

the  
Lord  
whom  
you  
seek  
will  
**suddenly**  
come  
to  
his  
temple



# THE DAWN OF REDEEMING GRACE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

After all the preparation and all of the waiting, the day is here at last!

Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light  
And usher in the morning!

If you cannot be home today, you are in good company. Mary could not be home in Nazareth to deliver her first baby, either. For "so it was, that while they were [in Bethlehem] the days were accomplished that she should be delivered." Perhaps she did not mind, and was just glad that the day had finally arrived, as we are today.

Rejoice, Rejoice this happy morn!  
A Savior unto us is born,  
The Christ, the Lord of Glory!

Of course, after all the waiting, a birthday is just the first day. Who knows what will follow? In medieval history, for example, there are a lot of famous people whose exact birth-date, even the year or the decade, are unknown. It was not recorded for the generations to come, simply because it was not known at the time that the child would become famous in some way. Nor did the leaders in Israel's capital take note of the birth of a "poor carpenter's son."

But God knew the day and the hour and what this Child would accomplish! And the angels knew, too. When that day dawned, it was the dawn of more than Jesus' birthday. This world's clock struck the hour of Redemption that day – our Redemption – of which we still sing today! For us that Child will live the perfect life that we should live, for us He will suffer the penalty we deserved. Because He was called "son of man" we are called "children of God." It's a wonderful life indeed that lies before us on the day of His birth!

Hail now! ever blessed morn;  
Hail redemption's happy dawn;  
Sing through all Jerusalem,  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

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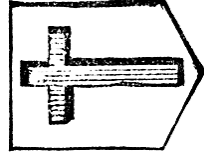
## THE COLORS OF CHRISTMAS: BROWN

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24      FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

**Philippians 2:6-8** ... Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death.

Perhaps you think that brown isn't a Christmas color. I would like to know if there was ever any color more suited to Christmas? What is the color of the root and trunk of the Christmas tree which support it and give it life? What is the color of the wood in the fireplace that gives warmth? What is the color of the boxes within which so many of our presents arrive? What was the color of the original shepherds' staffs? What was the probable color of the animals in the barn with Jesus? The color of what was likely an earth floor? Was it not very likely the color of the garments of the child's parents? Was it not likely even the color of the manger itself? But most importantly is it not the color of the cross, which is the reason for Christmas?

There are many colors surrounding and intermixed with the Christmas season, but how many of them can compare with the color brown? Brown for the earth from which we came. Brown for the dust which is what we are. But most importantly brown is the color of the cross, and the color of Christ's crown. Brown, the color that Christ chose so that we might receive all the other colors, so that we might be clothed in the purple of kings, so that we might be covered in the purity of white, so that we might bud with the greenness of life, so that we might enjoy the wealth of gold. Brown, the color of Christ's humility, which is translated into the color of our exaltation. Brown, the color of Christ's suffering which makes it the color of our redemption. May brown always remain at the heart of our Christmas celebration.



Christ chose brown.

## COME, LORD JESUS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27      FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

During this initial season of the church year—Advent—we prepare for the coming of the Savior. It is the time of year when we begin the church year by looking forward to the birth of God's Son. Advent is as time of preparation, of thinking about our sins and repenting of them, and waiting eagerly for the coming of our Savior.

In Advent we prepare for three "comings" of the Savior. The first coming is the day when He was born as a baby and laid in a manger at Bethlehem. So we look forward to Christmas, the birthday of Jesus Christ. The second coming is within ourselves. Jesus has come to us in our baptism. Every day He sends us His Holy Spirit to feed our souls with the Word of God and supply us with the power we need to live as God's children. We are happy that He comes to us each day to live in our hearts. The third coming of Jesus is in the future. He will come again to receive us into mansions of eternal glory in heaven. We look forward to His coming on the Last Day to judge the world and take us home.

These three comings of Jesus set the theme for Advent, a time for looking ahead in eager anticipation for the arrival of the King of kings. During Advent we look back to the manger. We look at ourselves in our daily living as God's children. We look forward to our Savior's return on the Last Day.

Come, Thou precious Ransom, come,  
Only Hope for sinful mortals!  
Come, O Savior of the world!  
Open are to Thee all portals.  
Come, Thy beauty let us see;  
Anxiously we wait for Thee.  
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 55:1)

## ADVENT TIME IS "HOUSE-CLEANING" TIME

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28 FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Advent is a time for preparation and spiritual renewal. The violet paraments you see hanging from pulpit and lectern at church are reminders of this. They are symbols of the sorrow of Christian repentance. They preach a silent sermon on the importance of readying ourselves for the coming of our heavenly Guest at Christmas and for His coming on the Last Day.

What can we do to get ready for Jesus? When you prepare your home for receiving holiday guests what do you usually do? Don't you perform chores like vacuuming and dusting, getting rid of clutter, straightening things up a bit so your guests will find your home tidy and neat? Don't you "roll out the red carpet" to help make your guests feel welcome when they step through the door? That's how Scripture encourages us to get ready for Jesus. We're to give our hearts a house-cleaning by sweeping away the things that would offend our heavenly Guest (e.g. the clutter of bad attitudes, the dirt of sinful habits, the grime of spiritual laziness and lethargy). We can't do the clean-up work on our own, though. We need the Holy Spirit's help. He uses the Word to show us our sin and lead us to drown our old Adam through daily contrition and repentance. By the same Word He draws us to our Savior, comforts us with His forgiving love, and empowers us to begin living a new and nobler life to God's glory.

It's what we sing about in the well-known Christmas carol:

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let every heart prepare Him room  
And heaven and nature sing.  
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 87:1)

## THE COLORS OF CHRISTMAS: RED

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23 FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

**1 John 1:7** ... The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

"Make it yourself with materials that you have lying around the house." Our society grows more and more diversified with material products. And you don't buy just one cleaning chemical. You need one for the kitchen floor, one for the bathroom floor; another for the sink, another for the tub, etc. You don't buy just flour, you buy all-purpose, or bread flour, or flour for baking, etc. Even as the corporations come up with bigger, better, stronger options, many people are talking about how you don't need the fancy chemicals. You can do it all with common household items. I remember talking with a friend about making your own soap. I also once spilled wine on the white altar cloth and was able to clean it perfectly and easily using nothing but salt and tap water. Ironing was a bit more tricky. That I should have left to the pros.

When it comes to cleansing our souls from sin, there is only one cleaning agent that will work, the red blood of Christ. Many people have tried different home remedies. Luther tried scrubbing out sins by beating himself. The Pharisees tried their heritage. The new big thing is love. If you are a loving person, then you will be clean. Often it is tempting to think that I just have to try harder, then the Lord will love me. None of these "home remedies" have any impact on the stain that covers our lives, for that there is only one cleaning agent, the blood of Christ.

Thankfully it is easily found in every household. It is not a cheap substance that just happens to be lying around. It is a very expensive substance, which nevertheless has been provided free of charge for everyone who wishes to make use of it. You don't even have to call a toll free number, just ask the Lord and He will cover you with it.

Christ's red blood cleanses all.

## THE COLORS OF CHRISTMAS: GOLD AND SILVER

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

**1 Peter 1:3-4** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

Let's see, a kite and a fishing pole, what do these two things have in common? They are both presents that will never actually get used as intended if given to a child for Christmas. I witness from experience that the agony of having to wait three whole months, at least, before you can use a Christmas present is far too much for most children to endure. And so if given a kite or a fishing pole most children will conceive of wondrous new games in which to make use of said gifts. Furthermore most of these games will do nothing to ensure the longevity of the precious present. At the very least the child will open, put together, caress, look at, take apart, put back together and on some rare occasions sleep with the treasured item. No matter what happens, it, whatever it is, will seldom remain in a working state when the lakes are thawed.

It is probably, therefore, a good thing that the Lord keeps our inheritance from us until such a time when we are no longer capable of ruining it. We are the sons of God, by adoption true but still the sons of God, and yet we do not live like it. The gold and silver, the mansions, the feasts are all waiting for us in our homeland. But oh what agony to know what the present is and see it waiting for us and have to wait. Nevertheless we do so knowing it is worth the wait.

Gold and silver, the riches of a king. The riches of a king, Christ's inheritance as the Son of God. Christ's inheritance, God's gift to us. Gold and silver, the riches of a king, what we wait to enjoy in the eternal spring.

Christ gives us gold.

## THE ADVENT WREATH

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Already before Advent begins the communities where we live begin to get ready for Christmas. We see decorations put up downtown. We hear reminders of how many shopping days are left before Christmas. We hear carols of Christmas played over loud speaker systems at the mall. We see displays of Santa and his reindeer in front yards of homes. Because of this it is easy for us to get ready of Christmas without preparing ourselves for the coming of Jesus. During this pre-Christmas Advent season we want to be sure that we're not just longing for presents piled under the tree but for God's precious gift of a Savior from sin, death, and hell. It is important that we prepare our hearts and homes for the coming of Jesus.

The Advent wreath is one of the best-known customs to help us prepare. Being in the shape of a circle, the wreath stand for eternity. The evergreens symbolize eternal life in Christ. The four candles mark the weeks of the Advent season. At the beginning of the first week one candle is lit. Each time a candle is lit, we think of how dark our lives would be without God and the growing light of salvation through Christ's coming into the world at the first Christmas.

Dear Lord, in high compassion  
Bend down with Advent grace.

My heart, I pray, refashion

With mercy from Your face.

Come from the thankless inn

To make my heart Your manger

That I, no more a stranger,

Eternal praise begin.

## A GREAT AND MIGHTY WONDER

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

"I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost." So we confess in the Creed. Ponder this amazing miracle! God's eternal Son was conceived in the womb of a lowly virgin girl living in the out-of-the-way village of Galilee 2000 years ago. Is this not a wonder? Even apart from the wonderful purpose of Jesus' conception, just the fact of it happening is reason to lift our hearts in praise to our God. "Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness, praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet, with harp and lyre, with tambourine and dancing, with the strings and flute, with the clash of cymbals" (Psalm 150).

At this season we praise Him as we think about the Christmas miracle. God sent His angel to announce that the Holy Spirit would come upon Mary and the power of the Highest overshadow her. The same God who created the world in the beginning, who formed the first man from the dust and the first woman from a rib of the first man, He used His creative power to cause a unique human life to begin forming in the womb of a woman who had never been with a man. Is that not a wonder?

In our preparations for Christmas may let us not be distracted by unbelieving skeptics who say: "This goes against everything we know about biology. People living in olden days were naive enough to believe a baby could be born without a human father but I can't be expected to accept miracles of the Bible as factual." No rather, let us recognize in humble faith how the virgin birth of Christ is a grand example of our Lord choosing "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" (1 Corinthians 1:27). The same God who made the world in six days; and kept Jonah alive in the stomach of a fish for three days; and commanded the waters of the Red Sea to part and form a walled-in highway, caused His Son to be conceived in a virgin's womb for our salvation. Praise Him!

## THE COLORS OF CHRISTMAS: GREEN

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

**Jeremiah 17:7-8** Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

I personally believe that pine trees are among the ugliest of all trees. There may be many that disagree with me on this, but that is my opinion. Many of the forests of Wisconsin, after being cleared of their native trees by the lumber industry, were replanted with pine trees. This makes me sad. When I go walking in the woods in summer or autumn, I don't want to see pine trees, they seem boring and a bit colorless next to the mighty oaks, or the white birch trees. I like the willows especially the ones that hang low over quiet rivers and the Ash trees turn a glorious gold color in the fall, but the pine ...

Nevertheless, if the pine is plain and simple and not particularly strong or glorious, yet it remains green when everything else has died. In the heart of winter, suddenly the simple pine tree is the only thing that has color. All other trees produce a myriad array of colors in the fall, but the harshness of winter appears and only the pine retains any color.

This world might very well produce much that astonishes us. The worldly people that surround us might seem to have so much more than those who live for Christ. They might be stronger, more colorful, bolder, richer, but in the end when they have lost it all, those in whom Christ remains are the only ones left alive. Those who hope in the Lord will remain green. Everything else will die.

Christ keeps you green.



## THE COLORS OF CHRISTMAS: WHITE

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20      FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

**Isaiah 1:18** "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool."

Brilliantly white, startlingly white, dangerously white, such is the sudden descending blanket that can so quickly transform the colorful fall into the starch world of winter. Anyone who lives north of Missouri, and a lot of people farther south, know what it is like to wake up to the first snow fall of the season. Instead of the dead grass, brown leaves, and wilted flowers, all of a sudden the entire world is one vast field of white. It can be very beautiful. It can also be incredibly painful. Eyes accustomed to the dull gray bleakness of a November day can quickly be reduced to tiny slits and scrunched cheeks when the snow is hit by the vivid reflection of a golden sun. Further north, the Eskimos often spend a good deal of the year wearing special goggles with nothing more than a slit in the wood to survive the blinding influence of the glimmering snow. Such is the pure whiteness of the snow, which one can barely look at it. And it is to this that God compares our lives. Christ does shine on our lives until He can see His own reflection in it. And that reflection is so powerful and vivid that just as one cannot bear to look at the glory of Christ with human eyes, so one has to squint to look at those who reflect His glory.

As the days wear on the snow is covered with tracks and dirt and the brown liquid that is left in the bucket after scrubbing my floor. Trust me, this is dark brown. But thanks be to Christ who covers us each day with a fresh coat of forgiveness so that we may wake up squinting at the brightness of our lives reflecting the glory of Christ.

Christ makes us white.

## PRAISE GOD FOR TWO MIRACLES

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1      FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Why did the Spirit overshadow Mary with His power and cause a one-of-a-kind human Child to begin forming in her womb? Every person begotten in a natural way is born with a sinful flesh. If Jesus had an earthly father, then what Scripture says about all of us would have been true of Him too: "I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). However, because Jesus wasn't begotten in a natural way, hereditary sin wasn't transmitted to Him. That is why He could be born holy, live a sinless life, and finally offer His life of holiness on the cross as the all-sufficient sacrifice for the world's sin.



Let us cling to the teaching of the virgin birth with all our might and never let it go! If it is "myth", we've got no reason for Christmas joy. We might as well refrain from "decking the halls." Our mission as a church, which is to share the glad tidings of great joy of a Savior born for us, would be sham. The religion of Christianity would collapse if the virgin birth didn't happen. You might as well put your trust in Frosty the Snow Man.

But praise God it happened exactly as the Bible records. What's true of all other babies wasn't true of Jesus. He had no human father. So what Scripture testifies about Him elsewhere is true: "He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). "Such a High Priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26-27). "You know it wasn't with perishable things like silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Do you believe this? If you can answer "yes," blessed are you! Then praise God for another miracle. He sent His Spirit into your heart through the Word to lead you to a knowledge of the Truth and make you wise for salvation in Jesus!

## DON'T JUDGE BY HIS LOWLY APPEARANCE

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2 FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

**Zechariah 9:9** Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Jesus is a king, indeed, but a poor and wretched king, who doesn't even look like a king if you judge Him by such outward signs as might and splendor, things which the kings and princes of the world usually employ to show off.

He leaves to other kings such fancy signs as pomp, castles, palaces, gold and great wealth. He prefers to let them eat and drink, dress and build more elaborately than other people. But the heart that Christ the beggar-king knows, they do not even know at all. He provides relief not only for one sin, but for all my sin; and not for my sin only, but for the sins of the whole world. He comes to remove not only sickness, but also death; and not my death only, but the death of the the whole world. This is what the prophet means when he says: "Tell the daughter of Zion not to be offended at His lowly advent; but shut your eyes and open your ears and see, not that He rides so lowly, but listen to what is said and preached about this poor King. His poverty and lowly condition are plain to see, for He comes riding on a donkey like a beggar who owns neither saddle nor spurs. But the fact that He will take away from us our sin, will strangle death, will give us eternal holiness, eternal bliss, and eternal life, this is not plain to see. Consequently, you must hear and believe."



– Martin Luther

## THE COLORS OF CHRISTMAS: LIGHT

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19 FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

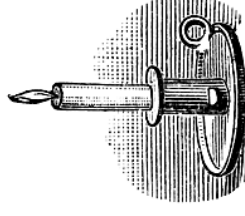
**John 1:4-5** In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness.

Have you ever stopped to consider the fact that Christmas occurs three days after the darkest day of the year? It is sometimes difficult to be excited about winter. Cold, dark, wet, and often dangerous roads, these things all combine to make winter, for some people, the worst time of the year. We can get grumpy about shoveling our sidewalks. We can complain about looking out the window at 3:30 and seeing nothing but black. And yet right in the midst of this dreary, dull, depressing time of year sits Christmas. Arguably it is the most cheerful, joyous time of year. It is hard to truly dislike winter with such a warm and festive holiday sitting at its heart.

The festival of Christmas spreads out tendrils of warm glowing joy to what would otherwise be an almost unendurably bleak and forbidding stretch of time. This is very appropriate, since it is the celebration of the coming of warmth and joy into the bleak desolate world of men. Like a furnace in the heart of a house, so is Christmas in the heart of winter, and so is Christ in the heart of a man.

Just when our life looks the bleakest. Just when we don't think it could get any darker out, Christ comes with His light to change mourning into gladness. We may yet have months of gloom ahead, we may have dark hours and cold nights still coming, but once Christmas is in our heart the days only get longer and closer to the Summer of eternity. May all those who live in the shadow of our own darkness continually receive the warmth and light of the celestial rays of that eternal day.

Christ brings the light.

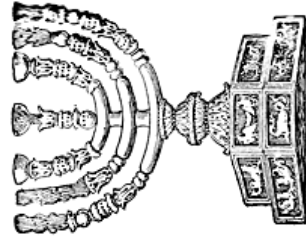


## THE LIGHT ETERNAL

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

**John 8:12** "I am the light of the world."



Many of our churches are now open only one or two days a week. The temple in old Jerusalem was, of course, open every day. More than that, God designed the temple and its services to proclaim His daily provision for the spiritual welfare of all who trust in Him. And since Christ mediates all such blessings, the temple's appointments and rites quite naturally spoke of Him – from the lambs sacrificed each morning and evening, to the daily setting out of the 12 loaves of "showbread," to the gold lampstand that was constantly burning in the Holy Place. Not surprisingly, it was in the temple that Jesus said, "I am the Light of the World."

Sin, ignorance, and death fill the whole world with darkness. Jesus dispels that darkness with the release from death's curse and sin's power that the free gift of His forgiveness grants. His Word leads us out of the darkness of Satan's delusions and places our feet on the straight path.

Our Christmas lights are small and shine but for a time. The One whose birth they mark gives light for darkness everywhere, every day. He is truly the light of the *world*.

Long before Jesus' birth, the 24/7 nature of the light He brings was symbolized in tabernacle and temple. For when the Lord Himself designed the golden lampstand of the Holy Place, He gave it seven branches with seven lamps. There is no day of the week in which our Lord does not beam the very light of life into our hearts and lives.

The Light Eternal, breaking through,  
Made the world to gleam anew;  
His beams have pierced the heart of night,  
He makes us children of the Light.  
(Martin Luther)

## ARE YOU GOOD AT WAITING?

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

**Psalms 130:5** I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.

How good are you at waiting? Often we find that our ability to wait depends on the circumstances. If we are in a hurry, waiting is difficult. If the person telling us to wait doesn't seem to care about what our situation is, waiting is difficult. But, if you are out fishing, waiting is acceptable, but only if everyone else fishing around you is waiting too. If everyone else seems to be catching fish but you are not, then waiting becomes difficult again.

One of Advent's themes is *waiting*. The first of the four candles, the prophecy candle, symbolizes the some 4,000 years of waiting that God's Old Testament people had before Jesus finally did come. But the waiting was not without its goal. And all through that long wait gave His people prophecies reminding them of what, or rather Who, was to come.

We find the Lord time and again reminding His people through the sacrifices of those lambs, through the example of people like Moses, and through the words which He had spoken through those who were serving as His mouthpieces. People like Balaam, who spoke of "the star that would come out of Jacob and the Scepter that would arise out of Israel" – or Micah, who spoke of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Savior; Isaiah who spoke of His sufferings, or the countless other prophecies that the Lord had written down. So while, yes, it is true that there was a long time of waiting, the waiting was not without God's witness of what – and Who – was to come!

So it is our prayer that God's blessings would be on us during these days of our waiting for His coming, knowing that He will fulfill each and every promise He has given us, just as He did in Old Testament times!

## THE COMING ONE

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

**Luke 21:25-36** And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them from fear, and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Jesus makes plain the truth of His Return in glory at the end of time and the fact that for His disciples this will be their final deliverance for all of sin's power and evil effects. Jesus' Return is a fact of history waiting to happen. It is as sure to happen as His first Coming. For it rests on His own Word and Promise, which is something more solid than even the reality of this universe, for without the Word of our God there would be no heavens and earth.

Jesus Christ is still what many Old Testament believers called Him: the Coming One. To the fact of His Return in glory Jesus attaches a word of encouragement for us: "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads; because your redemption draws near."

"Be encouraged." This word applies to whole time between Jesus' comings. The signs are clear. Your redemption is near. And "those things" that remind us that the Last Day is coming. Events which naturally cause us concern as human beings should not cause us Christians to be anxious and fearful, but to remember the fact of our Lord's Return, an event full of happy expectation.

The world's break-up, which even now is in its beginning stages may also bring us trouble, affliction, even death. But these things are all part of this earth and its passing scene. As children of heaven's high King our future lies with Him. And He is coming in glory to rule and reign forever in the new heavens and new earth.

The things of this world can't and don't last. Sin has seen to that. Yet even in their passing they serve to remind us that our Savior's word and promise stand forever.

## AS IN THE DAY OF MIDIAN

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

**Isaiah 9:2, 4** The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined ... For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.

So certain is Isaiah of the Messiah's coming, that he speaks of it as if it had already occurred, and the victory were already won, won by God in such a way that those delivered could never conclude that it was their doing – as was the case when the Lord used Gideon to rout the vastly superior forces of Midian.

And God had seen to it that Israel was greatly outnumbered. He had pared down the 32,000 who had answered Gideon's call until only 300 remained, the 300 most frightened, least likely of warriors.

Yet, when Gideon and his men broke the jars that hid their torches, blew on their trumpets and cried out: "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!" the result was a thorough-going rout of the Midianites.

Isaiah uses Gideon's victory to picture a far greater one: the victory of God's greatest champion over Satan and his demon forces. For Gideon's victory was great, but it was nothing compared to Christ's. Gideon's victory over Midian was great and bloody, but not final. Jesus' victory over Satan was bloody (the Victor's blood!) – and eternally final.

And because Christ came to win His greater victory for us with His own blood, a far greater joy than that of victorious Gideon is ours.

But as with Gideon vs. Midian, our God wins the day in a way most surprising and unexpected way. He sends an army of One! And that One who comes as a child, comes to die a seemingly helpless death.

Yet from the dark shadow of the grave itself, the Light has shined!

## YOUR BRIGHT MORNING STAR

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16 THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

**2 Peter 1:19** And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Are you interested in astronomy? If so, then you know that the Morning Star is actually the planet Venus. You also know that the Morning Star is one of the most beautiful sights in the heavens. It is the star that outshines all the rest. In today's Bible verse Peter makes mention of this star.

As the Morning star is the prize possession of the heavens, so the Bible has its prized Morning Star. The Morning Star of the Bible is, of course, none other than Jesus, God's Son – the Light of the World. It is this Morning Star, it is this Jesus revealed so clearly and brightly in the Bible, Who drives away the darkness from our lives.

No one else but He, as He shows Himself to us in His word, can displace all the darkness, which is so thick and deep. There's the darkness of our own inborn sin which tries to overshadow the joy and peace we have by faith in Christ. There's the darkness of a world, hopeless and lost, whose despair can easily rub off on us. There's the appalling darkness of death's shadow. There's the forces of darkness, Satan and his evil angels, which are bent on dragging us down into the abyss of eternal night. The only true antidote for all this gloom is the light our Savior brings. And His light shines in no other place but in your Bible.

Can our own self-made remedies of dealing with problems do for us what Jesus can? Can the advice of a well-meaning friend light our way better than the Morning Star of the Scriptures? Can society's ever-changing values, promoted by the world's "stars" be the better light to follow?

The gloom is in us, around, and upon us! So let us turn off all artificial lights, for we have real light to drive away the shadows of all our fears. We open the Bible and there He is: Jesus, beaming so true and so sure.

## HE COMES FOR SINNERS

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5 SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

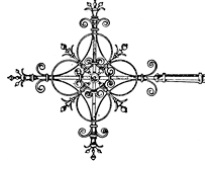
**1 Timothy 1:15** This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

Is there anything good about being a sinner? In the truest sense, there is nothing good about sin or being a sinner. Sin is always a departure from God's good and holy will. The end of sin is death.

However, in a certain light you may be able to say that there is something good about being a sinner; not the sin, of course, but something else – some good news.

Consider this example. If I go to the hospital because I am terribly sick, even fatally sick, my sickness is never going to be a good thing. In fact, I would be much better off having never contracted it. However, at the point that I am in a hospital bed, suffering and dying, never having had the disease in the first place is no longer an option. In this case I can only hope that there is a cure for my condition.

According to the medical capabilities of this world, depending on my disease, sometimes there will be a cure – and sometimes there won't. This being the case, I may actually consider it a good thing to have a certain disease if I am told that the disease is treatable. It is not the disease that is good. It is the fact there is a cure for my disease that is good news.



And so it is with our condition of sin. Once again, sin is never good. We are always better off apart from sin. And yet, at the end of the day, each one of us must admit that we are a sinner, even the *chief of sinners*. However, there is good news for sinners! There is a cure! Jesus has come into the world to save sinners. By His perfect life and innocent death, He has taken our place in God's sight and given us the forgiveness of sins and the hope for eternal life.

Sinners, be glad! Jesus has come for us.

## HE COMES IN TRUTH

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

**John 18:37** "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."

Parents teach their children to tell the truth, and when a child seems to be a little less than forthright about a certain matter, you can often hear a parent saying in a suspecting tone, "Tell the truth, now."

A court of law will place those who testify under oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In deciding the matter of a court case, the point is to find out the truth. Anything less than truthfulness in the courtroom will only confuse the matter and delay or endanger the deliverance of justice.

These are just two examples, but how often is the truth vitally important to our lives everyday? Of course, it is important for us to know the truth about many things, and none more so than our eternal situation.

It's quite sad, but so many people don't know the truth when it comes to the all-important matters of eternity. Some have taken hold of lies, thinking they can achieve eternal life and salvation through adherence to some false religion. Some will admit that they simply don't know what to think about these things. Some invent their own personal ideas about these things. But this doesn't have to be the case.

God who is the creator of all things knows the truth about all things. With regard to salvation and eternal life, the truth is found in Jesus. Jesus came into this world to establish the truth of salvation through His work on the cross, bringing forgiveness of sins for sinners everywhere. Jesus has come to bear witness to this great gospel truth found in the Word of God.

Through Jesus, through His Word, and through His disciples (that's us!), God wants everyone to know the truth about forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Jesus is the truth.

## THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

**Isaiah 60:1-2** The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor ...

Believers in Old Testament times didn't have Christmas every year like we do. But God did give them the year of Jubilee to long for. Isaiah refers to it as "the year of the LORD's favor."

The Jubilee came along once every fifty years. During this year God commanded the people of Israel not to plant, reap, or harvest in their fields. They were simply to eat what grew in their fields. God promised He would provide more than enough (Leviticus 25). When the LORD divided up the Promised Land and gave each tribe its own land, each person could sell the land they were given. But in the year of Jubilee, all people were to return to the family property. Also, an Israelite who had become a slave to pay for debt would be released in the year of Jubilee. It's not hard to see why the people would long for the year of Jubilee.

The beginning of the year of Jubilee was announced with a trumpet blast throughout the land. To the people that trumpet blast meant:

- Stop working and watch the LORD provide.
- Now you may return to the land of your father, which was lost.
- Now you are free from your chains.

Jesus' preaching announced the beginning of the greatest "year of Jubilee" ever (Luke 4:18-21). And indeed throughout the land the trumpet of Christ's preaching was heard, it said:

- Stop trying to pay for your sins, you can't.
- Stop and watch the LORD provide payment.
- Now you may return to the land of God's favor which once belonged to your father Adam.
- Now you are free from your chains of sin.
- In Christ's blood they are dissolved and bind you no more.

## THE SAVIOR'S NAME

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

**Isaiah 9:7** And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

In our previous devotion from Isaiah we looked at how our Savior came born of a virgin, both true man and true God in one person. Here Isaiah goes into much more detail as to who this coming Savior would be.

The first name that is attributed to Him is Wonderful. He would be a wonder, a miracle beyond what anyone could imagine. He was a wonder in that He was completely sinless and in every way He kept the Old Testament Law perfectly for us. He was the Wonder of wonders.

He is also called Counselor. As our Counselor He formulated the most important of plans and then, with His own blood, carried out that plan to the fullest degree. And even now he still remains our Counselor. His counsel is His Word, and with that Word He has counseled believers throughout the centuries.

This child would also be called the Mighty God. He is the true and all-powerful God.

If that were not enough in itself, the title Everlasting Father is added. This too points to the divinity of Jesus. He was the Word and the Word was with God and was God from the beginning. He is eternal, everlasting! He cares about all people and became human because of His love for us sinners.

He is also called the Prince of Peace. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, we became the enemies of God. A wall was built up separating God and man, and with our sins we only made that wall higher. But Jesus was the Prince of Peace who came and with His death has torn down the wall and has once again brought peace between man and God. Jesus is our Savior who has come and has purchased our release from sin just as it was foretold. To Him be the Glory!

## HE COMES FROM THE FATHER

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

**John 5:43** "I have come in My Father's name."

As Christmas comes, it is a time for us for us to think on Christ and His coming to men. The coming of Jesus Christ is a marker of the one true religion of God.

After the fall into sin, God promised to send a Savior into this world. It would be through this Savior alone that sinners could be justified and live. This Savior would be the God-man, Jesus, Son of the Father. It is only through Jesus that sinners can come to God and be reconciled to Him. Apart from Jesus, sinners are left alone in their sins, and there is no access to the Heavenly Father.

In today's world, there are significant efforts being made to present all religions and all ideas as equally valid. It can be considered taboo to assert that there is only one true religion that leads to salvation. It is because of such efforts that we are hearing less and less about the "Christmas season," and more and more about the "holiday season."

Well, in a sense this should not surprise us. The Scriptures tell us that the whole world lies under the sway of Satan. Also, as Christians, we don't want to make it our goal to force the secular world to observe Christian holidays. It is, however, our goal to promote and defend the truth when it comes to the only way to the God and His salvation. Jesus is the only way. Jesus is the only one who has come to earth in the Father's name for this purpose.

Some believe that all religions are acknowledging the same god, just in different ways. That is not the message of the Bible. The Bible says that Jesus and the Father are one. You cannot have one without the other.

As Jesus came to earth on that first Christmas, He came from the Father, according to His plan for the salvation of sinners. Jesus and His coming are distinctive markers of the true religion of God.

## HE COMES TO SERVE

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

**Matthew 20:28** "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

"Can I help you?"

We might hear this line when we go to a restaurant, a store, or a bank, but what about when we open up the pages of the Bible? Do we hear this message when we consider God's Word? Well, I don't think we'll ever find that exact quotation in the Bible, but, in so many words, this is a question that Jesus Himself asks us through the pages of Holy Scripture. More specifically, through pages of Holy Scripture, He makes a statement and tells us, "I can help you."

Of course, to be helped, we must be in need of something. In our case, we are in need of the forgiveness of sins and righteousness that can only be found in our Savior Jesus. In our case, without Jesus and His work, we are condemned sinners. Because of this, we need Jesus' help. Fortunately for us, the King of Glory has come to serve us, offering us His help.

So often the high and mighty in this world are more interested in being served, and don't care much about serving others. If this is the case with earthly rulers and leaders, how much more should this be the case with God of all creation? And yet, Jesus established a different pattern. Jesus came to this earth to reign as King, but to reign in a spiritual kingdom through a life of service.

Jesus knew that by His service forgiveness of sins and salvation would come to sinners. Jesus knew that without His service, all men would be eternally lost. Through His service, Jesus laid down His own life and gave His life as "a ransom for many." Through His life and death of service, He paid the ransom price that was on our heads.

Jesus has come to this earth to serve. In His Word Jesus tells us, "I can help you."

## THE SAVIOR'S BIRTH

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT



**Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

In the days leading up to Christmas we hear much about the birth of Jesus. Manger scenes and Christmas cards and letters remind us of His special birth. The birth of Jesus of Nazareth was different from any other birth. And our Savior Himself was different from every other person who has ever lived. The difference was that our Savior was both True Man, and also True God. Isaiah speaks of the Human nature of our Savior saying, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son!" This is most certainly a sign that would be remembered. It was a promise of something extraordinary – miraculous! It would be nothing new for a woman to give birth to a child, but this woman would be a virgin, one who has not had relations with any man! Now that would be a miracle!

But there was also more to Jesus than just His human nature. For we know that He was also True God. Isaiah goes on to tell us more about this virgin's son, saying, "and shall call His name Immanuel." Immanuel, as Matthew tells us, means "God with us." Here the LORD was not referring to the actual name of this child who was to be born, but was referring to what He would be. He would also be True God. In Jesus, God and man were brought together in one person. God Himself would enter human life through this miracle.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, he was told to name this baby Jesus – because He will save His people from their sins. The name Immanuel refers to what that Child would be, namely, God with us! They shall call his name Immanuel – God with us, God in our nature. This was fulfilled in their calling him Jesus, a Savior, for if He had not been Immanuel, God with us, He could not have been Jesus, a Savior.

Praise be to God that He did fulfill this promise that a virgin would conceive and bear a Son, who was both True Man and True God in one person. Thanks be to God for the salvation we have received through that Holy Child, our Savior Jesus Christ.

## THE SAVIOR'S WORK

MONDAY, DECEMBER 12

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

**Isaiah 61:1** "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners."

Every four years the citizens of this country have the opportunity to elect a new leader for our country. We look at the candidates qualifications and compare those with what needs to be accomplished and make our vote. But still it often happens that someone unqualified gets elected instead. Thanks be to God that our Savior was not elected or chosen by us, but was chosen by God from the foundation of the world.

What was it that our Savior had been chosen to do? He was chosen to bring comfort "to bring good news to the afflicted." All people have been afflicted since the time of Adam and Eve and the fall into sin. We are afflicted with sin which is the inability to fulfill God's Law as He wants us to. Our sin condemns us to an eternity in hell with the Devil. But Jesus brought us the "good news" of our sins forgiven through His perfect life and His death in our place.

But our Savior was chosen to do more than just proclaim. More importantly, He was the one who obtained this liberty and comfort for all people. While He was here on earth He was proclaiming this message of liberty but He was also keeping the Commandments of God perfectly in our place. He was looking forward to the cross, when He would also die in our place; for the sins we had committed. Through His perfect life and innocent death He gained the victory over death and the devil for us. It was the freedom over death and the devil which He won for us that He came to proclaim. Jesus work was not only to tell us about this freedom from sin, but also to deliver us from the bondage of sin!

## HE COMES FOR DESTRUCTION

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

**1 John 3:8** For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

According to this passage, Jesus has come to earth for the purpose of destruction. When we think of the reasons why Jesus came to earth, "for destruction" is usually not the first one that pops into our heads. Rather we might think of how He came to bring forgiveness and eternal life to sinners. However, destruction is a very real part of the process by which He brings forgiveness and eternal life to sinners.

First of all, it is important to remember that because of our sins, the powerful Son of God could have rightfully destroyed us human beings. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, left God's side and joined the devil's team when they chose to disobey God's Word and listen to the devil's words instead. By their sin, they were no longer God's friends, but they had now become God's enemies along with Satan. By their very sinful natures, they passed along this inborn sinfulness to every other human being, including you and me. And we must confess, our sinfulness is not only that which is inherited from our sinful parents and ancestors; sinfulness has permeated the thoughts, words, and actions that are all our own.



It is not surprising that the Son of God came to this world for the purpose of destruction, because this world is sinful and full of His sinful enemies. What is surprising is that, according to God's loving plan, He came to save men, through the forgiveness of sins, while reserving His destruction for His enemy, the devil, and for His sinful workings.

The Lord Jesus has come for destruction, however this is not a destruction intended for mankind. Instead, He came to this earth and went to the cross to destroy the works of the devil, even the work of death, so that by this destruction we might have eternal life through faith in Him.

## HE COMES TO GIVE LIFE

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

**John 10:10** "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

Every once in a while you will hear the expression, "Now this is living!" The person who steps off the plane to begin his Hawaiian vacation or the person who slips into his newly purchased hot tub for the first time might be heard saying, "Now this is living!"

The implication of this expression is that there is ordinary life, and then there is the "good life". And how true this is, there really are two kinds of life. Except to find the fuller and better version of life, one should not look to the cares and pleasures that are found in this world.

Sure, it's nice to experience some of the good things that this life has to offer from time to time, but we don't want to let these things become the basis for our highest hope. If this is case, these things will only disappoint us. The vacation will end, the hot tub will become old and will require costly maintenance, and so on and so forth. Even life itself here in this world will soon come to an end.

So the real "good life" is having a hope and future that surpasses the fleeting pleasures of this world. The real "good life" is knowing that we will be delivered through all the troubles of this world. The real "good life" is knowing that even when we die, we will live – and live eternally in paradise.

The real "good life" cannot come to us through anything that this world has to offer. It can only come to us through the love of God. And in love God sent His Son into this world to pay the price for our sins, so that whoever believes in Him will be saved.

Without Jesus, a person's life becomes emptier and emptier, as he moves closer and closer to death and condemnation. However, by faith in Jesus, and through His merits, a person's life becomes fuller and fuller as everyday he moves toward his heavenly home. Jesus has come the so that we may have life, and have it more abundantly.

## HE WHO CAME IS COMING

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

**Luke 21:28b, 36a** Lift up your heads; because your redemption draws near ... Watch always therefore, and pray.

Christmas is coming. Signs are everywhere. But do people know what they point to? Or even that they which are pointing *are* signs?

Christ is Coming again. Signs have been everywhere for centuries: wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes (Matthew 24). But do people know they are signs, and to what they are pointing? To many they are simply "natural" occurrences.

Now, we know Christmas is not just family-time and gift-giving. We know it is the anniversary of the coming of the Son of God into our human race, God the Father's gift of His only Son to be our Savior from sin.

And we know this same Christ is coming again. His Word is plain and clear on that. We know He will return in the clouds with power and great glory on the Last Day of this universe's existence, the Last Day of time and the heavenly bodies that mark time.

But we know this is not just the end of the world. This will be the greatest family time ever – the gathering of the family of God. "The Son of Man ... will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matthew 24:30-31).

For believers, then, this is not a day to anticipate with fear or anxiety, but rather a day on which the Lord says we are to stand tall: to lift up our heads because our redemption draws near.

