

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

January 29, 2023

Dearest Jesus, We Are Here

Lutheran Service Book 592, Lutheran Worship 226, The Lutheran Hymnal 300



1 Dear - est Je - sus, we are here, Glad - ly Your com -
2 Your com - mand is clear and plain, And we would o -
3 There - fore we have come to You, In our arms this
4 Gra - cious Head, Your mem - ber own; Shep - herd, take Your



mand o - bey - ing; With this child we now draw near
bey it du - ly: "You must all be born a - gain,
in - fant bear - ing. Tru - ly here Your grace we view;
lamb and feed it; Prince of Peace, make here Your throne;



In re - sponse to Your own say - ing That to You it
Heart and life re - new - ing tru - ly, Born of wa - ter
May this child, Your mer - cy shar - ing, In Your arms be
Way of Life, to heav - en lead it; Pre - cious Vine, let



shall be giv - en As a child and heir of heav - en.
and the Spir - it, And My king - dom thus in - her - it."
shield - ed ev - er, Yours on earth and Yours for - ev - er.
noth - ing sev - er From Your side this branch for - ev - er.

- 5 Now into Your heart we pour
Prayers that from our hearts proceeded.
Our petitions heav'nward soar;
May our hearts' desires be heeded!
Write the name we now have given;
Write it in the book of heaven!

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.

Introit Psalm 1:1–5; antiphon Psalm 1:6

L For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

C Blessèd is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

L but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

C He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

L The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

C Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

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 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

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: Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** **Amen.**

Micah 6:1–8

- ¹Hear what the LORD says:
Arise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.
- ²Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,
and he will contend with Israel.
- ³“O my people, what have I done to you?
How have I wearied you? Answer me!
- ⁴For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.
- ⁵O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”
- ⁶“With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
- ⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
- ⁸He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Gradual Psalm 117:1–2a; 96:8

L Praise the Lord, all nations!

C **Extol him, all peoples!**

L For great is his steadfast love toward us,

C **and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.**

L Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;

C **bring an offering, and come into his courts!**

Psalm 15

L ¹O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?

Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

C ²**He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart;**

L ³who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

C ⁴**in whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD;
who swears to his own hurt and does not change;**

L ⁵who does not put out his money at interest
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.

C **He who does these things shall never be moved.**

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

¹⁸For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

L This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:3

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia, Blessed are the poor in spirit, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Alleluia.

Matthew 5:1–12

- L** The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 5th chapter.
C Glory to You, O Lord.

¹Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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

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

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

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

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

Son of God, Eternal Savior

Lutheran Service Book 842, Lutheran Worship 394, The Lutheran Hymnal n/a



1 Son of God, e - ter - nal Sav - ior, Source of life and
2 As You, Lord, have lived for oth - ers, So may we for
3 Come, O Christ, and reign a - mong us, King of love and
4 Son of God, e - ter - nal Sav - ior, Source of life and



truth and grace, Word made flesh, whose birth a - mong us
oth - ers live. Free - ly have Your gifts been grant - ed;
Prince of Peace; Hush the storm of strife and pas - sion,
truth and grace, Word made flesh, whose birth a - mong us



Hal - lows all our hu - man race, You our Head, who, throned in
Free-ly may Your ser - vants give. Yours the gold and Yours the
Bid its cru - el dis - cords cease. By Your pa - tient years of
Hal - lows all our hu - man race: By Your pray - ing, by Your



glo - ry, For Your own will ev - er plead: Fill us with Your
sil - ver, Yours the wealth of land and sea; We but stew - ards
toil - ing, By Your si - lent hours of pain, Quench our fe - vered
will - ing That Your peo - ple should be one, Grant, O grant our



love and pit - y, Heal our wrongs, and help our need.
of Your boun - ty Held in sol - emn trust will be.
thirst of plea - sure, Stem our self - ish greed of gain.
hope's fru - i - tion: Here on earth Your will be done.

Devotional thoughts:

Have you ever done something hard? I mean really hard. Maybe you have run a marathon or competed in a triathlon. Have climbed a mountain or snowshoed across the tundra?

Maybe you have crossed a desert on foot or completed a free dive to the depths of the ocean. Have you wrestled an alligator or captured a python?

No, I haven't done any of those things either. But I have written a sermon based on the word "blessed."

It seemed like the thing to do at the time. Our Gospel lesson is the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It consists of the Beatitudes. The word Beatitude is derived from the Latin word *beati*, the plural of *beatus* which is an adjective meaning blessed.

Jesus used the word "blessed" nine times in the Beatitudes. It seemed logical to preach a sermon titled BLESSED. I should have wrestled an alligator.

It's not that the word itself is difficult to understand. The Greek word is *makarios* (μακάριος). It means blessed or happy. It conveys the idea of God extending His benefits. It is such a well-loved concept that Makários is a common name among Eastern Orthodox Christians.

This is where things began to get a little difficult. It turns out that the word blessed is used over 280 times in the Bible with more than 80 times in the New Testament alone. This includes 50 times in the psalms and 24 times in Luke. (As an aside, the Bible uses the words "bless," "blessed," and "blessing" almost 500 times!)

This is when I rolled up my sleeves, tightened my belt, and took a deep dive. I began by reading all the references in Genesis. Next, I read all the times that "blessed" is used in the psalms. Then, I read every one of the times that the word "blessed" is used in the New Testament. Finally, I looked up and read the references to "blessed" made by the commentators that I regularly study.

Along the way, I copied the passages that I thought would be valuable for a sermon on the Beatitudes. In addition to the nine times Jesus used blessed in the Beatitudes, I found 25 passages for us to consider.

Fasten your seat belts. Here we go! Not really. Let's take an abbreviated tour and end at Jesus' feet on top of the Mount of Beatitudes.

Did you know that the first words God spoke to our human race were a blessing? After God created Adam and Eve the Bible records this in Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

The first words Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount were, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The Book of Psalms begins, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers."

What can we learn from this? God wants to bless us. God has always desired to bless His people. In Numbers 6:22-27, God gave Aaron this blessing to place upon the people.

²² The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

²⁴ The Lord bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

²⁷ "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

If you haven't already guessed that when Jesus used the word "blessed" in the Sermon on the Mount, He wanted to indicate that God has acted or is willing to act for your benefit. Nine times Jesus declared His people to be blessed because of what God has in store for them. He intends to do whatever is necessary for your good.

The first Beatitude informs all the rest, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This is like all the others. It is an invitation to come to the grace that God offers to us in Christ.

Those who are wise in worldly ways believe that these Beatitudes are foolishness. They are convinced that God helps those who help themselves. In the Beatitudes, Jesus teaches us just the opposite. God helps those who can't help themselves.

Those who are poor in spirit know that they must look to God for everything! The truly poor in spirit are those who come to God with empty hands of repentance seeking to be included in His Kingdom of Grace.

God does not disappoint us. He sent Jesus to be a blessing for just such people. On the cross, Jesus opened the Kingdom of Heaven to those who recognize that they are poor in spirit and come to Him in faith to receive the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

We are among those who have become truly blessed. We understand Psalm 32:1, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." We are the ones who hear the word of God and keep it (Luke 11:28).

God's people know that this world brings persecution and ridicule but we are blessed to look forward to "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" (1 Peter 1:4).

You and I understand that every true blessing is always associated with God's actions for us in Jesus Christ. He gives us house and home, spouse and children, and all that we need to support this body and life. He gives us comfort when we mourn. He fulfills our desire for righteousness. He hears and answers our cries for mercy. He gives us pure hearts of faith so that we can see Him in Jesus' cross and resurrection. He makes us His children so that we may call the Prince of Peace our dear brother.

God's people are often persecuted for their faithfulness to God's word and His plan of salvation. But this is but a temporary and light burden that we bear until we hear the final beatitude of Revelation 14:13, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

"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.

Prayers

L God of all wisdom, You have revealed to us that the Word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but it is Your power to all who are being saved. Strengthen our faith that we would not turn to human wisdom but boldly proclaim Christ and Him crucified.

C Amen.

L Lord, teach us to hunger and thirst for righteousness that may find satisfaction in Your word of truth and learn to live our lives in ways that are pleasing to You.

C Amen.

L Lord keep us from foolish pride and grant us the humility of a poor spirit that through repentance and faith, we may receive the inheritance of Your kingdom.

C Amen.

L Almighty God, give our leaders wisdom for the challenges ahead. Send Your holy angels to watch over all of our loved ones, especially those who live in distant places. Protect all who attend to our needs during this ongoing pandemic.

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 God of God, O Light of Light

Lutheran Service Book 810, Lutheran Worship 83, The Lutheran Hymnal 132



1 O God of God, O Light of Light, O Prince of Peace and
2 For deep in proph-ets' sa-cred page, And grand in po-ets'
3 That life of truth, those deeds of love, That death so steeped in
4 Then raise to Christ a might-y song, And shout His name, His



King of kings: To You in heav-en's glo-ry bright The song of
wing-ed word, Slow-ly in type, from age to age The na-tions
hate and scorn— These all are past, and now a-bove He reigns, our
mer-cies tell! Sing, heav'n-ly host, your praise pro-long, And all on



praise for - ev - er rings. To Him who sits up - on the throne,
saw their com - ing Lord; Till through the deep Ju - de - an night
King once crowned with thorn. Lift up your heads, O might-y gates!
earth, your an - them swell! All hail, O Lamb for sin - ners slain!



The Lamb once slain but raised a - gain, Be all the glo - ry
Rang out the song, "Good-will to men!" Sung once by first - born
So sang that host be - yond our ken. Lift up your heads, your
For - ev - er let the song as - cend! Wor - thy the Lamb, en -



He has won, All thanks and praise! A - men, a - men.
sons of light, It ech - oes now, "Good - will!" A - men.
King a - waits. We lift them up. A - men, a - men.
throned to reign, All glo - ry, pow'r! A - men, a - men.

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 after Epiphany

January 30 – February 4, 2023

Introduction

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

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

Introit Psalm 1:1–5; antiphon Psalm 1:6

- L** For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.
- C** **Blessèd is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;**
- L** but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- C** **He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.**
- L** The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
- C** **Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.**
- 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** For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:3

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia, Blessed are the poor in spirit, Alleluia.
- C** Alleluia, Alleluia, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 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.

Our introit is Psalm 1. It's an appropriate psalm for the Sunday when we read the Beatitudes. Unfortunately, the antiphon is verse six which obscures the fact the first word of Psalm 1, and therefore, all the psalms, is "Blessed."

This psalm details the contrast between the "blessed" and the "wicked." The blessed thrive like a well-irrigated tree. The wicked are blown away in a harsh dry wind.

One common characteristic of sinful, wicked people is their belief that they don't need God and His word. They plan all of their actions based on personal preferences and the supremacy of their will. They have no concern for others or God's law. They scoff at those who put their trust in God's promises. In their own eyes, they are wiser than the foolish people who believe that God cares.

The "blessed" take a totally different view of life. They delight in God's word and meditate on it day and night. They trust in God's promises rather than human wisdom.

This is the way of the cross. At Jesus' crucifixion, it appeared that wickedness had won. The powerful Romans overcame the meek and gentle Savior. Jesus' enemies believed that their plotting and scheming were wiser than the Holy One of God.

But on Easter morning, everything was turned upside down. Sin, death, and the devil had been defeated. Life and hope triumphed.

Jesus lives! The victory is won! May we always be counted among the blessed who delight in God's love revealed to us in His word.

L Let us pray. O Lord God, thank You for the salvation that comes through the foolishness of the cross. Move us to abandon the ways of the wicked and cling to our Savior for every blessing of body and soul.
C Amen.

Tuesday

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

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:3

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Blessed are the poor in spirit, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 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: Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

For a time when I was on vicarage at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Moline, Illinois, we only had one car. Valerie was teaching third grade at Immanuel Lutheran School in Rock Island about 7 miles away.

Some days, she was able to drive to work. On other days, I would take her to school in the morning and pick her up in the afternoon.

On one particular day, I was running late. I drove down 41st Street to John Deere Highway. John Deere Highway was a four-lane road with traffic lights.

I was focused on making up as much time as possible so I was in the left lane ready to pass any slower traffic. I caught up with two semi-trucks driving side by side. They were traveling well under the speed limit. Needless to say, I was frustrated. I started to feel anger welling up when all of a sudden an important realization came to mind. I asked myself, "Could it be that God had sent these trucks to prevent me from getting to an intersection too soon?"

We all have heard of serious and sometimes fatal accidents that have happened because someone was in the wrong place at exactly the wrong time. At that moment, my anger and frustration were replaced with calmness.

I've never forgotten that instant in time. Have you ever stopped to consider how often God may be protecting you when aren't even aware of it?

We live in the midst of many dangers. Without God's protection, we would never survive.

The gravest danger we face is the temptation to abandon God. In our collect, we are praying for God's strength and protection through all these dangers. He answers our prayers by sending His angels to watch over us. They often do this in ways we do not recognize. He protects us from the greatest danger of all by granting us salvation for Jesus' sake.

Prayer: Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You 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 5:3

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Blessed are the poor in spirit, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Alleluia.

Psalms 15

L ¹O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

C ²**He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart;**

L ³who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

C ⁴**in whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD;
who swears to his own hurt and does not change;**

L ⁵who does not put out his money at interest
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.

C **He who does these things shall never be moved.**

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.

As you read Psalm 15, did you think of Alice Cooper? I did. Well, not right away. I must admit that Alice Cooper would have been a more culturally relevant reference 30 years ago.

In 1992, Wayne's World debuted at number one and was the eighth highest-grossing film of the year. It cost \$20 million to make but had a total box office of \$181 million! Roger Ebert gave the film three stars out of four!

During one iconic scene, Wayne and Garth meet Alice Cooper. He invites them to stick around and hang out. Wayne and Garth immediately drop to their knees and bow down to Alice repeating, "We're not worthy!"

This reflects the question at the beginning of Psalm 15. To paraphrase, it asks, "Who is worthy to approach our holy God?"

Wayne and Garth are in awe of Alice Cooper. Their recognition of unworthiness is at the same time humorous and accurate. Yet who in our culture recognizes our intrinsic unworthiness to come into God's presence?

The remaining four verses explain just who is worthy to draw near to God. Only those who are blameless and have a pure heart are worthy to worship. God will welcome only those who do not slander and do no evil against their neighbor. A worthy person accepts nothing vile.

Judging by this standard, no one is worthy to worship God. We do not belong in His presence.

Nevertheless, the historic Divine Service of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod begins, "Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart." How can we dare draw near to God? We aren't blameless. Our hearts aren't pure.

It is Jesus who makes us worthy to worship our holy God. It is His sacrifice for sin that cleanses our hearts and makes us blameless.

You may recall that the full text of the beginning of the Divine Service reads this way, "Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness." It is by repentance and forgiveness that we may enter God's presence and truly worship Him. God grants this to us by grace through faith for Jesus' sake.

For this reason, the pastor refrains from entering the chancel until the introit following the absolution. Sinful people may not enter God's presence but forgiven sinners are welcomed with open arms! Because of Christ, we anticipate dwelling in the House of the Lord forever.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank You for welcoming forgiven sinners into your presence. We recognize our own unworthiness to approach You apart from the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin. Grant us pure and blameless hearts for His sake so that the words of our mouths and the mediation of our hearts would be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

Thursday February 2 Candlemas

The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of our Lord

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

Verse of the Day: Luke 2:34b

L	Alleluia, Alleluia,
C	Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel. 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.

Luke 2:22–32

²²And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, [Mary and Joseph] brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” ²⁵Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰for my eyes have seen your salvation
³¹that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel.”

Can you believe that it’s 40 days after Christmas already? Crowds are gathering in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania at Gobbler’s Knob to celebrate Candlemas also known as The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of our Lord.

Of course, this is all said “tongue in cheek.” I know that they are there to celebrate Groundhog Day. I wonder how many in the crowd know the connection of today with the life of Jesus.

We celebrate Jesus’ birth on December 25. Forty days after Jesus’ birth, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were at the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the requirements of Leviticus 12 for the purification of Mary and the presentation of Jesus. Hence, we celebrate this event on February 2.

On this day Simeon came to the temple and took Jesus into his arms speaking the famous words of the Nunc Dimittis that we sing following the Lord’s Supper.

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word,
for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people,
a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before he had seen the promised Messiah—the Lord’s Christ. With Jesus in his arms, the promise was fulfilled. Looking at Jesus, Simeon exclaimed, “My eyes have seen Thy salvation!” He was now ready to depart this life and enter into the mansions of heaven.

On this day, we, too, rejoice that our eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord in the person of Jesus Christ. Through faith in Him, we are also ready to enter the eternal mansions of our Father’s house in heaven.

The Epiphany season began with the first gentiles coming to worship Jesus. On this day, we rejoice that Jesus is the light of life for the Gentiles. He is not only the Savior of the Jewish nation. He has come to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We were once strangers and foreigners but now we are part of God’s family (Ephesians 2:19).

To celebrate the light of Jesus that lightens the gentiles, churches were once filled with candles on this day. They were blessed and given to the faithful. In their homes, these candles represented the light of Christ. Hence, this day acquired the name Candlemas. Let us always celebrate the light of Christ in our lives.

Prayer: Almighty and ever-living God, as Your only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in the substance of our flesh, grant that we may be presented to You with pure and clean hearts; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Friday

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

C Amen.

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:3

L Alleluia, Alleluia, Blessed are the poor in spirit, Alleluia.

C Alleluia, Alleluia, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Alleluia.

Kyrie

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

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

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

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

¹⁸For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Sometimes, writing these little meditations is easy. Other times, I struggle to find just the right thing to say to make a relevant point concerning the Scripture reading. Still other times, I have a relevant comment but worry that it will be taken the wrong way. Today is such a day. But fools rush in where angels fear to go. So let's begin.

As I read the Apostle Paul's quotation of Isaiah 29:14, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart,” a certain phrase jumped into my mind. It has been floating around for the last couple of years. I'm hoping that I can talk about it in a way that is helpful and wholesome without

causing misunderstandings and hurt feelings.

The little phrase that has caused controversy in the media and among politicians contains only two words. It has been used to push one agenda and it has been ridiculed to promote an opposite agenda. Without intending to take sides on any political or social debate, I think a discussion of this phrase perfectly fits Paul's comments in our epistle for this week.

While you have been reading this, some phrases may have crossed your mind. By any chance, were you thinking of these two words: Settled Science?

I like science. I am a curious person by nature. Under different circumstances, I could have easily pursued a career that was heavily engaged with science and technology.

The phrase, "Settled Science," results from a careless use of the language. We've begun to speak of "science" as though it were a thing, an object that can be held in your hand like an apple or a rock. We now say things like "follow the science" or "science shows us" or "science heals us," etc. as if there is something out there named science that can do all these miraculous things? Of course, there isn't.

A more careful way of speaking would be to recognize that what we call science is just a shorthand way of referencing the conclusions reached by following the scientific method. Some of these conclusions have more data and research behind them and some have less.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we've learned a new phrase that is equally careless, "Follow the science." It's as though science is an escaped fox that is being hunted down by baying hounds chased by horsemen in red riding togs. What we actually mean to say is that preliminary conclusions are replaced by more refined conclusions as more experiments are conducted to test those conclusions.

Sometimes the conclusions of "settled science" fall like the walls of Jericho to new research. Or new conclusions are reached by reevaluating old data. Ask Isaac Newton. Those who have elevated Albert Einstein to sainthood are now having to cope with quantum mechanics, dark energy, and dark matter. James Webb Telescope data seem to challenge other conclusions of "settled science."

To make this all fit, some scientists pursued new areas of research resulting in new conclusions. One of those areas of research is something called "String Theory." But String Theory introduces problems of its own. One version of string theory requires 26 dimensions instead of Einstein's 4 dimensions.

What's the point? Don't sell your soul to human wisdom and understanding. It doesn't lead to eternal life. Some people such as the ancient Greeks loved wisdom. But human wisdom is like sinking sand.

Only Christ and His cross provide us with the power of God for our salvation. They look like foolishness to the unformed but in reality, Christ and His cross are the solid rock of our salvation.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank You for the gift of salvation. Preserve us from the foolishness of human wisdom and grant that we may always trust Jesus Christ. Amen.

Saturday

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

C Amen.

Gradual Psalm 117:1–2a; 96:8

L Praise the Lord, all nations!

C Extol him, all peoples!

L For great is his steadfast love toward us,

C and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

L Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;

C bring an offering, and come into his courts!

Verse of the Day: Matthew 5:3

- L** Alleluia, Alleluia, Blessed are the poor in spirit, Alleluia.
C Alleluia, Alleluia, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 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 6:1–8

- ¹Hear what the LORD says:
Arise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.
²Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

³“O my people, what have I done to you?
How have I wearied you? Answer me!
⁴For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.
⁵O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

⁶“With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
⁸He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah records a monologue spoken by God asking His people what He has done to cause them to reject Him. Then the Lord recounts how He saved them from the land of Egypt and freed them from slavery. These ungrateful people have no reason to reject the Lord.

When the people come to their senses, what can they do to restore their relationship with God? None of the temple rituals will be good enough. Not even the pagan practice of sacrificing their children will suffice. Nothing will be good enough to restore them to God’s family.

Only repentance and a sincere faith will do. Returning to God in faith means that they start “to do justice,

and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

These words still stand true today. God has granted us countless blessings but we choose to ignore Him and go our own way. This is the way that leads to death.

We can never buy our way back into God’s favor. Only repentance and a sincere faith will do. The prophet Joel put it this way, “Return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13).

Prayer: O God, thank You for salvation through faith in Jesus. May we never turn from Your grace and go our own way. If we should stray, draw us back into Your presence. Grant to us true repentance and faith to trust in Your gracious mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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