

It is the same way for us. We can know all the “facts” about the birth of Jesus. We can recite the story of the trip to Bethlehem, the manger, the shepherds, and the Wisemen. But this is not enough. We need the Holy Spirit to work faith in our hearts so that we know that Jesus is the savior who is Christ the Lord. Or what John the Baptist would declare a little more than thirty years later that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Let’s conclude by hearing the final words of Elizabeth to Mary, “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Elizabeth points out that the most important thing is that Mary believed! Advent is a time of renewing faith. Unless we believe God’s promises, all of what Jesus did for us is lost!

We too are blessed when we believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord,

who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death,

that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,

just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

This is most certainly true.

“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.

L O Lord, mighty God, Bethlehem was too small to be among the clans of Judah, yet from it came forth the King of kings. Grant that we would not despise the small and humble things that you have blessed. Teach us that You are able to use the most meager among us for the work of Your kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C Amen.

L O Lord, mighty God, You sent Your Son to shepherd His flock in strength. Grant us faith to trust the Good Shepherd to lead us into green pastures beside the still waters.

C Amen.

L O Lord, we thank You for using Elizabeth and Mary in Your plan of salvation. Bless the faithful women of today who work tirelessly for the advancement of Your kingdom and the salvation of souls.

C Amen.

L O Lord, Mary believed Your promises. Grant that during this Advent-Christmas time, more people would come to faith and believe Your promises of life and salvation through Jesus life, death, and resurrection.

C Amen.

L Almighty God, send Your holy angels to watch over all of our loved ones, especially those who live in distant places. We thank You for the protection granted to all who have attended to our needs during the pandemic. As we again experience an increase in infections, we ask for Your continued protection and grace.

C Amen.

C I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

C Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

L Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

L The Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

C Amen.

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

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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 Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 20 – December 25, 2021

Introduction

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

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

Monday

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

Verse of the Day: 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.

Introit 1 Samuel 2:1b, 2, 5b–7; antiphon Luke 1:46b-47

- L** My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
- C** My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in your salvation.
- L** There is none holy like the Lord;
there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.
- C** The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.
- L** The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
- C** The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low and he exalts.
- 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** My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

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. |

Our introit is a creative combination of an antiphon from the beginning of Mary's Magnificat and part of Hannah's Prayer from 1 Samuel 2. Hannah longed for a child but year after year she was barren. 1 Samuel 1:10 records, "She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly."

She promised that if God answered her prayer by giving her a son then she would return him to the Lord. God granted her request. 1 Samuel 1:20 tells us, "Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel."

Hannah was faithful to her promise. In 1 Samuel 1:27-28, she says, "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord."

Samuel became a great prophet. The Bible books of 1 & 2 Samuel are named for him. God used him to anoint Saul to be king over Israel. When Saul displeased God, God used Samuel to anoint King David. And so Hannah and Samuel play an important role in God's plan of bringing His son into the world to save His people from their sins.

1 Samuel 2:1-10 is Hannah's song of praise to God for answering her prayer. Mary may have modeled her Magnificat on Hannah's Prayer.

Hannah, Mary, and Elizabeth remind me of all the faithful women who trust in God and His promises. None will be as well known as Mary, the mother of our Lord. But whether they are remembered or only work behind the scenes. God uses them for His purposes. Some may be active in bringing comfort and care to those in need. Others may be active in reaching out to the lost. In all of this, we should be grateful for the faithful women who pray fervently as Hannah did. May we join our prayers with theirs as we trust in God's promises of life and salvation for all who believe.

Let us pray: O Lord, grant to us spirits that rejoice in our savior, Jesus. Strengthen our faith that we may join Hannah and Mary in magnifying Your holy name. Amen.

Tuesday

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

Verse of the Day: 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 our third “stir up” prayer of Advent. It is our second “Stir up Your power, O Lord” collect.

In this prayer, we ask God to use His might and power to lift the crushing weight of sins from our shoulders. This is the reason for Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Good Friday, and Easter. The reason for the season is the salvation that God brings to us in Christ.

Without God’s intervention into our world, we would all be hopelessly crushed by sin and death. It is only through God’s abundant grace and mercy that we can have this burden removed. His advent into our world brings with it the joy of salvation and the release from bondage to sin.

I am reminded of an illustration that I once saw. The artist depicts a man being pressed into an open grave by a huge bundle of sin. Massive chains surround this bundle attaching it to his back. However, if you look carefully at the chains, you will notice that each chain is broken. This man is free from the crushing weight of sin. It remains on his back only because he refuses to let it go. On further examination, you will notice that his tombstone reads, “I did it my way.”

God has already answered our Advent prayer. He has used the power of the cross to lift the weight of sin from our shoulders and place it on Jesus. May we continue to live in repentance and so rejoice in the forgiveness brought to us by the baby born in Bethlehem.

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. 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 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 80:1–7

L ¹Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.

C ²Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us!

L ³Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!

C ⁴O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people’s prayers?

L ⁵You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure.

C ⁶You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh among themselves.

L ⁷Restore us, O God of hosts;

C let your face shine, that we may be saved!

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.

One of the hazards that we all face is overlooking the commonplace blessings that we experience day to day. I recently was riding in a car with my daughter who is visiting from a large city. As we drove along, she

remarked, “Look at all the green.” We were passing vineyards, orchards, and fields. I thought to myself, “I drive on this road every day. What a blessing!”

Later, we went by two flocks of sheep. I made a dad comment, “Oh, look. They are all wearing wool sweaters.”

Until my daughter brought it to my attention, I hadn’t reflected on the joys of living in a semi-rural area. I am so glad that I was able to again appreciate these blessings. The other way that we may come to appreciate these commonplace blessings is when they are taken away.

Psalm 80 uses two rural images. In the first seven verses that serve as our psalm for this week, we see God as the Shepherd of Israel and Joseph as the flock. The final twelve verses use the imagery of a vineyard.

The people are in danger of losing more than flocks and vineyards. Their very existence is in peril. A powerful enemy is at their gates. Psalm 80 is a plea for God to hear and respond to their prayers for salvation and restoration.

As you read the psalm, you may have noticed these words from verse 2, “Stir up your might and come to save us.” They remind me of the words from our collect, “Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might.”

We, too, are in danger of losing everything. Not only are flocks, vineyards, orchards, and fields in danger. Our very souls are threatened by the enemies of sin, death, and the devil. We also pray, “Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!” (Psalm 80:3, 7, 19).

In answer to our prayer, God sent His only Son to be born of the Virgin Mary and enter our world of sin to be our savior. We pray that by His grace and mercy, we would come to faith and stay in faith until He takes us to be with Him for all eternity.

We vigorously repeat the Advent refrain of Psalm 80, “Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!”

Prayer: O Lord, stir up your might and come to save us. Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. 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 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.

Micah 5:2–5a

²But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.
³Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return
to the people of Israel.
⁴And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth.
⁵And he shall be their peace.

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!

Throughout most of history, Bethlehem was little more than a dot on the map. It was just one of many small settlements that surrounded the metropolis of Jerusalem. Nothing of significance happened there. It was the fly-over country of the Holy Land, except for one thing. It was the hometown of King David.

God promised throughout the Old Testament that one day a savior would be born. The first prophecy was given in Genesis 3:15. As each prophecy was made known, more and more was revealed about the identity of the long-promised Messiah. He would be a descendent of Abraham. He would be of royal lineage from King David. He would be born in the little-noticed town of Bethlehem.

This astounding prophecy recorded in Micah 5:2 was well known to those who studied the Bible. Therefore, when the Wise Men went to Jerusalem seeking the newborn king, the chief priests and scribes were quick to report that the savior would be born:

In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

““And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”” (Matthew 2:5-6).

Luke 2 tells us that God used the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, to bring Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem because they were of the house and line of David! And so, the prophecy of Micah 2:5 was fulfilled in a remarkable way.

This prophecy from Micah reminds us that everything God does is remarkable! From saving the world through the baby born in Bethlehem to bringing you to faith, God has done remarkable things for you.

We may believe that our lives are insignificant and unimportant but Bethlehem tells us again that God can use the smallest things to accomplish His purpose.



1 O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, How still we see thee lie!
2 For Christ is born of Mar - y, And, gath - ered all a - bove
3 How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly The won - drous gift is giv'n!
4 O ho - ly Child of Beth - le - hem, De - scend to us, we pray;



A - bove thy deep and dream-less sleep The si - lent stars go by;
While mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep Their watch of won - d'ring love.
So God im - parts to hu - man hearts The bless - ings of His heav'n.
Cast out our sin, and en - ter in, Be born in us to - day.



Yet in thy dark streets shin - eth The ev - er - last - ing light.
O morn - ing stars, to - geth - er Pro - claim the ho - ly birth,
No ear may hear His com - ing; But in this world of sin,
We hear the Christ - mas an - gels The great glad tid - ings tell;



The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee to - night.
And prais - es sing to God the king And peace to all the earth!
Where meek souls will re - ceive Him, still The dear Christ en - ters in.
O come to us, a - bide with us, Our Lord Im - man - u - el!

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Friday – Christmas Eve (There is also a service of Lessons and Carols for you to download.)

- 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 1:28-33).

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.

Saturday – Christmas Day (There is also a complete service for Christmas Day for you to download.)

Ho, Ho, Ho. Merry Christmas!

Pause for a moment and consider this question: "What makes Christmas special?"

Is it Christmas cookies lovingly prepared with extra sprinkles?

Is it a prize turkey delivered to Bob Cratchit? Or is it a ham with an extra special glaze?

Is it the perfect Christmas tree meticulously decorated by the Leonardo da Vinci of your family?

Is it grandma's prize recipe for eggnog or pecan pie with a mountain of whipped cream?

Is it grand music streaming from every direction or is it the beaming smiles of children?

Is it finding the perfect gift under the tree or is it a hug from loved ones?

We could easily spend an hour listing things that make Christmas special. We all must agree that Christmas is an extraordinary event. Pagans, atheists, secularists, unbelievers, and non-Christians of every description cannot help but notice that Christmas is special.

Christmas is the time when we go the extra mile. We buy the exceptional gift. We celebrate to the point of exhaustion!

Why? How did this all begin?

Christmas began in darkness, the darkness of sin and death. Christmas began in a world without Christmas. There was no real joy in the world. Heaven and nature did not sing. It was a world dominated by Scrooges and Grinches, by scribes and Pharisees, by Herods and Caesars. Money changers filled the temple. False prophets came in sheep's clothing but inwardly were ravenous wolves. Hired hands fled and abandoned the flock. Thieves and robbers came to steal and kill and destroy.

But in this world of sin, the dear Christ enters in. John describes it this way, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9). "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5-6).

Every Christmas candle, every Christmas star, every Christmas light testifies to this Light shining in the darkness. But unfortunately, not everyone receives His light. Many choose to remain in darkness. As St. Paul writes, they live "in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Ephesians 4:17-18).

But for us, children of Christmas, the world is quite different. The Bible describes us this way: "The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:16).

Long ago, and far, far away, a beam of light from a miraculous star reached the eye of a wise man in the east gazing into the sky. Something special, wonderful, and amazing happened. This beam of light was God's signal that Christmas would change the world. Soon they mounted an expedition to find the new-born king. This was no ordinary king. No ordinary gifts would do. They must bring Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. They must bow down and worship Him, the Light shining in the darkness.

The wise men discovered a baby who fulfilled the angel's promise to Mary. Her child was the Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32). The star led them to a boy named Jesus because He would save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). They bowed down and worshiped Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). They gave their gifts to the "Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

The light of that Christmas star has also touched you. It was not a light from a night sky. It was the light of God's word. His word is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Psalm 119:105). Through the gospel, the eyes of your hearts have been enlightened (Ephesians 1:18).

And what have your eyes seen? Have they seen "a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer"? No, you have seen the Word made flesh. You "have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Why is Christmas special? It is special because God's only-begotten Son became one of us! He was born of the Virgin Mary.

This little child wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger is God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made being of the same substance of the Father by whom all things were made! This Babe lying in a manger is the Son of God who came down from heaven for us and our salvation!

He was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.

This is why Christmas is special! Christmas is special because Jesus went the extra mile. Christmas is special because Jesus, God's only-begotten Son is an exceptional gift. Christmas is special because Jesus loved us to the point of exhaustion and death on the cross. Christmas is special because Jesus rose from the dead.

God no longer sends Christmas stars. Angels no longer proclaim the Savior's birth or sing "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill toward men." But He still sends light into the world! "You are the light of the world!" (Matthew 5:14). "You are all children of light, children of the day!" (1 Thessalonians 5:5). You all

have received Jesus. You believe in His name. You have become children of God. You were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13).

You make Christmas special when you tell again the Christmas story. You make Christmas special when you touch the people around you with the love of Christ. You make Christmas special when you go the extra mile to show compassion. You make Christmas special when you give the exceptional gift of forgiveness. You make Christmas special when you serve God and your neighbors to the point of exhaustion!

1 O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

2 For Christ is born of Mary,
And, gathered all above
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the king
And peace to all the earth!

3 How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him, still
The dear Christ enters in.

4 O holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Immanuel!

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