

The Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 21, 2025



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 28:20 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 Fourth Sunday in Advent, we light all four candles. You may choose to light them 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 - doned 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.

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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:

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 Blessèd 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 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 ¹⁰Who 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!

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Devotional thoughts:

Here we are! It's the Fourth Sunday in Advent! Christmas is a four days 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, 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 Heavenly Father, You raised up Joseph, a man honorable and just, to be the guardian and earthly father to Your Son. Give all earthly fathers wisdom, patience, pride of duty and, above all, faith and loyalty to Your Word, that knowing Your true Guardianship, they may head their households with godly forbearance.

C Amen.

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

C Amen.

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

C Amen.

L Lord God, heavenly Father, we give You thanks for Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the Dayspring from on high and the splendor of light everlasting. By His coming in the flesh and by His blessed Word, enlighten our hearts with the Gospel, enlighten the hearts of those who sit in the darkness of unbelief with the light of saving faith, and enlighten those who dwell in the shadow of death with the certain hope of the resurrection through Him. Grant that, as we recall with thanksgiving His advent in the flesh, we may always confess Him and remain watchful for His advent in glory at the Last Day; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

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

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

L Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

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

C Amen.

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.

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 Week of The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 22—27, 2025

Introduction

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

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

Monday

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

Verse Matthew 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 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.

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.

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.

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 - Christmas Eve

(There is also a service of Lessons and Carols for you to download.
<http://quardokus.com/homeworship/ChristmasEve24December2025.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.

Thursday – Christmas, The Nativity of Our Lord

(There is also a full service for Christmas to download.

<http://quardokus.com/homeworship/Christmas25December2025.pdf>)

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

Verse John 1:14

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia, The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, Alleluia.
- C** **Alleluia, Alleluia, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. Alleluia.**

Kyrie

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

John 1:1–18

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

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!

L To us a child is born, to us a son is given; let us offer praise, thanks and prayers to God the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Almighty God, we ask that all who celebrate the incarnation and acknowledge that their God reigns would lift up their voices and sing for joy, and would always be ready to tell others about the Word made flesh

C Amen.

Friday

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.

Saturday

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

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

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

Verse Matthew 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.

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