

The beginning of the Gospel. The start of good news. How does it begin? It begins with what seems to be the “anti-gospel”: all should make it smooth-going for Yahweh to enter and rule!

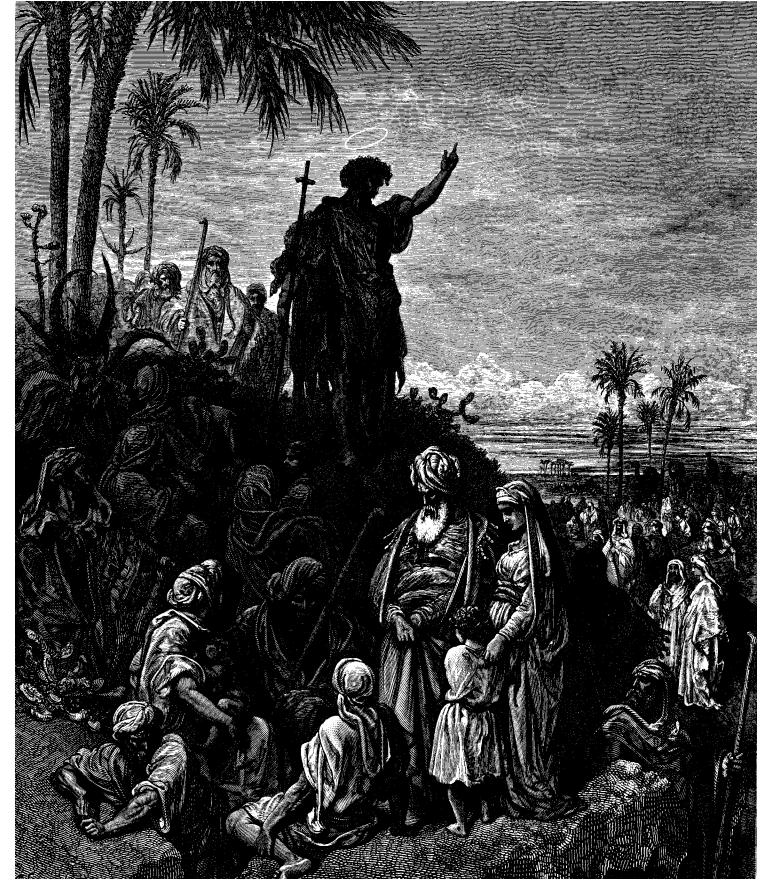
Yet, John is proclaiming not “improvement by good works,” but forgiveness of sins! His “repent” means: “Stop doing the things you think will make you happy, that always fall short and leave you condemned; also stop trying to make God pleased with you, as you will never accomplish it. Instead, have your heart and mind freed from such preoccupation by trusting in what the Lord says He will here provide you—the washing away of your sins!”

People often think of John: “Oh, he must be holy; look at how he lives! In a world of materialism, he is so spiritual!” Yet, John confesses that he is unworthy and that the One who gives his Baptism power is the “normal looking one” coming after him, whose sandals neither John nor his hearers are fit to untie.

St. Mark makes it clear that doubters are foolish, because John isn’t the only one to testify of Jesus: the Father and the Spirit testify when John baptizes Him, and everything else the people see Him do in this chapter declares who He is—even the demons must say it, along with all who hear His teaching!

We pray: We thank You, dear Lord Jesus, that what we would only make rougher by our works You have made perfect by Yours, showing clearly what the Gospel is: that You give the forgiveness of sins and true sonship through faith in Your having redeemed us by the shedding of Your most holy blood, You who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever One God, reign unto all eternity. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



**ADVENT 1—WEEK OF CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 5—31, 2016)**

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Lesson from the Book of Concord

Second Sunday in Advent

Article XVII.

Also, they [the Lutherans] teach, that, at the Consummation of the World, Christ shall appear for judgment, and shall raise up all the dead; He shall give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He shall condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. They condemn also others, who are now spreading certain Jewish opinions that, before the resurrection of the dead, the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed [exterminated].

—The Augsburg Confession

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30: ISAIAH 64–66 WEEK OF CHRISTMAS

The Lord teaches us our “place” through these chapters of Isaiah: we are not able to build for Him or do for Him anything that is not already His. Whatever we would use to make it, He has created. Our very bodies and minds, and the health of both that would allow us to work, these He has provided, as well. Thus, it is not that we are to fashion for ourselves or for others a more pleasant world, but that we are to stand in awe of the Creator and His grace, by which He makes the new heavens and the new earth that shall forever remain—and by which He makes us also to remain to enjoy them.

Therein is the true worship that continues always: the confidence that He calls us to Him who were not formerly called by His name. Though He had right to us by creation, He has purchased and won us through the blood of His Son. He has won us by destroying that which held us in bondage—our sin that made us slaves to death and the devil. He purchased us by paying all the debt of that sin that we owed to Him. He has given us this confidence through His Word that creates such faith within us, and through the Sacraments that are given their power and effect by that Word.

We pray: Unto us a Child has been born; God the Son has come as Man to be given for us, fulfilling all righteousness and paying all that we owe. Through Him, O Father, You give us life in Your eternal Kingdom as Your own dear children, for which we praise You now and forever. Amen.

In St. Luke 4, Jesus read Isaiah 61 in the synagogue in Nazareth one day, sat down and said, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The people marveled at Him, not allowing the reports of what He had done in Capernaum to create faith, but wanting Him to put on a show for them and give them their “fare share” of His miracle working. Yet, He knew that doing so would neither cause them to believe, nor get them to receive the fact that His Word was more than the miracles. Their prejudice—both toward Him and toward the Gentiles—would keep them from the blessed state of affairs described in that chapter.

That would not, though, make Jesus keep silence. Rather, as the prophet wrote, He would proclaim salvation and make salvation, so that all nations could treasure what He would do in Jerusalem. Even so, the daughter of Zion—the Bride of Christ built by the Christ’s sacrifice—would be the true eternal and unforsaken city, the Redeemed of Yahweh, the Sought Out. While those whom He had delivered again and again in the Old Testament had “become like those over whom [He] never ruled, like those who are not called by [His] name,” still the prophet would remember what the Lord had done in former days. Through God the Son He would give to all who would trust in His promise what He had given to fallen Israel: “And he became their Savior. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.”

We pray: We thank You, O Lord Christ, that You were truly born for us and took our sins upon Yourself, being afflicted with all of the affliction we had brought upon ourselves, so that You might redeem us and make us Your own. Amen.

We see the Church represented in this vision as a woman, the “weaker vessel,” but the spouse of Christ, and the mother of the saints. “As clothed with the sun,” having put on Christ, who is “the Sun of righteousness,” she, by her relation to Christ, is invested with honorable rights and privileges and shines in His rays.

As having “the moon under her feet” (that is, the world), she stands upon it, but lives above it. Her heart and hope are not set upon lower things, but on the things that are in Heaven, where her Head is. The “crown of twelve stars” is the doctrine of the Gospel preached by the twelve Apostles, which is a crown of glory to all true believers. In travail, crying out, and “pained to be delivered” she was pregnant and in pain to bring forth a holy progeny for Christ, desirous that what was begun in the conviction of sinners might end in their conversion. She desires that when the children were brought to the birth there might be strength to bring forth, and that she might see of the travail of her soul more children of God.

We pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Thine Only-Begotten Son, so that by His coming we may be enabled to serve Thee with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ. Amen.

Here is a war begun between the beast with his followers and the Lamb with His followers. The beast and his army, to an eye of reason, appear much stronger than the Lamb and His army. One would think an army with a lamb at the head of them could not stand before “the great red dragon.”

But here is a victory gained by the Lamb: “The Lamb shall overcome.” Christ must reign till all enemies “be put under his feet.” He will be sure to meet with many enemies, and much opposition, but He will also be sure to gain the victory.

Here is the reason of the victory: “He is King of kings and Lord of lords.” He has, both by Nature and by Office, supreme dominion and power over all things. All the powers of Earth and Hell are subject to His check and control. His followers “are called, and chosen, and faithful.” They are called out by Holy Baptism to this warfare. They are chosen and fitted for it with the robes of Christ’s righteousness, and they will be faithful in it. Such an army, under such a Commander, will at length carry all the world before them into the safe haven of the Church.

We pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Thine Only-Begotten Son, so that by His coming we may be enabled to serve Thee with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ. Amen.

The children of Israel will bear the Lord’s wrath for their faithlessness and sin, yet the Lord promises that His wrath will not be His final word. In due course He will grant deliverance to the repentant ones. Law will give way to Gospel, and the Gospel will predominate. Nor does He even limit the promise to Israel. The Gentiles will be let in on it too. Consider the words of Isaiah 60:3. “The Gentiles shall come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.”

We celebrate the fulfillment of this prophecy at Epiphany, when the gentile Magi bring gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The light of the Lord has come. Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, has assumed human flesh for us men and for our salvation. He is not only the Messiah of the Jews, but the Savior of the Nations, of all of us.

As with Israel of old, know that when the chastisement of the Lord seems to rest heavily upon you, He intends it only for your good. He intends thereby to call you back to Himself, that the light of our Lord Christ may rest upon you, that you may cling to the forgiveness of sins in His blood that you may have everlasting life.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, grant me ever to live by the light of Christ, repenting of my sins and clinging to His blood bought gift of forgiveness, through the same Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

The prophet asks us rhetorically, “Why do you spend money on what is not bread? And your wages for what does not satisfy?” What a question! And yet we all do it. We squander our money, our time, our energy on things that are not truly worthy of it, on things that ultimately leave us unfulfilled. But he follows this question with a glorious offer: “Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live, And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David.”

As we have just celebrated the birth of our Savior, behold how this promise has been fulfilled! Listen. Listen well. Take it to heart. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. What could matter more than this, that God the Son has taken up our human flesh to bear our sin, redeem us from our fallenness, and give us eternal life by way of His own death and resurrection? And hearing this, how joyfully wise it is of us to re-prioritize our lives according to this “everlasting covenant” of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord! God grant us grace to “live there” in communion with our merciful heavenly Father, in a blessed communion that will indeed be “everlasting.”

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, by Your grace make us to set our hearts on things above, and not on earthly things, that at the last we may indeed know the eternal pleasures that are to be found at Your right hand, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

“Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”

The occasion of this song is the reign and dominion of that omnipotent God who has “redeemed his church by his own blood,” and is now in a more public manner betrothing the Church to Himself: “The marriage of the Lamb has come.”

Now, you have here a description of the bride, how she appeared “in fine linen, clean and white,” which “is the righteousness of saints.” She is in the robes of Christ’s righteousness—the “stola,” the “white robe” of purity and universal holiness. She had “washed her robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” These her nuptial ornaments she did not purchase by any price of her own, but received them as the gift from her blessed Lord.

The marriage feast is declared to be such as would make all those happy who were called to it, a feast made up of the promises of the Gospel: forgiveness, life and salvation. These promises, opened, applied, and sealed by “the Spirit of God,” in the Holy Eucharist are the marriage feast. The whole collective body of all those who partake of this feast is the bride, “the Lamb’s wife;” they eat one Body, and drink one Cup, and become the body of Christ.

We pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Thine Only-Begotten Son, so that by His coming we may be enabled to serve Thee with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ. Amen.

The heavenly state, which was before described as a city and called the new Jerusalem, is here described as a paradise, alluding to the earthly paradise which was lost by the sin of the first Adam. Here paradise is restored by the second Adam; a paradise in a city, or a whole city in a paradise! In the first paradise there were only two persons to behold the beauty and taste the pleasures of it, but in this second paradise whole cities and nations shall find abundant delight and satisfaction.

The tree of life is in this paradise. Such a tree there was in the earthly paradise. This one far excels it. This tree of life is fed by the pure waters of the river that comes from the throne of God. The presence and perfections of God furnish out all the glory and blessedness of Heaven. This tree brings forth many sorts of fruit—"twelve sorts," suited to the taste of all the saints. It brings forth fruit at all times—"yields its fruit every month." This tree is never empty, never barren; there is always fruit upon it. The presence of God in Heaven is the health and happiness of the saints. There they find in Him a remedy for all their former maladies, and by Him are preserved sinless for all eternity.

We pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Thine Only-Begotten Son, so that by His coming we may be enabled to serve Thee with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ. Amen.

Isaiah speaks one of the clearest prophecies of Christ: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed." There is no greater truth we can know than that which Isaiah prophesied with these words. We make a mistake if we think only that God and man were separated, but with God becoming man in Christ Jesus, that fixes everything. No, the Person of Christ also has saving work to do: the God-man must be wounded, bruised, chastised, crucified; all so that the righteous demand of divine justice may be fulfilled and the price of every sin must be perfectly paid.

Jesus has indeed done this for us. He has not only become man, but He has paid the price that was owed on account of our sin. Our bodies still suffer sickness, weakness, and death, but such is the nature of life in this fallen world. Nevertheless, on account of our Lord's holy, innocent, bitter suffering and death all of this will ultimately give way to healing. Our perishable will give way to the imperishable; our mortality will give way to immortality. In Baptism we have been Baptized into His death and raised to new life. Indeed, we have received perfect healing, even as we have been perfectly united to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

We pray: Most merciful heavenly Father, I thank You that You have sent Your Son to bear our sin, and be our Savior. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may cling to Jesus Christ in life, and in the hour of our death that in Him we may at the last receive the crown of everlasting life. Amen.

“The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob” (48:20). The season of Advent closes as we celebrate the Eve of Christ’s nativity. The prophet Isaiah taught us to see the captivity of Judea in Babylon as a picture of our captivity to sin, so that we might also see Judea’s restoration as a picture of our salvation. God is true to His Word. Though He punishes sinners, He promises to have mercy upon all who repent of their sins and believe in His name. As God proved true by causing a remnant of the Judeans to return to Jerusalem, so His Word is true which promises the forgiveness of sins, perfect righteousness, and the blessedness of innocence to all who believe the Gospel. This good news creates new hearts in us. Faith in the forgiveness of sins causes joy to flow from our hearts as waters flowed from the rock in the wilderness.

This is not so for the wicked, however. “There is no peace,” says the Lord, ‘for the wicked’ (48:22). All who pass by the manger of the Christ child with disdain or discomfort cannot receive His blessing. Running from Christ, they remain under God’s wrath, for unbelief cannot possess the peace the angel choirs proclaim to the shepherds in the Bethlehem fields. Today, and in the days to come, let us contemplate the great gifts won for us in the Incarnation. Let us put away our sins through repentance so that we may joyfully and happily take up the gifts won for us by the Incarnate Word, Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gracious Lord, keep us always in true repentance and faith, so that we may daily contemplate the gifts given in the Incarnation. Amen.

“After the Babylonian captivity a part of the kingdom of Judah was preserved in order that it might be the seed of the coming reign of Christ, to whom it was bound. Therefore, this people could not be completely rejected until the lawful reign of Christ had come. And this is why the prophets move over from the physical kingdom to the spiritual, even though they are regarded as fanatics for not preserving the order. But he who sees the continuance of those two kingdoms will also see that the prophets have written in the best way.

“Accordingly, in the previous chapter Isaiah dealt with the punishments of the physical kingdom because of the sin and ungodliness of those people. Later he dealt with limited restoration after the captivity. Now follows the prophecy concerning the kingdom of Christ that is to come after the return from the captivity. But these words must be carefully noted, because the prophet speaks spiritually when he describes the church of Christ and skillfully depicts it, namely, that this kingdom is ruled by one scepter, which is the Gospel. Wherever this Gospel is proclaimed with sincerity, there this kingdom of Christ is.” (Luther’s Works, vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39)

We pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Thine Only-Begotten Son, so that by His coming we may be enabled to serve Thee with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ. Amen.

“The Christian has no other cover than Christ; he does not rely on the arm of flesh, for there is no salvation in man, nor on good works, for they are not good in the presence of God. The Christian should teach and act in such a way that he may dare to stand in the presence of God. But the faithful are supported by the Word alone.

“The heat is an internal attack, when the conscience is smitten by the wrath of God, an attack which it also feels when the wrath of God is experienced. It is called the lash of God, and that because it is a punishment that God thus inflicts in a fatherly spirit. Yet because our nature feels it with extreme anguish, it is called wrath, even though God is not angry but loves whom He chastises. Satan is added to this anguish, and despair is increased. As a result there is distress within and without, which is the heat, and it is called spiritual. God, however, chastises so that the power of the Word may be shown to us and Satan may see that the Word is invincible and so that thus the power of the Holy Spirit may be glorified.

“He who has regard for the crowd or tries to gain the good will of princes is deceived, because there is no help in man. Such people cause destruction. Thus God said to Ahaz that he should not fear the king of Syria and promised that He would be his protector, but Ahaz did not believe it (Is. 7:3). Faintheartedness is not made strong with hands but by the Word of God, which alone heartens and causes to stand. If you trust in men, you will have help neither from them nor from God, who forsakes those who forsake Him. For the Word of God is the exceedingly strong tower of Zion and the pavilion of God offering protection in prosperity and adversity.” (Luther’s Works, vol. 16: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39)

We pray: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Thine Only-Begotten Son, so that by His coming we may be enabled to serve Thee with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord says, “Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth” (43:19). This new thing the Lord will accomplish will bring life to the desert places and rivers of life-giving water in the wilderness. This new thing is the salvation of His people through His chosen instrument, which in the case of the exiles in Babylon will be Cyrus, king of Persia. It is certainly new and strange that the Lord will use a pagan king as His Christ (45:1) to lead the saints from their captivity. For as “new” as this is and for as odd as it may strike the ears of all who hear, the Lord’s salvation through Cyrus is still only a type of the truly “new thing” which He will work for His captive people.

That new thing is the incarnation of the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God, begotten from eternity. Man could never suffice to deliver sinners from their captivity in the camp of Satan. No man can loosen the chains of sin. No prophet or God-filled man could undo death for all believers. The true anointed one is God Himself who assumes human flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Son of God comes to redeem His people from their sins, from death, and from all the powers and schemes of the devil by bearing their flesh and blood. This is the “new thing” the Lord promises, for it never happened before, nor will it ever occur again: God becoming man for our salvation.

Almighty God, we give You thanks for sending Your Only-begotten Son into our flesh to bear our sin, to die our death, and redeem us from the captivity of the devil. Keep us in this faith. Amen.

Failure and disappointment are part of the human experience. Both are brought about by sin, so they affect all men. The wicked face failure and disappointment because the Lord is set against their selfish counsels. “He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless” (40:23). The Creator blows on them and they, along with all their schemes, whither (40:24). The saints also face failure and disappointment in life at the hands of other men, as well as from the devil, the world, and their own sinful nature.

It is into this sinful world full of failure and disappointment that God’s Servant enters. “He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth” (42:4). This Servant is our Lord Jesus Christ. He comes in the flesh to atone for the sin of the world and He does not fail in this. He comes to break sin’s oppression in the lives of all who believe the gospel. He comes to mankind to grant rest to those whose souls are restless, that is, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness but do not find it in the things of this world. He provides strength through the gospel so that the saints are able to run and walk without wearying and fainting (40:31). Because He does not fail, neither does His Word and Sacraments. Through these means He continues to open the eyes of those blinded by their sins. Through these means He still releases those imprisoned by their guilt and opens to them everlasting life.

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for sending Your Only-begotten Son into the flesh and that His work for us does not fail. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Third Sunday in Advent

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ’s sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ’s sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

—The Augsburg Confession

Article XVI.

Of Political Order.

The sixteenth article the adversaries receive without any exception, in which we have confessed that it is lawful for the Christian to bear civil office, sit in judgment, determine matters by the imperial laws, and other laws in present force, appoint just punishments, engage in just wars, act as a soldier, make legal contracts, hold property, take an oath when magistrates require it, contract marriage; finally, that legitimate civil ordinances are good creatures of God and divine ordinances, which a Christian can use with safety. The entire topic concerning the distinction between the kingdom of Christ and a political kingdom has been explained to advantage in the literature of our writers, that the kingdom of Christ is spiritual, to wit, that it is in the heart the knowledge of God, and fear and faith in God, beginning eternal righteousness and eternal life; meanwhile it permits us outwardly to use legitimate political ordinances of every nation in which we live, just as it permits us to use medicine or the art of building, or food, drink, air. Neither does the Gospel bring new laws concerning the civil state, but commands that we obey present laws, whether they have been framed by heathen or by others, and that in this obedience we should exercise love.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, §53–55a

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1).

Behold, a branch is growing Of loveliest form and grace,
As prophets sung, foreknowing; It springs from Jesse’s race
And bears one little Flow’r In midst of coldest winter,
At deepest midnight hour.

Isaiah hath foretold It In words of promise sure,
And Mary’s arms enfold It, A virgin meek and pure.
Through God’s eternal will This Child to her is given
At midnight calm and still.

The shepherds heard the story, Proclaimed by angels bright,
How Christ, the Lord of Glory, Was born on earth this night.
To Bethlehem they sped And in the manger found Him,
As angel heralds said.

This Flow’r, whose fragrance tender With sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor The darkness ev’rywhere.
True Man, yet very God; From sin and death He saves us
And lightens ev’ry load.

(Behold, A Branch is Growing - Translation by Harriet Reynolds Krauth, 1922)

We pray: Most Merciful God, who has given Your Eternal Word to be made incarnate of the Virgin, grant to Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, so that we may be made ready for Your visitation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

The Lord gives two signs to Hezekiah in today’s reading. The first sign (37:30) is that the Lord will provide volunteer crops to feed the Judeans. They had not been able to sow or reap due to the Assyrians. The Lord would provide daily bread for them. They would not need the sweat of their brow. The second sign (38:8) the Lord gives specifically to Hezekiah. To demonstrate His favor and that He will extend Hezekiah’s life by fifteen years, the Lord promises to “bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward.” In both cases death and destruction were imminent, the first was a national death and in the second Hezekiah’s own life was threatened. The Lord’s gracious promise to save was connected to a visible sign to strengthen the faith of all who believed.

Hearing this refrain twice in today’s reading, “This shall be a sign to you,” and, “This is the sign to you from the LORD,” should call to mind the first and greatest sign the Lord promised through the prophet Isaiah: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (7:14). The Immanuel child is the chief sign by which we know the love and favor that God has for mankind. This sign is for all mankind, for the Immanuel child will be born to atone for the sins of the world, so that all who believe in Him and trust His gospel will have the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life.

Gracious heavenly Father, direct our eyes always to the sure and certain sign You give us: the Son of the Virgin crucified for our sins. Amen.

The Lord promises a day for His vengeance and “a year of recompense for the cause of Zion” (34:8). He will strike Zion’s enemies who oppress and harass her. He uses Edom as a prototype of all the nations (34:5-6), since His fury is “against all nations” (34:2) who pester His holy people. His judgment upon Zion’s enemies will be fierce so that their land will be laid waste. The land will no longer be habitable for man, only for desert creatures. The Lord then promises the land of Israel shall rejoice in that day when her enemies fall. She will rejoice because her enemies are no more and her salvation from them is finally complete. In that day the victory over Zion’s enemies will include sight for the blind, legs for the lame, and songs for the tongue once dumb. Where there was once despair there will be joy.

This is a picture of what our Lord Jesus Christ brings with Him in the incarnation. He brings about the destruction of Zion’s true enemies of sin, death, and the power of the devil. The Word of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary according to the flesh, brings an end to sin by living righteously and dying innocently in the sinner’s place. The eternal Word of God assumes flesh to die for the sins of the world. The Son of God assumes flesh to battle the devil and snatch his power from him. Christ destroys Zion’s enemies and subjects them to His almighty power so that they might have no power over all who believe the gospel that “Your God will come. He will save you” (35:4).

We give you thanks, O Lord, that by Your incarnation You destroyed our enemies and give us peace . Amen.

“For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will still choose Israel, and settle them in their own land” (Isaiah 14:1).

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high, Who orderest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show, And teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Satan’s tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save, And give them victory over the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death’s dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

(Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel - Translation by John Mason Neale, 1851)

We pray: Most Merciful God, Who has given Your Eternal Word to be made incarnate of the Virgin, grant to Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, so that we may be made ready for Your visitation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

“In mercy the throne will be established; And One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, Judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness” (Isaiah 16:5).

O come, O come, great Lord of might, Who to Thy tribes on Sinai’s height

In ancient times once gave the law In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Root of Jesse’s tree, An ensign of Thy people be;
Before Thee rulers silent fall; All peoples on Thy mercy call.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Desire of Nations, bind In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease, And be Thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

(Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel - Translation by John Mason Neale, 1851)

We pray: Most Merciful God, Who has given Your Eternal Word to be made incarnate of the Virgin, grant to Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, so that we may be made ready for Your visitation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

The Israelites brought instability upon themselves by her sins. Instead of trusting the Lord’s gracious promise of protection, Israel sought a military alliance with Egypt. For this, both would “perish together” (31:3). Many Israelites brought God’s wrath upon her by her wicked deeds of plundering the poor and dealing treacherously with neighbors. For their sins they would be burned up as chaff and stubble (33:11). The wrath of God hangs over all who sin and make a practice of sinning. The one who lives contrary to God’s will shall find no peace, no quietness, and no assurance. The Prophet tells them to rise from their complacency because wrath is coming, even if they can’t see it that moment (32:9-15). He preaches this to the Israelites so that they might repent of their sins and their reliance upon worldly strength. In repentance they are to look for God’s righteousness.

It is only in God’s righteousness, which is offered to all and to be received by faith alone, that sinners find rest from their sins and God’s wrath. “The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever” (32:17). All who believe the gospel, that in Christ Jesus we have a God who is merciful, have everything the gospel promises: forgiveness of every sin, life, and eternal salvation. They also have the effects of righteousness. We have peace with God, for Christ has suffered God’s wrath. We have quietness of soul, so that the Devil’s accusations and torments are met with certain faith that our sins are no more. We have assurance that God is for us and not against us because God has given us His Only-begotten Son for our salvation.

Dear Father, thank you for giving us the righteousness of Christ by faith. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

Fourth Sunday in Advent

Article IX.

Of Baptism, they [the Lutherans] teach, that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God; and that children are to be baptized, who, being offered to God through Baptism, and received into His grace.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who allow not the Baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism.

—The Augsburg Confession

V. Of Baptism.

Baptism is nothing else than the Word of God [with mersion] in the water, commanded by His institution, or as Paul says: “A washing in the Word”; just as Augustine also says: “The Word comes to the element, and it becomes a sacrament.” Therefore, we do not hold with Thomas and the monastic preachers or Dominicans, who forget the Word (God’s institution) and say that God has imparted to the water a spiritual power which, through the water, washes away sin. Nor do we agree with Scotus and the Barefooted monks [Minorites or Franciscan monks], who teach that, by the assistance of the divine will, baptism washes away sins, and that this ablution occurs only through the will of God, and by no means through the Word and water.

Of the baptism of children, we hold that children ought to be baptized. For they belong to the promised redemption made through Christ, and the Church should administer it to them.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part III.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15: ISAIAH 19-21

ADVENT 3

“For thus has the Lord said to me: ‘Go, set a watchman, Let him declare what he sees’” (Isaiah 16:5).

Watchman, tell us of the night, What its signs of promise are.
Traveler, o’er yon mountain’s height, See that glory beaming star.
Watchman, does its beauteous ray Aught of joy or hope foretell?
Traveler, yes—it brings the day, Promised day of Israel.

Watchman, tell us of the night; Higher yet that star ascends.
Traveler, blessedness and light, Peace and truth its course portends.
Watchman, will its beams alone Gild the spot that gave them birth?
Traveler, ages are its own; See, it bursts o’er all the earth.

Watchman, tell us of the night, For the morning seems to dawn.
Traveler, darkness takes its flight, Doubt and terror are withdrawn.
Watchman, let thy wanderings cease; Hie thee to thy quiet home.
Traveler, lo! the Prince of Peace, Lo! the Son of God is come!

(Watchman, Tell us of the Night - Text by John Bowring, 1825.)

We pray: Most Merciful God, Who has given Your Eternal Word to be made incarnate of the Virgin, grant to Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, so that we may be made ready for Your visitation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

“Therefore glorify the Lord in the dawning light, The name of the Lord God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea” (Isaiah 16:5).

Ye sons of men, oh, hearken: Your heart and mind prepare,
To hail the almighty Savior, O sinners, be your care.
He who of grace alone Our Life and Light was given,
The promised Lord from heaven, Unto our world is shown.

Prepare the way before Him; Prepare for Him the best,
Cast out whate'er offendeth This great, this heavenly Guest
Make straight, make plain, the way: The lowly valleys raising
The heights of pride abasing. His path all even lay.

The humble heart and lowly God lifteth up on high:
Beneath His feet in anguish The haughty soul shall lie.
The heart, sincere and right, That heeds God's invitation
And makes true preparation, It is the Lord's delight.

Prepare my heart, Lord Jesus, Turn not from me aside,
And grand that I receive Thee This blessed Advent-tide.
From stall and manger low Come Thou to dwell within me;
Loud praises will I sing Thee And forth Thy glory show.

(Ye Sons of Men, Oh, Harken - Translation by Arthur T. Russell, 1851)

We pray: Most Merciful God, Who has given Your Eternal Word to be made incarnate of the Virgin, grant to Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, so that we may be made ready for Your visitation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

“And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation’” (Isaiah 25:9).

Rejoice, rejoice, believers, and let your lights appear.
The evening is advancing, and darker night is near.
The Bridegroom is arising, and soon He draweth nigh.
Up, pray, and watch, and wrestle: At midnight comes the cry.

See that your lamps are burning; replenish them with oil.
And wait for your salvation, the end of earthly toil.
The watchers on the mountain proclaim the Bridegroom near.
Go meet Him as He cometh, with alleluias clear.

O wise and holy virgins, now raise your voices higher,
Until in songs of triumph ye meet the angel choir.
The marriage feast is waiting, the gates wide open stand;
Rise up, ye heirs of glory, the Bridegroom is at hand.

Our hope and expectation, O Jesus, now appear!
Arise, Thou Sun so longed for, over this benighted sphere!
With hearts and hands uplifted, we plead, O Lord, to see
The day of earth's redemption that brings us unto Thee.

Ye saints, who here in patience your cross and sufferings bore,
Shall live and reign forever, when sorrow is no more.
Around the throne of glory the Lamb ye shall behold;
In triumph cast before Him your diadems of gold!

(Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers - Translation by Sarah Findlater, 1854)

We pray: Most Merciful God, Who has given Your Eternal Word to be made incarnate of the Virgin, grant to Your people grace to put away fleshly lusts, so that we may be made ready for Your visitation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.