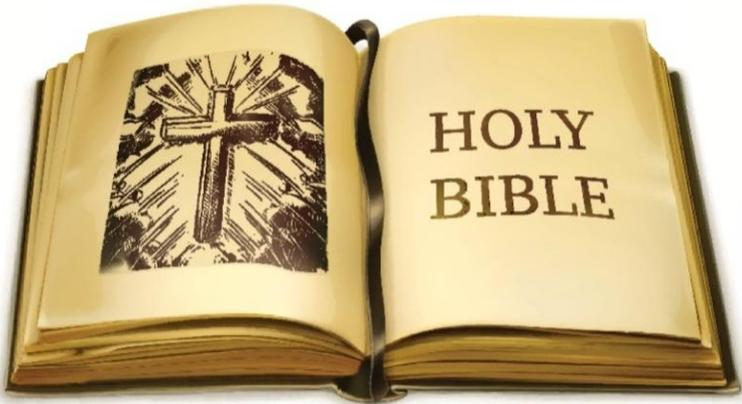


Each Day in the Word



**November 30, 2025—January 3 ,
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FOREWORD

This booklet is compiled by the pastors of the Confessional Lutheran Ministerium for congregations and individuals not necessarily affiliated with any Lutheran denomination. Indeed, it is for anyone who finds it in their hands whether they are Lutheran or not. It is our prayer that God's people will be edified by this humble offering.

While it is tempting for everyone when reading daily devotional booklets to skip the Scripture lesson and read only the devotional material, it is highly recommended that the reader set their attention on the Scripture lesson before reading the devotion itself. The Holy Spirit tells us in Hebrews 4:12 that "the word of God is living and powerful." As the Scripture is the very Word of God, we ought to devote time and attention to it each day so that through it, God the Holy Spirit may strengthen our trust in His promises and kindle in our hearts love for God and our neighbor.

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Quotations from Martin Luther works are taken from Luther's Works, American Edition, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86), hereafter AE.

The Book of Revelation is a very deep book of God's Holy Scripture, with many things to unpack when it comes to trying to understand it. The text assigned for today doesn't fall short of containing such depth. From St. John's perspective, everything is seen from the heavenly view; and thus, Revelation is embedded with symbolic divine language.

Seven is a signifier of completeness or perfection, suggesting that the Book of Revelation was not just written for the seven congregations in Asia Minor, but rather to the universal Church—including other small communities of faith that were in and around Asia Minor. While the language of Revelation does not resonate with today's postmodern language, the letter was written to all believing Christians, and its ultimate message is, "Be prepared!"

This falls perfectly in line with the three-fold theme of Advent: namely, Christ's first coming (adventing) when taking on man's flesh; Christ's continued coming (adventing) through His Word and Sacraments; and His final coming (adventing) when He comes in glory. So, indeed, "Be prepared" for Christ's final advent on the Last Day! There really are no better words to prepare than those of God's Holy Scripture: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen." "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

When working through His Word and Sacraments to keep the faith that He created within you—faith fed and focused upon Jesus' merits for you—you are indeed prepared! Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (vs. 28-30)

To know of such a peaceful rest is definitely to know Christ! It brings us to remember how our sabbath rest is in Him. The first Sabbath was that seventh day of the week in which the Jews of old were commanded to rest from physical labor. This Sabbath was fulfilled and ended in the second Sabbath, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. Because He is the Sabbath Rest of God, everyone who believes in Him enjoys an endless spiritual peace (rest)—that is, the peace of being reconciled to God and of being forgiven of all sins. This is a third Sabbath. A fourth Sabbath is the Resurrection of the dead which will occur on the Last Day. At that time the spiritual rest which the saints enjoy now through faith will also become a bodily rest, as they enjoy everlasting perfection of body, soul, and spirit in the presence of their Savior.

This Advent season we rejoice to know that our Lord and Savior has advented to give us rest. Most importantly, He has given us rest from sin, from guilt, and from the fear of God’s wrath, and He continues to do so as He advents through His Word and Sacraments. But, when He comes (advents) on the Last Day, He will give us rest from pain, from sorrow, from death, and from all the weaknesses of this fallen world forever. It will be an eternal sabbath in the Lord!

Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

There is a false teaching of God’s Word in the world that declares Abraham as the father of three distinct faiths: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. All of these so-called Abrahamic faiths are given legitimacy by the false teachers through their misinterpretation of the Word that God spoke to Abraham, claiming that *all* of Abraham’s descendants are blessed—together with the *faiths* that they hold—by virtue of their being of Abraham’s bloodline.

However, Abraham believed differently. Abraham held to the one true faith, the Christian faith, established at the foundation of the world by God the Holy Trinity. In the Garden of Eden, immediately following man’s fall, God promised to send the Seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) to save all the world from sin, death, and Hell. As the Holy Spirit of God testifies through the Apostle Paul, that seed, of which God speaks to Abraham, is a singular seed, Christ Himself (Gal 3:16). Abraham believed God’s prophecy that the Savior would be born from His bloodline, and then God delivered on the promise when Christ Jesus was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary (Mt 1; Lk 3).

In this Seed truly all of the families of the earth shall be blessed, for Jesus is the propitiation (substitute) for all. “God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (Acts 3:26). Any one from any of the families of the earth—whether of the blood of Abraham or not—is blessed in this Seed when they hold to the only true Christian faith, just as Abraham did.

Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (v. 15).

People often think of God as only invisible, or as only a spirit. However, God not only created all things visible and invisible, but He also reveals Himself to us in ways visible and invisible. Jesus Christ is how we actually see God.

If children ask us what God looks like, the first thing we need to tell them is to look at Jesus. We should answer in the same way to the adversaries of Christ’s Church who say, “Show us your God!” The first response should be to show them Jesus Christ crucified. Jesus’ crucifixion is the fullest image by which the invisible God shows Himself to mankind, because the crucifixion is a matter of flesh and blood, it is a matter of history, it is a matter of social and political consequences, while at the same time being a matter of the utmost spiritual significance.

The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is a real and visible way that He shows us that we have a God who loves us, to the point of sacrificing Himself for us. He also shows us that there is hope, which grows out of the forgiveness of our sins by His sacrifice. We have hope—certainty—that our bodies and our souls will be made glorious and perfect in the resurrection, which will not only be a visible reality, but it will be more beautiful than anything we’ve seen in this fallen version of creation!

Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

It is a popular misconception to say that we need God to speak to us in a thunderous voice from the clouds, or in some mystical personal experience. While it is true that God has spoken to His people in these ways in the past, we are naïve to limit the God and Creator of all things visible and invisible to man's assumptions about how God should work. God the Father made all things through His Son, Jesus Christ, who is the very incarnation of His glorious Words, and He has seen fit to speak to us by the same incarnate Word now.

You don't have to climb mountains or depend on emotional states to substantiate that God is speaking to you. He has given you His Word which stands ready and preserved in print, and also lives and breathes as it is taught and preached. You need nothing more than a faithful translation of the Scriptures or the voice of a faithful pastor to hear God speak His wisdom and mercy to you. And, if that's not simple enough, He has also given you the very name of Jesus Christ as a comfort to you.

In His name you are told that God will *save His people from their sins* (the very meaning of "Jesus"), and this Jesus is the Holy One *anointed* to be both your King and your Savior (the very meaning of "Christ"). Furthermore, the name of Jesus the Christ should also bring to your minds His crucifixion, which is the culmination of all the Scriptures and is celebrated at each Lord's Supper. How blessed to be so focused on the One who is your great treasure, sent by God, just for you!

Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

God comes—advents—to you in His Word to tell you that He has merited full forgiveness for all your sins. From the beginning of the world, He has been *coming* to man through the same Word by which He created you. Sometimes He spoke directly to His people, and other times He sent His messengers, the angels; and still other times He sent prophets, apostles, and evangelists. But they all brought the same Word that would be flesh and blood in Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, so many people still neglect the great salvation that God has given through Christ, which is why His Word continues to be proclaimed through the various powers and gifts of His Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. The wisdom of His Law must continue to work toward repentance, and the power of His Gospel certainly continues to show forth God's love and merciful kindness. The *faithless* need to hear these things so they might believe; and the *faithful* need to heed these things so that they do not drift away from the faith.

Sinful hearts and flesh compel man to drift away every day. This makes the exhortation of the second chapter in Hebrews most certainly true and important. “Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.” God has given you a profound gift of peace, life, and salvation in the Word of Jesus Christ. Rejoice that He continues to advent to you—preparing you for His final advent in glory!

Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The revelation of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ ties His people together, making us His Church. He has come to different people at different times throughout history, but all end up coming together into one holy body according to His truth and mercy. His people of Israel were given the promises and miracles that showed God's love and faithfulness to man. But when the fulfillment of His promises were revealed in Christ Jesus, He reveals that people from all nations might be made fellow heirs of everlasting life through faith in Him.

God comes to the world through the Word of His Son, and that Word, attached to earthly elements which we call Sacraments, bring peace and comfort. Jesus had a body of flesh and blood that was nailed to the cross for the atonement of our sins, and that same body was glorified in His resurrection from death, and ascension into Heaven. However, we cannot forget the fact that Christ *still* has a body of flesh and blood that is made up of the members of His Church.

For ages God has revealed that He fulfills His promises and accomplishes forgiveness through Jesus. Whether it is by the tribulations and miracles for historic Israel, the persecutions and ministry of St. Paul, or the struggles and confession of His saints in His Church today, all these things point to the cross of Jesus Christ where salvation is fully accomplished. Through faith we are made part of that same body, which lives, breathes, and shows forth God's eternal purpose that comes to all mankind in His Word. Within this penitential Advent season, there is still a reserved rejoicing that God brings you to be united in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Today's Gospel (Luke 21:25-36) turns our attention to Christ's second advent with His urgent warning that we not allow ourselves to be so entangled in worldly affairs that we are no longer watchful and ready for His return.

The devotional text from Revelation fine-tunes that warning. The angel (i.e., the pastor) of the church in Ephesus, and, by extension, the members of his congregation, were faithfully watching out for false doctrine and eradicating impenitent sinners from their midst. They rightfully hated the practices of the Nicolaitans who were attempting to normalize adultery and sexual immorality within the Christian Church. They were doing many of the outward things that Christians ought to do.

Even so, they were not ready for Christ's advent because all their watching, all their toiling, all their fighting for the truth was no longer motivated by love. Some 35 years earlier, the Apostle Paul had written this to the Ephesian Christians when their church was in its early days: "I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints" (Eph. 1:15). Apparently, that love had grown cold. Their devotion to purity of doctrine and life had become an external thing, a matter of pride or of self-righteousness instead of a matter of love. They were doing the right things, but that wasn't coming from a love for God or for His people. And as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor. 13).

As you watch for Jesus to return, search your heart. And if love is missing, repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness before He comes! Then you will surely overcome this world and be allowed to eat from the tree of life when He comes.

Let us pray: O Lord, You see what is in our hearts as You walk among Your churches everywhere. Forgive us our sins and warm our hearts with Your love that we may imitate You even as we watch for You. Amen.

God's providence—the way in which all creation is geared toward supporting human life—points to God's existence and His goodness. But the Athenians were groping around in the dark for God, as all non-Christians still do. There's a reason for that. In the beginning, God walked with Adam and Eve. But when they rebelled against Him, they plunged humanity into darkness. We no longer walk with God by nature. We're alienated from Him, sinners who are hostile toward Him, blind to who He is, unwilling and unable to know or worship the true God. God's providence alone still leaves Him unknown.

All of God's providence to mankind has this purpose: that when He sends His Word, as He did through the Apostle Paul and as He still does through His ministers, men should hear God's call to repent, turn from their idolatry, turn from their sin, turn from their ignorance, and know the true God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; who created all things; who revealed Himself to Israel; who came in the flesh, lived under the law, died for our sins, was raised and exalted to the right hand of God, and will come to judge the earth.

The unknown God has revealed Himself in the Gospel of Christ, and to know Christ by faith is to have eternal life. "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3).

Let us pray: O Lord God, we give You thanks for all that You provide for us, but especially for graciously providing Your Gospel, that we may know You rightly, believe in You steadfastly, and confess You joyfully. Preserve us, O Lord, in the true knowledge of God. Amen.

Mankind has invented all sorts of twisted notions of love. But Christians have the perfect pattern of love set forth for us in God the Father's sending of His Son to be the world's Savior, to give His whole life as the atonement for our sins. The love of God is His sincere devotion to our human race in spite of our rebellion against Him who is love, in spite of our transgressions against His love-centered commandments.

God's sincere devotion to sinners was put on display in the incarnation of His Son, in His obedience to the Law in our place, in His humility, in His words, in His deeds, and especially in His willing sacrifice on the cross.

And now, as God calls out to us in the Gospel, inviting us to repent of our lovelessness and come into His kingdom of grace, the word of God's sincere devotion to us in Christ is what draws us to Him in faith, by which we are grafted into the Son of God, grafted into His love.

Those who have been grafted into His love by faith are now directed outward, to show this same kind of love to one another. How can it be any other way? Faith and love always go together. Faith toward God, sincere devotion to one another, a heart set on doing good to our fellow believers, praying for them, forgiving them as we have been forgiven, serving them as we have been served, loving them as we have been loved.

May this kind of love characterize us in the world as we await the advent of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us!

Let us pray: Come, Holy Spirit, renew our hearts and kindle in us the fire of Your love! Amen.

Faith and love always go together: faith in Christ and love for all the saints. One never exists without the other. Faith and love characterized the Colossian Christians. It's what they were known for throughout the world. It's the report that reached St. Paul, for which he gave thanks to God and for which he commended them.

Where did their faith and love come from? Both came from the Holy Spirit, who convinced them, through the Gospel, of the hope laid up for them and for all the saints in heaven. The word of truth about Christ's love for us poor sinners and about the glorious heavenly riches He has prepared for those who love Him kindles both faith and love in our hearts.

But faith and love don't remain hidden in the heart. The faith of the heart is confessed joyfully with the mouth, so that all may know that Christ has loved us and that we acknowledge His love for us with thanksgiving. The love of the heart is both professed with the mouth and displayed in selfless service and acts of devotion to our brothers and sisters in Christ, both near and far.

May it be your goal to be known throughout the world, not for your own impressive deeds or talents, but for the faith and love that the Holy Spirit has worked in you through His Gospel and that He continues to feed and strengthen through the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, we give thanks to You for working faith and love in the hearts of your saints by Your Holy Spirit. Strengthen our faith and increase our love, by the powerful working the same Holy Spirit, that we may be known as Your children and become a blessing to the saints throughout the world. Amen.

It is the Holy Spirit who works faith and love in us—the faith by which we are saved, and the love by which we show ourselves to be children of Him who is love. Both of these are the work of the Holy Spirit. And after we have been brought to faith in Christ, God calls on His children to cooperate intentionally with His Spirit that we may grow in love. He admonishes us to use the Means of Grace by which He works, to walk according to God’s commandments, to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

The Lutheran Confessions highlight the comfort of this phrase. “To all godly Christians who feel and experience in their hearts a small spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation this precious passage is very comforting; for they know that God has kindled in their hearts this beginning of true godliness, and that He will further strengthen and help them in their great weakness to persevere in true faith unto the end” (Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration: II).

In today’s reading, God commands us to do “all things without complaining and disputing.” That runs contrary to our flesh, which wants to grumble as soon as it experiences the slightest opposition. But we have God’s promise to work in us and to strengthen us, so that we may learn to walk with His Spirit and to rejoice in His love instead of complaining.

Let us pray: Grant to us, Lord, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without You, may be enabled by You to live according to Your will; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Faith and love are not perfected in this life. The goal is not reached here on earth. As long as we carry around our sinful flesh, our faith will be imperfect and our love for others will be tainted with the sinful devotion to self.

But, as Paul knew, that's no reason to give up! Martin Luther's words reflect the meaning of the apostle: "This life is not godliness, but growth in godliness; not health, but healing; not being, but becoming; not rest, but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way; the process is not yet finished, but it has begun; this is not the goal, but it is road; at present all does not gleam and glitter, but everything is being purified" (American Edition:32:24).

The goal toward which we are pressing will be worth all the sighing and struggling and wrestling. The goal is to live under Christ in His heavenly kingdom, to serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, to live forever in the perfect love of God and in the perfect love that every citizen of heaven will have and show toward one another, without the weight of the flesh to muffle or diminish it.

That goal was already purchased for us by our Lord Jesus. We press on, not to earn it, but to arrive at it. We run the race, not to win God's grace, but because God has made us His own through Holy Baptism and has set us on this path to run, to pursue faith and love with our whole being until He Himself perfects us in the life to come.

Let us pray: O God, mercifully grant us Your grace, that we, running the way of Your commandments, may be made partakers of Your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The themes of Advent—Christ’s coming and our need to lead pious lives of daily repentance as we wait for Him—are set forth beautifully in today’s reading.

Christ admonished us in Sunday’s Gospel, “Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly...Watch, therefore, and pray always” (Luke 21:34, 36). St. Paul reissues this same warning as he writes to the Colossians. Instead of indulging in sinful, earthly pleasures, instead of focusing on temporal, earthly goals, remember your Baptism where you were joined with Christ, buried with Him, and also raised again to life, where you were made alive together with Him, where all your trespasses were forgiven you (see Col. 2:12-13). Remember that your primary goal is living with Christ in heaven! If your life has been tied to Christ so intimately, if your goal is to live a life of sinlessness in heaven, then what place do sexual immorality, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness have in the new life Christ has given you? What place do anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language have in the lives of those who are preparing for heaven, whose life is already hidden there in Christ?

Keep looking up. Watch. Pray for God’s help to preserve you in watchfulness and in leading a life that is worthy of your calling. The God who created the new man in you, who has united you to Christ as your all in all, is faithfully devoted to preserving and strengthening you until the end.

Let us pray: Holy Father, bless us and keep us from all sin and shame. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, draw our eyes and our hearts heavenward, where our dear Lord Jesus sits at Your right hand. Amen.

At the beginning of the Church Year, the season of Advent gives us a wonderful opportunity to consider our own preparations for when our Lord calls us Home to be with Him. Advent focuses largely on our Lord's second and final Coming when He will put an end to all things and bring His Bride, the Church, to Himself. As we consider the certainty of Last Day, we are encouraged in today's reading to focus on a few very important things.

First, our Lord knows our works. Truly He knows all things, therefore we cannot hide anything from Him. All works done in and from faith are pleasing to God and serve our neighbor. Though works do not save us, they are they are good for our neighbor, and they are good and acceptable in God's eyes when they are done in faith.

Next, we are to be watchful and ever looking forward to the Day of the Lord. Being watchful includes availing ourselves of all the ways our Lord wishes to come to us – His Word and Gospel preached, and His Sacraments rightly delivered. Those are the ways that God prepares us for His Coming; those are the ways by which we are strengthened and kept in the one true faith until the end.

Further, we are to hold fast to what we have received. We receive God's Word preached from our faithful pastor. We receive Christ in His Sacraments. We continue in the church catholic and take our place among all the faithful who have gone before us.

And we *get* to repent. Repentance itself is a work of the Holy Spirit wrought through the preaching of God's Law. Repentance – admitting our sins and pleading for God's mercy in Christ – is an excellent Christian discipline, for then we are always aware of our sinfulness and appreciate even more what Christ has done to pay for all our sins.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, give us Your grace and peace this Advent season that we may, by Your blessing and work in us, be prepared for Your final coming and victory; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his hearers not to “cast away your confidence, which has a great reward.” A Christian has a confidence that can come only from the certain fact of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection for all mankind. We are confident of His work for us – that He has paid for all our sins in His own body on the tree of the cross. We are confident of His love for us shown in that same horrid suffering and death. We are confident that we too will rise on the last Day and have our bodies remade and reunited with our souls to be with our Lord forever in heaven where there will be no more sin, sickness, suffering, sadness, or death. Being with Christ in heaven at the end of all things will be the greatest reward we could ever know.

In the meantime, we need endurance in order that we may indeed receive this great reward. Of course, we have no endurance of ourselves. If left to our own devices, we would fail miserably to keep the faith; we would perish eternally for our sins and never enjoy the bliss and glory of heaven.

For that endurance, we look to Hebrews 12:1-2: “¹Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus, therefore, is our endurance. He who is coming again has given us the gift of faith to believe in His work for us, and by that same faith has justified us and made us right with Him. We stand firm in Christ and will be with Him forever in sinlessness and glory.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for Your great love and forgiveness. As we struggle in this life, keep us faithful to You so that we may be with You forever. Amen.

As we know, the season of Advent is intended not only as a time of repentance, but also a time to focus on Christ's second and final coming. And our readings this week do not disappoint.

Luke writes about the signs of the times and the end of the age. When Jesus' disciples asked Him about when the end would take place, He made it abundantly clear that His followers were to look for false Christs, nation rising against nation, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, persecution of Christians, betrayals by unbelieving family members, hatred by all unbelievers, and even death. Those are hardly the things that would make anyone jump up and say, "Hey, sign me up!" On the contrary, those things are quite off-putting.

But our Lord Jesus is not like any of those happy-clappy prosperity preachers of our day who look you in the eye and lie about the challenges of being a Christian. They speak of a happy life here and that, even in this life, everything will be all right. Not so our Lord; He gives it to us straight. He does not lie.

But along with the harsh truth of the difficulties of holding fast to the one true faith here in this life, Jesus elsewhere in Scripture promises His presence, His peace, and His strength as we battle on to the end. He promises always to be with us; and the particular ways that He is with us are through His Gospel and Absolution preached into our ears and His Holy gifts of Baptism and Supper which are put upon us and in us. Through these means Christ takes up residence in us, calls us His own children, and gives us His strength to bear up until we are called Home to the life of the world to come.

So, End Times, do your best! No matter, for Christ has defeated death and hell for us and will take us to be with Him in eternity.

Let us pray: Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

“Watch, therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Advent is a time for watchfulness, repentance, faith, and prayer. Throughout these weeks leading up to Christmas we are steadily focused on nearly everything that the world around us ignores. But unlike the world, we don't rush into Christmas right after Halloween, or even before. There are still some important things to consider as we resist rushing through or forgetting about Advent altogether. We are reminded of our Lord's second and final Coming, and that when He comes, He will usher His Bride, the Church, into eternity with Him, and relegate all unbelievers to the eternal damnation they have chosen.

The Christian's watchfulness, therefore, is not about himself, but about Christ because He is the one who strengthens and keeps us in the one true faith. Never forget what Christ has done for you. He has placed a label on you, and that label says “You are worth My body broken and blood shed on the cross. You are so very precious to Me that I gave My life for you, paid for all your sins, and I give you My promise of eternal life in heaven. I want you in heaven with Me and I have given you My Word and Sacraments to sustain you until I call you Home.”

So, listen to Jesus. Watch and keep watching. Receive Jesus in all the ways He wants you to have Him. The Bridegroom will come soon enough. By watching and using the means God provides, you will be prepared to join the joyful wedding procession into the great heavenly hall where your joy will have no end.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray You, give ear to our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

If there was ever a profession or vocation that calls for almost super-human amounts of patience and prayer, it is that of the farmer. People who farm the land and produce food for others need to be chemists, mechanics, weather-watchers, mathematicians, and human computers. But for all their intelligence and expertise in all those areas, once the seed is in the ground, it is a matter of faith, patience, and no small amount of prayer on the part of the farmer. He must be patient and wait for rain and favorable weather that God, in His time, will bring. And then until harvest time comes, he must be patient and wait for the crops to come to maturity until they are able to get the produce out of the ground and on to the bins, silos, and stores.

In our reading today, James exhorts the brethren to “be patient until the coming of the Lord.” These, of course, are Advent words; they are words which point us to the patient waiting that all of us as God’s people are given to engage in not only during the Advent season, but for our entire lives. We have the certainty from Jesus Himself that He will return to take us to be with Him on the Last Day, but we are not given the exact day or hour. Only God knows when that Day will be; He has set it on His divine calendar of events, and it will most certainly happen. Until then we pray for patience to wait for that great Day when our Lord will destroy this sinful world and make a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells for eternity, and we will be with Him in glory without the ravages and effects of sin.

Oh, what a day that will be! “Therefore, be patient.” Until that Day, our Lord gives us the patience and strength we need through His holy Word and Sacramental gifts to keep us watching, waiting, and faithful to the end.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray You, give ear to our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Like Abraham and Sarah of Old Testament times, Zacharias and Elizabeth were also advanced in years and had not yet received any children from the Lord. So, while he was taking his turn burning incense in the temple (as per the OT duties prescribed for priests to do), Zacharias prayed to God for a child. In a miraculous way, an angel of the Lord appeared to him and delivered the marvelous and wonderful news that yes, his dear wife Elizabeth would indeed bear him a son whom he was to name John. This, of course, is John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, the last Old Testament prophet to testify of the coming of the Messiah.

John's job was simply "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Lk 1:17). And John certainly went on to do just that. He pointed people to Jesus as "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29). That is always the job of the Holy Spirit – to point people only to Jesus. If you ever need to determine whether a preacher or teacher is doing the Spirit's work, ask yourself whether that person is pointing to Jesus. If he is, then great! If not, then follow the advice of Scar in *The Lion King*: "Run away and never return."

This Advent season continue to make certain that you are being pointed only to Jesus in His first Coming as the incarnate God in the flesh, as well as His second and final Coming at the end of all time. And while waiting in faith for that blessed event, receive Jesus in all the ways He wants you to have Him: in His Gospel preached, in your Baptism wherein He gives you forgiveness, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, in His holy Supper wherein He gives you His very body and blood, and in Holy Absolution which is yet another giving of Christ into your ears for your comfort and certainty.

Let us pray: Lord, we pray You, give ear to our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In this beautiful reading, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to deliver the great news that she was “highly favored” by God, and that she would indeed conceive and bear a son. And not just any son, but the very Son of God. This makes Mary the Theotokos, the mother of God, the God-bearer. No one else in all human history has been given this name; no one else has ever been chosen by God to give birth to God in the flesh.

This is what Mary was told about her Son: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give 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.”

Mary had difficulty fathoming not only the angel’s appearance but also his message. Even so, her simple and faithful response was, “Let it be to me according to your word.” In other words, Mary simply said, “Amen; gift received.” She had conceived in the most miraculous way—by a word in her ear.

We know from the Small Catechism that “Amen, amen, means, yes, yes, it shall be so.” When we say “amen” we are agreeing with God and receiving His words and miraculous gifts in much the same way that Mary did. When we hear the Absolution we say, Amen. When we receive our Lord’s body and blood for forgiveness and salvation, we say Amen. When we receive the Lord’s Name upon us in the Invocation and Benediction, we say Amen. When our pastor ends his sermon in which he has preached Christ to us, we say Amen.

Gift received. That is the life of the Christian. We are constantly given to by our good and gracious God. His fathomless love has been lavished upon us in full in the words and works of Christ for us.

Let us pray: We thank You, Lord God, heavenly Father, for all Your benefits, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

Being clear-cut should always be appreciated. Vagary usually leads to being too loose. As the saying goes, “If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything!” The Lord makes it quite clear that He does not put up with fence riders. You are either a clear-cut believer (hot) or you are not (cold). Thus, the Lord will vomit lukewarm believers out of His mouth. They will be treated as a troublesome sickness that needs to be extracted so that the body is not adversely affected.

In America some might say that freedom and prosperity create such a lukewarm (indifferent) attitude. Granted, with both of those come the temptation to trust in the blessings rather than in God who is the bringer of the blessings. By his fallen nature, mankind easily convinces himself of being self-sufficient. Having plenty, you tend to think you have need of nothing. Not having enough, you tend to think that what you need is what others have. The problem, though, isn’t wholeheartedly with freedom and prosperity. The main problem is always sin and unbelief! It’s man trusting in the wrong thing — namely, in the material world; in treasures on earth, in himself.

Thanks be to God for His Word where Christ told you to lay up treasures in heaven. To be focused and fed on Him, through His Word and Sacraments, God keeps you hot in the faith and ever a part of His body the Church!

Jesus, priceless treasure, Fount of purest pleasure,

Truest friend to me,

Ah, how long in anguish Shall my spirit anguish,

Yearning, Lord, for Thee?

Thou art mine, O Lamb divine!

I will suffer naught to hide Thee;

Naught I ask beside Thee (TLH 347; LSB 743)

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

“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, “God with us”’” (vs. 22-23).

The theology of the incarnation can be summarized in this way: The Holy Spirit by the will of the Father makes Christ present for us. Therefore, we know that the holy triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is of one mind with regard to salvation. And we see Jesus present in an incarnate way (some call this “incarnationally”) not just in His birth in Bethlehem, but also in Word and Sacrament.

Jesus said the wealth of the whole world is not enough to buy a single soul out of God’s prison. He proclaimed, “What will a man give in exchange for his soul?” The price of salvation is infinite; therefore, only an infinite God could pay the price. “God with us” means that our Savior-God gave His infinitely valuable blood in exchange for our souls. Because His blood has infinite value, it is valuable enough to pay for all souls. What will a man give for his soul? If he is of the one true faith he will give the precious blood of Christ, “...given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.”

O ye heights of heaven adore Him;
Angel hosts, His praises sing.
Pow’rs, dominions, bow before Him
And extol our God and King.
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Ev’ry voice in concert ring
Evermore and evermore. (LSB 384)

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

“And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (vs. 41).

There are some who are quick to respond to the question, “When did Christ become man?” by saying, “When He was born.” But Christ Jesus was among us a full nine months before that, just hidden from sight. Christ became man when He was conceived in the womb of the blessed virgin.

Every human being except Jesus is a condemned sinner while still inside their mother. Each one of us began as an enemy of God — not fearing, loving or trusting in God. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, Christ was with her, with her words. The effect of Christ’s presence with Mary was that the Baby inside of Elizabeth was stirred by those words. Since Christ Jesus is still present with His Word today, that Word has creative power, and faithful Christian mothers do well to take their babies to church while still in the womb.

Adults are also affected by Christ’s presence in the Word. Elizabeth, whom we are told was among the faithful, was filled with the Holy Spirit at Mary’s words. She in turn spoke a blessing to Mary and told her of the things of God. Because Jesus is present with His Word, it has the power to create and increase faith. Thanks be to God!

Once He Came in Blessing, All our sins redressing;
Came in likeness lowly, Son of God most holy;
Bore the cross to save us; Hope and freedom gave us.
(LSB 333)

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

And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” (vss. 46-47)

Mary, being the mother of our brother Jesus, is, in a sense, the mother of us all. Mary was not proud or puffed up as she carried Christ-God in her womb. Instead, she was awed by the grace of God shown to her. She made no claim to holiness but rejoiced in God her Savior. Her joy was not that she had done great things, but that God has done great things for her. She knew she was not worthy. She knew she was a sinner. We do well, then to follow her example.

Like Mary, we too need a Savior. We, brothers and sisters of the One born of the Virgin, have nothing of which to boast in ourselves. We have not kept God’s Law. On the contrary, we break it daily. But God, according to His eternal promise made so long ago, is merciful and sent Jesus to live, die, and rise again for us. God could not die for us, nor could He live for us. But taking the human nature into Himself in Christ, He could live under God’s Law and die under God’s Law — and He did! Therefore, Jesus is God our Savior, having fulfilled God’s Law and having died to pay for our sin.

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth,
The guilt of sinners bearing
And, laden with the sins of earth,
None else the burden sharing;
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint,
To slaughter led without complaint
That spotless life to offer,
He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies,
The mockery, and yet replies,
“All this I gladly suffer.” (TLH 142, LSB 438)

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

But they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name” (vs. 61).

The world desires to name us and have us conform to itself. It desires to call us its own. Truly, each of us comes into this world of the world. By virtue of being conceived by sinful man, we are not holy, not welcome into the presence of holy God; we are actually enemies of God. We enter this life as worshippers of ourselves like the world around us. Even into adulthood our flesh can cause us to lash out if our needs and wants are not immediately met. If you doubt this, go for a drive in rush hour traffic. We are idolaters who believe that our needs and wants are to be fulfilled without regard to how it affects others.

Just as John was set apart from the tradition of being given his father’s name, by the grace of God the Holy Spirit calls us and separates us from the world. Adopted as God’s children through the waters of Holy Baptism, we are born again as holy children of God. We are given a new name. And, though we remain in the world, we are no longer “of” the world. The world now does not understand us any more than it understands Christ our Savior or John His forerunner. We get to rejoice that God our Father claims us as His children.

When Jesus comes — O blessed story!
He works a change in heart and life;
God’s kingdom comes with pow’r and glory
To young and old, to man and wife;
Thro’ Sacrament and living Word,
Faith, love, and hope are now conferred.
(TLH 65)

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

“To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (vss. 74-75).

In the Small Catechism, we confess that Jesus has “purchased and won us from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.” So often we think of our enemies as being people. But our true enemies are sin, death, and the devil. If we do not understand this, we will fail to love those for whom Jesus died.

Persecution should not be a surprise to believers. Persecution can be feared; that is normal. We can face persecution confident that we are already victors over it. Courage is standing firm even as our knees knock, teeth chatter, and hearts beat hard.

Believers, however, are delivered from sin, death, and the devil. We sin, but sin has no power over us; full payment for it has been made by Christ. We may die, but death is now the door to life. Christ accomplished this for us by becoming man, by tramping down death through His death. We do not need to fear those who can destroy the body, but the One who has power over body and soul; the One who in love sent His Son to redeem us. Through Christ He has revealed that He’s on our side!

The Word they still shall let remain

Nor any thanks have for it;

He’s by our side upon the plain

With His good gifts and Spirit.

And take they our life, Goods’ fame, child, and wife,

Though these all be gone, Our vict’ry has been won

The kingdom ours remaineth. (TLH 262, LSB 656)

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

“‘Twas the night before Christmas ...”

Now, most reading those words above would be able to finish the rest of that line. Yet, if it read, “So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying . . .” (Lk. 1:22), hardly anybody would be able to finish it.

It just reveals how mankind is more apt to read and re-read (or get familiar with) secular stories over God’s Holy Scripture because the flesh hates God’s Word; finding it boring and unsatisfactory to the flesh. So goes the reading for today. Not that anyone is supposed to memorize it, but simply reading it all the way through is still arduous for man’s flesh. Yet, it remains “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” (vs.1)

Truly in Christ, God has drawn near to sinful man to redeem sinful man. In Christ God became what God was not—a human being to save human beings. No matter how disgusting our sins are—to ourselves or others—our Savior was born to die and pay for those very sins. It is God who moved toward us. It is He who gave gifts to us. Among those gifts are His human body and blood which we take into ourselves so that we might receive strength from them. Since Christ’s holy, innocent Body and Blood have touched our lips, our sins are atoned for and our guilt taken away. Now, that should always be remembered and rejoiced in!

All praise to Thee eternal God,
Who, clothed in garb of flesh and blood,
Dost take a manger for Thy throne,
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone.
Hallelujah! (TLH 80)

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

So, how does the faithful Christian celebrate Christmas? Simple. How does the faithful Christian celebrate Christ, who is “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”?

Most non-Lutheran evangelical churches didn’t have Christmas Day service. A non-Lutheran pastor in was asked what they do if Christmas happens to land on Sunday. He said that they cancel service and try to make it as easy as possible on the people, putting no burden on them or requiring anything of them like attending a service. He thought he was being “truly evangelical” with that answer but it’s sad... for them, because they’re missing out.

Where else would you want to be to celebrate Christ than gathered with His people around His Word and Sacrament? What could possibly be more important than that, and how is it in any way putting some kind of *burden* on me? Is it a burden to kiss my wife or hug my children? Of course, not—I rejoice in it. Is it a burden to gather to hear God’s Word of all that He has done for us in Christ and to respond together in thanks and praise? Of course, not—I rejoice in it.

“In the beginning was the Word... ³ All things were made through Him... ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it... ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God... ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The Christmas day Gospel, the story of Christ arriving to save us from sin, death, the world, and the power of the devil is nothing short of mind-blowing, and I wouldn’t miss it for the world! Merry Christmas, indeed.

Let us pray: Almighty God, grant that the new birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old slavery under sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“Good King Wenceslas look’d out, On the Feast of Stephen.” That was December 26, the Feast of St. Stephen. The carol is based on a legend about a very real king, a *good* king. And the Feast of St. Stephen commemorates a very real servant of God, a *martyred* servant. *Our* very real and good king, Jesus Christ, foretold in our text today that there would be martyrs. In the church year we celebrate the festival of the birth of Christ, and then the very next day we commemorate the death of St. Stephen (and shortly thereafter the death of the holy innocents at the hands of Herod during the time of Jesus’ birth, which we’ll get to on Thursday this week).

No time to linger at length in festivals, the servant of God must be up and moving! Ready to do as the Master tasks us, and ready to endure what He sends our way. Jesus, our good and gracious King, goes before us to Jerusalem, lamenting the fact that the people of this world and even some of the so-called people of God, do not receive the message of God’s Law and Gospel as they should, and at times they also do not receive the messengers of God’s Word as they should. The result is what Jesus laments: at times there will be martyrs for the sake of the Gospel, “from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah,” and the blood of righteous Stephen, and the blood of all the saints martyred in the name of the Lord. These are all precious in God’s sight.

And precious in *our* sight, is Jesus our king—our *good* king who cares for His people—who lives the perfect life, fulfilling all of God’s holy requirements in His Law, and then goes to the cross to pay for all our sins. The sweetness of the Gospel then is ours as we receive it in faith—forgiveness of our sin, a new creation of Christ within us, and the promise of heaven. Gifts so precious that even the threat of martyrdom does not dissuade. “O Lord, gather your children under Your wings, for we *are* willing!”

Let us pray: Almighty God, grant that the new birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old slavery under sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

December 27 was the feast of St. John the evangelist. He wrote his Gospel account of Christ much later (c AD 90) than the other Gospels were written (Mt c AD 50, Mk c AD 50-60, Lk c AD 55-60). Writing between 30 and 40 years later, John was able to focus on events and sayings of Jesus that were not contained in the other Gospels. As Paul Harvey might say, John's Gospel is "the rest of the story." For example, John spent four whole chapters (13-16) telling us what Jesus told His disciples in the upper room but left out the institution of the Lord's supper. Why? Most likely because it was already covered in the other three Gospel accounts.

One other thing that John seems keen on in our text today is dispelling the rumor that John would never die. "²² Jesus said to [Peter], 'If I will that he (John) remain till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me.'²³ Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple (John) would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, 'If I will that he remain till I come, what *is that* to you?'"

Now, of course, Jesus can do whatever He wants, "for nothing will be impossible with God." However, we base our hopes and expectations on the clear Word of God. Since we have no clear Word from God that John would live forever, but we actually have this clarification in our text, we do not "believe, teach, and confess" that John is still physically alive, walking this earth. Would it surprise you to know that there are actually people who believe he is? Probably not. Would it surprise you that 7% of all adult Americans actually believe that chocolate milk comes from brown cows? It's true; just Google it.

What a blessing then for us, that we are not left to our own ignorance or gullibility, but given a sure and certain Word from God, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, and recorded for us by God's servants like St. John.

Let us pray: Almighty God, grant that the new birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old slavery under sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

On December 28 the church commemorated the death of the Holy Innocents who died at Herod's hand during the time of Jesus birth. It hardly gets more evil or heartbreaking than this event. "*Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.*"

The skeptic (or we, in our weakness) will ask: "Could God not have saved them?" Certainly. "Then why didn't He?" There are no easy answers that fully satisfy our hearts. This fallen world is full of evil, cruel, and heartbreaking events. And God could at any time have prevented them. Yet He did not. Why? It does far better to speak of God's *use* rather than His *purpose*. How does God *use* these events?

Tragically, King Herod had these innocent infants killed, but the infant Jesus escaped. In God's plan for our salvation Jesus needed to escape death at this time because He was scheduled to die later. And as the death of these holy innocents happen in the stead of Jesus' own death at this time, later Jesus' death will be as a substitute for all mankind. He will suffer and die in the place of all sinful humanity. Anyone who receives this in faith is saved from their sin.

This does not somehow make the death of these innocent infants an acceptable loss or mere collateral damage. God desires that all people will be saved, and the death of His saints especially is precious in His sight. However, we walk by faith, not by sight. How can faith be strengthened if it is not tested, and how can it be tested if there is no opposition in this world? God *uses* these calamities in the world to test and strengthen our faith in Him. So, we trust Him and His promises despite all the evil we see, because we know that He "works all things for our good" and we know that He will eventually take us to be with Him in heaven. Until then, we focus on His Word and walk in faith.

Let us pray: Almighty God, grant that the new birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old slavery under sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“¹⁵John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” Christ in His divinity existed before His incarnation, so He existed before John the Baptist. Also, Christ as the very Son of God certainly outranks His forerunner.

“¹⁶And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.” In Christ we receive one grace after another. Christ brings us His own righteousness, in what Luther calls the “blessed exchange” whereupon He takes our sin upon Himself, and we get His righteousness. As we receive in faith His atoning death for us on the cross, we also receive the forgiveness of our sins, salvation from sin, death, and the devil, and a new creation of Christ in us through His Word and Spirit. The final grace is that we are taken to a happy heavenly hereafter to be with Him forever.

“¹⁷For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Through Moses, God gave the revelation of His holy Law, the Torah. Through Christ, God revealed the fullness of His grace and truth. The former made way for the latter—the Law makes way for the Gospel, in that the Law prepares one to receive the Gospel. Without the Law to tell you that you have sin before God, the Gospel of the *forgiveness* of your sins makes no sense.

“¹⁸No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.” In the history of God dealing with His people, there are times when some of His servants did get glimpses of Him but never a full vision of Him in His full glory. Jesus has a special relation with the Father, being the “only begotten” of Him, and He is the only one who has fully beheld His glory. This means that Jesus is in a unique position to declare God’s glory to us. Blessed be the revelation of God through His Son!

Let us pray: Almighty God, grant that the new birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old slavery under sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. John saw “another mighty angel.” The description reminds us of Exodus and the description of God among His people. Also, the word “angel” simply means *messenger*, and Christ is the *messenger* of God, *par excellence*. Therefore, some take this to be a representation of Christ, even as many times in the Old Testament “the angel of the Lord” refers to the pre-incarnate Christ.

This messenger of God has a “little book open in his hand.” Previous scrolls were sealed, opened, and then the contents revealed. Here, however, even though this “little book” is open, the contents are not yet revealed. Instead, John is told to “seal up” even what the seven thunders are saying. This is revelation for a later time. The “seven thunders” is part of the apocalyptic language of the book of Revelation. Many places in Scripture, thunder is associated with God’s voice.

“⁵ The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven ⁶and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer.” Here the messenger of God swears on oath, in John’s hearing (and ours) that there will be no delay any longer. At this point, God’s judgment is indeed coming; it is imminent. For the unrepentant, this means that the wrath of God and His judgement will be poured out on them. For the believer, who receives Christ’s forgiveness in faith, this means that our full salvation from this fallen world is at hand.

Christ has indeed triumphed over this fallen world, and He is about to share His triumph with us—we who receive Him in faith. Until then, we walk by faith, trusting in His Word: “³³ These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

Let us pray: Almighty God, grant that the new birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old slavery under sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“⁷ But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.” God is sovereign over the world, and He does not fully disclose all the details of His plans. Instead, He only reveals what He knows we need to know, and when we need to know it. He does this through His servants the prophets. And, while we know that many prophecies have already been fulfilled in Christ, there are still many prophecies that await fulfilment. These matters remain a part of the “mystery of God.”

“⁸ Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, ‘Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.’” John the evangelist has been seeing and hearing many things up to this point. Now he is called upon and commissioned to become a prophet of God. He hears and responds in faith.

“⁹ So I went to the angel and said to him, ‘Give me the little book.’ And he said to me, ‘Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.’¹⁰ Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter.¹¹ And he said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.’”

Here John quite literally eats the Word of God to “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” it. God’s Word contains both Law and Gospel, so it is both bitter and sweet. The bitterness of the Law is all the threats of judgement, and the sweetness of the Gospel is all the promises of grace through Christ in faith.

God calls and commissions John to “prophesy again”—that is, to proclaim the Law to an impenitent world, and to proclaim the Gospel to those who repent.

Let us pray: Almighty God, grant that the new birth of your only Son in the flesh may set us free from our old slavery under sin; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.