

**Clergy of the ELDoNA,
affiliated congregations and missions**

Rt. Rev. James Heiser

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Alpha & Omega Lutheran Mission, Winter, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI; Pure Blessings Lutheran Mission, Fox Valley, WI

Rev. Jerald Dulas

Sts. Peter & Paul L. C., Simpsonville, SC; All Saints Lutheran Mission, Myrtle Beach, SC; St. Michael & All Angels Lutheran Mission, Martinez, GA; St. Bartholomew Lutheran Mission, Fort Myers, FL

Rev. Douglas Handrich

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Daniel Mensing

Faith Lutheran Church, Beaverton, OR

Rev. Randy Moll

Good Shepherd L.C., Rogers, AR

Rev. Mark Mueller

Redeemer L. C., Cambridge, MN

Rev. John Rutowicz

St. Boniface Lutheran Church, Niles, MI

Rev. Josiah Scheck

Christ Lutheran Church, Richmond, MO

Rev. Eric Stefanski

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Harrison, AR; Emmanuel Lutheran Mission, Conway, AR

Rev. Timothy Tolar

St. Luke Lutheran Church, Kenai, AK
Homer Lutheran Mission, Homer, AK

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

Rev. Dcn. Gary Harroun

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Martin Jackson

Good Shepherd L. C. Rogers, AR

Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Dcn. Floyd Smithey

Sts. Peter & Paul Lutheran Church, Simpsonville, SC; St. James Lutheran Mission, Knoxville, TN

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



NOVEMBER 28–DECEMBER 31, 2022

**A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA**

The Calendar

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941): TLH; 2022 Supplement: ASBH

(Monday: M; Tuesday: T; Wednesday: W; Thursday: R; Friday: F; Saturday: S)

November 30 (W) *St. Andrew, Apostle* ASBH #109

December 4 *Advent 2* ASBH #2

December 6 (T) *St. Nicholas, Bishop & Confessor* ASBH #66 (in this Herald)

December 11 *Advent 3* ASBH #3

December 13 (T) *St. Lucy, Martyr* ASBH #67

December 14 (W) *Wednesday in Ember Week*

December 16 (F) *Friday in Ember Week*

December 17 (S) *Saturday in Ember Week*

December 18 *Advent 4* ASBH #4

December 21 (W) *St. Thomas, Apostle*

December 25 *Feast of the Holy Nativity* ASBH #5

December 26 (M) *St. Stephen, Martyr* ASBH #70 (in this Herald)

December 27 (T) *St. John, Apostle and Evangelist* ASBH #71 (in this Herald)

December 28 (W) *Holy Innocents* ASBH #72

ST. IGNATIUS SEMINARY UPDATE—The Fall Quarter for the Third Year of the program of studies at St. Ignatius seminary ends on November 11. Classes for the Winter Quarter will run from November 28–December 16; with a Christmas Break from December 17 through January 1, with the remainder of the Quarter lasting from January 2–February 17. Classes for the Winter Quarter:

E006—The Gospel of St. John (3 hrs.)

P005—Homiletics 2 (3 hrs.)

S009—Apologetics 1 (3 hrs.)

P009—Parish Administration (1 hr.)

PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE FOR SYNOD AND COLLOQUIUM—

As discussed at the most recent synod, the 2023 Synod and Colloquium will take place after the conclusion of the Seminary's Summer Intensives. The Synod and Colloquium will take place during the week of Monday, June 26th through Friday, June 30th. The first order of business will be the examination of the seminary candidates; we anticipate that this will re-

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 31: EPHESIANS 1:3–6 7TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

Even though we sinful human beings were unacceptable in God's sight and deserved only the eternal torments of hell, God's Word tells us that we have been made "accepted in the Beloved," in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ kept God's commandments perfectly in our stead and atoned for all our sins. He redeemed us sinners with His holy and precious blood, shed for us on the cross. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have God's pardon and forgiveness for all our sins and eternal life with Him. Through faith in Christ Jesus, we are justified and acceptable in God's sight!

It is as St. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:19–23: “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel...”

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30: GALATIANS 3:23–29 6TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Though Adam and Eve were created as children of God, knowing God, loving Him, trusting Him, and honoring Him with their lives (cf. Genesis 1:26-27; Luke 3:38), they lost their right to be God's children when they doubted God's Word and disobeyed Him. They sought to be like God, knowing good and evil, but became children of the devil, enslaved by sin and evil (Genesis 3). As a result, all of us are born "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1-3). We are, by nature, sinners deserving of God's everlasting punishment!

But, in Christ Jesus, our Savior, God again gives the right and privilege of sonship to His elect, from Adam through Noah and Abraham, to the present. Those who place their faith in Christ Jesus and are baptized in His name are called the sons of God (cf. Genesis 6:1ff.; Hosea 1:10; John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1-2). But those who do not trust in Jesus as the Son of God and their Savior are of their "father the devil" (John 8:44) and continue in his evil ways.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

quire approximately 4 hours per candidate. After the examination of the candidates, there will be all of the regular work of the Synod (including work on the Church Order) and at least a day of Colloquium. Therefore, all clergy of the diocese should make plans with the understanding that the Synod will begin at **1 P.M. on June 26th**. Examination of the candidates will take place Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning. Regular synodical matters such as the Episcopal Address, Treasurer's Report, etc. will take place on Tuesday afternoon. Wednesday will be devoted to work on the Church Order. All of Thursday will be committed to the annual Colloquium. (Pastors and deacons with proposed topic are encouraged to contact the bishop.)

We also understand that Salem Lutheran Church will host the meeting of The Augustana Ministerium at the conclusion of our Colloquium and Synod. At this point, it would appear that this would take place on Friday morning (June 30).

The annual Diocesan Family Camp will be at Salem, beginning on Friday afternoon (June 30), continuing through Tuesday (July 4). The Camp will center on the celebration of the Festival of the Visitation on Sunday, July 2.

UPDATE ON ASBH SUPPLEMENT 2022—By time of publication, almost all copies of the *Supplement* have shipped. It is very encouraging that in most cases, copies were received well in advance of the November 30th goal, and substantially under the budgeted price of \$15/copy.

As regards copies of the liturgy and hymnody for organists and for the liturgy for use on the missal stand: We have changed our plans from simply distributing PDFs of the *Supplement* (which would have required local congregations to print copies for their use) for the simple reason that three-ring bound copies of the liturgy didn't work well; we have found that spiral binding is working much better. What this means: Spiral bound copies of the liturgy and hymnody are being prepared and will be send out as soon as possible, instead of PDFs. It remains our hope that all copies will be printed and bound by December 2nd. We will be shipping copies out as they are available.

Lesson from the Book of Concord First Sunday in Advent

Article VI.

Also they [the Lutheran theologians] teach, that this Faith is bound to bring forth Good Fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but not that we should rely on those works to merit justification before God. For remission of sins and justification are apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ attests: "When ye shall have done all these things, say: We are unprofitable servants" [Luke 17:10]. The same is also taught by the Fathers. For Ambrose says: "It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ, is saved; freely receiving remission of sins, without works, by faith alone."

—The Augsburg Confession

Part III, Article IV. Of the Gospel

We will now return to the Gospel, which not merely in one way gives us counsel and aid against sin; for God is superabundantly rich in His grace. First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world; which is the peculiar office of the Gospel. Secondly, through baptism. Thirdly, through the holy sacrament of the altar. Fourthly, through the power of the keys, and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, Matt. 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered together," etc.

—The Smalcald Articles

The selections from the Book of Concord are from H. E. Jacobs' translation of the Book of Concord, and are taken from the table in volume two of suggested lessons for Sundays and Festivals of the Church.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29: HEBREWS 1:1–12 5TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS

According to both Stephen and the Apostle Paul, God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai and gave His Law through the "direction of angels" (Acts 7:53; cf. Galatians 3:19). But God has spoken to us by His Son, the eternal Son of God, by whom all things were created.

In the Bible, we have the very words of Jesus, the Word made flesh, who dwelt among us (cf. John 1:1-5,14,17-18). Jesus told Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). Jesus also told the Jews who rejected His words, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

Do you hear Him and believe His Word? In Hebrews 10:28-29 we read: "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"

Thanks be to God that He has indeed come to us in His holy Son to bring grace and salvation to all who believe in Him.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.”

Each Sunday, after receiving the Lord’s Supper, we sing the Nunc Dimittis, the words of Simeon at the presentation of our Lord, recorded in Luke’s Gospel. Simeon was an old believer who had been waiting for the coming of God’s promised Messiah and Savior, and God had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen with his own eyes the Lord’s Christ. Directed by the Spirit to come into the temple at Jerusalem precisely when Mary and Joseph came to the temple with the baby Jesus, Simeon took Jesus up in his arms and said the familiar words of the Nunc Dimittis.

He was ready to die in peace. He had seen the promised Christ Child and held Him in his arms. He could stand in God’s presence because His Savior had come and would make full atonement for the sins of the world.

Have you, through the Scriptures, seen the Lord’s Christ and taken Him up in your arms by faith? Are you ready to die in peace, trusting that your sins are paid for and forgiven for Christ’s sake?

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the end of even a puppet kingship would render this prophecy false and the Word of God would seem the babbling of men, unless the Lord set a Son of David to rule over “the House of Israel” in some way other than as ruler over that geographical area at the east end of the Mediterranean. Again, the lack of the descendants of Levi sacrificing burnt offerings would make this promise false, unless the Priest and King were one, and His “holy nation” consisted of something other than the citizens of an earthly political entity.

Such a reality is shown by St. Paul calling the New Testament Church “the Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16. It is also shown by the name of the Church in contrast to the name claimed by modern (i.e., Talmudic) Judaism: “The Lord Our Righteousness.” For centuries, Judaism has had neither king, nor burnt offering—nor do they think they need such substitutionary sacrifices, but that they will redeem themselves by their obedience. Those that confess any messiah at all confess only a political leader or, more frequently, that their nation will enlighten the rest of the world to self-salvation through a watered-down version of the Law.

Thus, we see that they are not only set against Jesus as the Christ, but against Isaiah’s words of deliverance entirely.

Prayer: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; who liveth and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

With today's reading and this week's collect, we give thanks to the Father by asking our Brother, the Firstborn, to stir up His power, come to our rescue today, and to bring the Last Day soon. In God the Son, the Father has entirely given us the qualifications to partake of the inheritance of those who are holy. That is, as it must always and only be, He has given us holiness in Christ. He has given to us—who were alienated from Him by our sins—the peace that could only be available to us by His perfectly fulfilling the Law, and His suffering and dying on the cross.

St. Paul's description of this is through the image of power delivering us from power, just as our collect says. "Darkness" is a tyrant power, and it held us (as it holds all people) under its authority and command, as shown by our alienating works. We have received a "mighty deliverance" that even now saves us from "the perils of our sins" and has "conveyed us into the Kingdom."

We pray that we might be protected from ourselves and the consequences our flesh continues to bring upon us, that we would learn to reckon ourselves as citizens of His Kingdom here, and that we would soon experience in both body and soul what it means that He has transferred our citizenship there.

Prayer: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.'"

These words may seem insignificant to us, but they are of utmost importance. Why? Because it was necessary that Jesus, the sinless Son of God in human flesh, fulfill all the righteous demands of God's Law in our stead. So, as required in Old Testament Law (Leviticus 12), Mary offered the prescribed sacrifice for her purification following the birth of a son.

Having fulfilled the Law in our stead, our Lord Jesus was the sinless Lamb of God, "without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19), a perfect and holy sacrifice offered up to God for our sins. He redeemed us, "not with silver and gold, but with His holy and precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death" (Small Catechism, 2nd Art. of the Creed).

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.'”

Satan, the serpent of Genesis 3 and the great red dragon of Revelation 12, sought to destroy Jesus the Christ Child, the promised Seed of the woman, before He could crush Satan's head on the cross of Calvary and undo his evil work. Though the world did not recognize Jesus for who He was, the devil knew and moved Herod to seek Him out and destroy Him lest the words spoken to him in the garden be fulfilled: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15).

But God, by directing Joseph in a dream to take the young Child Jesus and His mother to Egypt, protected the Christ Child and preserved His plan to redeem us from the sin and death Satan brought into the world. As a result, Jesus grew up to fulfill all righteousness in our stead, and then to bear on the cross the full and just punishment for our sins, so that we might be pardoned and forgiven through faith in His name.

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy good pleasure, that in the name of Thy beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The lack of videographic evidence of where St. Andrew preached serves Christ's Church well: personal visitation by an apostle, or the lack thereof, has no bearing on the authenticity of one's faith, or any superior authority of one local congregation over another. Instead, all must rely on God's Word as the source and norm of our teaching—remembering, though, “that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21).

One place we can be sure St. Andrew proclaimed Christ is Achaia—because they killed him for it there. He was crucified by order of the Roman governor. He was possibly bound to the cross, instead of nailed, so that his suffering might be prolonged (and, thus, the possibility of his falling away from Christ heightened). Andrew remained faithful, knowing well the teaching and faithfulness of his Lord. Having been washed by the pure and purifying water of Holy Baptism, having been gathered to hear Jesus and to proclaim Jesus, he died in the full assurance of faith.

Verse 22 is used in our liturgy to bring us to confess and be absolved, so may that absolution continue to uphold us in confessing this faith, that others may receive this same sprinkling, and their evil conscience may be made good (1 Peter 3:21).

Prayer: Thy Word, O God, is our great heritage and shall be ours forever; to spread its light from age to age let be our chief endeavor. Through life it guides our way, in death it is our stay. Lord, grant, while worlds endure, we keep its teachings pure throughout all generations. Amen. (cf. TLH #283)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1: MATTHEW 11:25–30 1ST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

How glorious the wisdom and prudence of babies! Not that we should be ruled over by children (Isaiah 3:1–12), but that we should adopt the wisdom of a Christian child over the childish thoughts of those who deny Christ, no matter how educated, shrewd, or ‘street smart’ they may be.

What do babies know before they are mobile and exploring the world to make their own discoveries? That which is told and revealed to them is all they know, and they trust the parents who do that revealing. As far as they know—and as they should rightly be able to expect!—their parents know everything the children need to know, and are good, just, and want nothing but what is best for them. Even those parents who are evil and unbelieving try to improve themselves to do what they understand as being best for their children. Yet, due to their inborn sin and lack of faith in Christ (and even due to the flesh of those reborn in Jesus), parents fail to reveal God the Father’s love perfectly.

For those who bring their children to Holy Baptism and to the preaching and teaching of the Word, Christ Himself reveals the Father. For both young and old, the One who perfectly knows the Father desires to give us rest by revealing Him to us in the only way we can truly know Him: in God the Son’s atonement for all our sins!

Prayer: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

To Thy be born on earth and die,
Thy be - loved, Thy lat - est born,
An - swer kind, didst Thou ac - cord.

Well Thy saints have kept their sta - tion,
In Thy glo - ry he des - cries Thee,
Wis - dom for Thy Church to pon - der.

Watch - ing till Thine hour drew night,
Reign - ing from the Tree of scorn,
Till the day of dread a - ward. A - men.

4. Lo, heav'n's doors lift up, revealing
How Thy judgments earthward move;
Scrolls unfolded, trumpets pealing,
Winecups from the wrath above;
Yet o'er all a soft voice stealing,
"Little children, trust and love."

Δ5. Thee, th' almighty King eternal,
Father of th' eternal Word,
Thee, the Father's Word supernal,
Thee, of both the Breath adored,
Heav'n and earth and realms infernal
Own one glorious God and Lord.

Festival of St. John
71. Word Supreme, Before Creation

John Keble, 1856, cento

"Geistreiches Gesangbuch"
Darmstadt, 1698

1. Word Su - preme, be - fore cre - a - tion
2. Now 'tis come, and faith es - pies Thee,
3. Much he asked in lov - ing won - der,

Born of God e - ter - nal - ly,
Like an ea - glet in the morn
On Thy bos - om lean - ing, Lord.

Who didst will for our sal - va - tion
One in stead - fast wor - ship eyes Thee,
In the se - cret place of thun - der

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2: LUKE 17:20–25 ` 1ST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

In this season of waiting, the desire in the Pharisees' question seems almost reasonable. "What might we observe to know that the Kingdom is coming upon us? What cataclysm or what great wonder will make us know the Kingdom is here? What will tell us that the Last Day will be next Tuesday, so we can be prepared for it?" So many false teachings are built from such wrong expectations that we can't list them all. Not only millennialism and cults based upon certain expectations concerning Jesus' return, but all who look for physical signs and wonders in these latter days, or who assert some priority of the genetic or religious descendants of the ancient people of Israel, are guilty of the same sort of misunderstanding.

Jesus says that the Kingdom of God doesn't come with great outward show. Until that last moment when He appears again, all things will continue on normally. Calamitous signs, wars and rumors of wars, seedtime and harvest; all of these things will continue on until the end, just as they always have. The Kingdom neither appears, nor is received, through the physical sight of world events, but through God's Word and Sacraments. By those means, the Holy Spirit creates faith in the hearts of those who rejected the Son of Man and alienated themselves from God.

Prayer: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3: ROMANS 1:16–20 1ST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

There is only one way to have true life, to be just in the eyes of God: by faith in the Gospel of Christ. Eve quickly cast away self-justification and expected God's promised 'Serpent Crusher,' looking to bearing "a Man" who was "the Lord," and naming her second son "Vanity" to show her disappointment (Genesis 4:1–2). It is what Abel trusted in (Hebrews 11:4), thus making his offering pleasing to the Lord. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and all those who lived in the earthly family and physical kingdom that God established, had their names recorded as righteous only through the expectation of the Righteous One. This Son would sacrifice Himself to be the righteousness of all—and is indeed the righteousness of all who trust in Him—as St. Paul says, "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:10).

At the same time, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all...who suppress the truth" and against all their "ungodliness and unrighteousness." "Is revealed" is present tense, showing that God's wrath didn't end or pause, only someday in the future to be again revealed, but that there is the ongoing revelation of His ongoing wrath against those who refuse to heed what even the creatures around them, their consciences within them, and their fellow men reveal. In the unrelenting tide of death, we see our need for a Savior from this wrath, and in the Gospel we see the power that overcomes death.

Prayer: Stir up, we beseech Thee, Thy power, O Lord, and come, that by Thy protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Thy mighty deliverance; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Hymn - ing one tri - um - phant song?
Sealed with His al - migh - ty Name,
Shall to liv - ing fount - ains lead;

"Wor - thy is the Lamb, once slain, Bless - ing, hon - or,
Clad in rai - ment pure and white, Vic - tor - palms in
Joy and glad - ness ban - ish sighs; Per - fect love dis -

glo - ry, pow'r, Wis - dom, rich - es to ob - tain,
ev - 'ry hand, Through their great Re - deem - er's might,
pels all fears; And for - ev - er from their eyes

New do - min - ion ev - 'ry hour.*
More than con - quer - ors, they stand.
God shall wipe a - way the tears. A - men.

Festival of St. Stephen
70. Who Are These in Bright Array?

James Montgomery, 1819

St. George's, Windsor.
George Job Elvey, 1858

1. Who are these in bright ar - ray,
2. These through fier - y tri - als trod,
3. Hun - ger, thirst, dis - ease un - known,

This in - nu - mer - a - ble throng,
These from great af - flic - tion came;
On im - mor - tal fruits they feed;

Round the al - tar, night and day,
Now, be - fore the throne of God,
Then the Lamb a - midst the throne

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

Festival of St. Nicholas
 66. Of the Father's Love Begotten

Aurelius C. Prudentius, 1413, cento
 Tr., John M. Neale, 1854, and
 Henry W. Baker, 1861

Divinum mysterium
 Plain-song tune, 12th century

1. Of the Fa - ther's love be - got - ten ed
 2. Oh, that birth for - ev - er bless - ed

Ere the worlds be - gan to be,
 When the Vir - gin, full of grace,

He is Al - pha and O - me - ga,
 By the Ho - ly Ghost con - ceiv - ing,

He the Source, the End - ing He,
 Bare the Sav - ior of our race,

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24: LUKE 2:15-20

CHRISTMAS EVE

The wait is almost over. Advent is a season of waiting and repentance. However, the wait is almost over. We are going to celebrate the first coming of our Lord tomorrow, but we are still waiting for His return in glory.

When the shepherds saw the newborn babe, they told the good news just as the angels had proclaimed to them. There was no waiting anymore for that first coming of the Lord. There was only joy and confessing the good news of what had taken place concerning this newborn. So also, we continue to confess to the world the good news of the Incarnation and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

The wait for Christmas is almost over, but the work of the Church continues until the Lord returns in His glory to judge both the quick and the dead. Therefore, confess the truth of Christ to the world and rejoice that your King has come to you. He comes to you to give you the forgiveness of sin. He gives His Word and Sacraments, and calls all men to be saved by Him alone.

Prayer: O God, who hast made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light, grant, we beseech Thee, that as we have known on earth the mysteries of that Light, we may also come to the fullness of His joys in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

As we read of the birth of our Lord in Luke's Gospel, we once again encounter something that should be familiar to us. In the Divine Service, the Gloria in Excelsis is sung which calls to mind the song of the angels that night as they appeared proclaiming the good news to lowly shepherds. The joy with which the angels sang that night is the same joy we receive in Christ at the Divine Service. This is the joy that the saints, like St. Thorlak, preached, and that we continue to preach. We join with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven to laud and magnify the name of Jesus, knowing that every knee will bow to Him.

This babe that is born so lowly is God in the flesh; the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. It is no wonder the angels broke out in tremendous chorus, just as we will belt out the Gloria in Excelsis at the end of the Advent season! The waiting is almost over, dear Church. Let us continue to serve our King!

Prayer: Merciful God, graciously look upon Thy Church here on earth. Strengthen Thy congregation and give Thy Church comfort and peace. Teach the leaders of Thy Church to unite against all obstacles to Thy Word. Guide those who are tempted. Comfort those who suffer any want of body or soul. Prepare Thy congregation to make ready to sincerely and faithfully celebrate the holy feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Of the things that are, that have been,
And the Babe, the world's Re-deemer,

And that future years shall see
First revealed His sacred face

Ev - er - more and ev - er - more.
Ev - er - more and ev - er - more. A - men.

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

4. This is He whom Heav'n-taught singers
Sang of old with one accord;
Whom the Scriptures of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word.
Now He shines, the Long-expected;
Let creation praise its Lord
Evermore and evermore.

Δ5. Christ, to Thee, with God the Father,
And, O Holy Ghost, to Thee
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving
And unending praises be,
Honor, glory, and dominion,
And eternal victory
Evermore and evermore.

St. Paul asks some serious questions: Do you think you will escape the wrath of God? Do you despise the riches of His mercy and patience toward you? Do you not know He works to lead you to repentance?

The unfaithful do not care about these questions. Many people don't care about God or what He says, so these questions are meaningless to them. Self-seeking hypocrites practice the double-standard that Paul condemns in these verses. They claim to care about God's Word, they think they are righteous and justified, but their behavior shows otherwise. They despise others and fail to do good, even when it is their proper responsibility to do so.

It is the faithful who properly fear God and understand His righteous wrath. Those who are truly humble according to His power and Spirit are the ones who not only appreciate His grace and goodness, but also do that which is good and merciful in the hopes that even our enemies would repent.

Each of us should endeavor to consider our own sin and God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ before we are quick to despise and condemn others. Our Savior still loves His enemies and works to bring them to repentance from their sins. As we are His people, forgiven and renewed in Him, He teaches us to do the same!

Prayer: 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, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Earlier this week we saw how the mother of our Lord was obedient and magnified the Lord in her being made the Theotokos, or Mother of God. Today, we see that St. Joseph, the guardian of our Lord, was a just man and obedient to the Lord.

Even when Joseph encountered what could have been seen as unfaithfulness in his betrothed wife, he did not wish for her to be made a public example. This tells us that Joseph honored the 8th Commandment and was not given to anger. This alone cannot save, but it shows where Joseph's priorities were, even before the angel came to him.

As we prepare for the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord, we are reminded that parents are a blessing to their children, and they should walk in the ways of the Lord. Joseph did not depend on his own understanding, but believed God's Word about who the babe in Mary's womb was and what that babe would bring. May all Christian parents do likewise by the working of the Holy Ghost, through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Stir up, O Lord, we beseech Thee, Thy power, and come, and with great might succor us, that by the help of Thy grace whatsoever is hindered by our sins may be speedily accomplished, through Thy mercy and satisfaction; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Today we observe the festival of St. Thomas the Apostle. St. Thomas often gets the unfortunate moniker of “doubting Thomas.” It was easy for Thomas to rest on his own wisdom when he did not believe the reports of the Lord’s resurrection at first. However, we see in our reading from 1 Corinthians that the wisdom needed is not in ourselves, or of this age. It is the hidden wisdom of God, the mystery of faith. If the world knew this wisdom, there wouldn’t even be a need for the resurrection, because they would not have crucified the Lord.

Despite his initial unbelief, St. Thomas did believe, and he preached this same wisdom which is the mystery of faith in Christ Jesus. St. Thomas is no longer known by his doubting, but by his faithful believing. We, like Thomas, are believing because the Holy Ghost reveals this wisdom in the Word. Trust the Lord and His Word that you may believe.

Prayer: Grant, O Lord, unto Thy people a steadfastness in faith, that we might not be shaken by the doubts of the flesh, but ever be established in an unshakable hope in Christ Jesus, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

On his festival day, we remember the idea of the real man who was St. Nicholas. This is not the jolly figure with a soda in his hand, or who flies around with reindeer and climbs down chimneys. It is important for the Church to mark the difference between men who represent faithfulness, and characters from pop culture. Even more important, the Church focuses on those things that confess the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ over the folktales and commercials of secular society.

Bishop Nicholas is said to have been pious, generous, and one of the men who upheld the Scriptural teaching about our Lord Jesus Christ as true man and true God. These are the proper things on which the Church should focus. These are the things that confess the true faith and help us to set our minds on our Lord's kingdom and righteousness. These also point us back to the story that is both a wonderful miracle and historical reality which has been taught to us in St. Luke's Gospel account. The holy messenger of God announced that the true son of Mary, born of her flesh and blood in the line of King David, would also be the divine Savior, the true Son of God, who would save us from our sin and captivity to the devil. We focus on this because it is the greatest story about His kingdom and His grace for all who believe in Christ Jesus!

Prayer: O Lord, hear our prayers to Thee on this day of St. Nicholas, Thy confessor and bishop, that as Thou didst lead him to render faithful service to Thee, Thou wouldst lead us to faithfully confess our hope in Thy salvation, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

St. Ambrose is remembered as a faithful teacher and leader in the Church. He served during a time when there was political and theological persecution. And as St. Paul had instructed Timothy (who would also be a teacher and leader in God's Church), these things will always be a part of life for those who belong to the Body of Christ Jesus in this world.

Immoral leaders and false teachers will always contend with God's Kingdom, but that persecution and error are also used by God to strengthen His saints. Christ teaches us to love our enemies. He tried to help those who opposed Him, and He was patient even when they betrayed and assaulted Him. Godless rulers and self-important errorists have come and gone throughout history, but the Lord has kept His Church by the power of His Word, and exalted it through His works of love and righteousness.

In our own time, the realm of politics is still an immoral mess, and false teachers continue to sow confusion about God's truth. But Christ's Church will remain. He will continue to protect us during persecutions, and He will continue to send faithful saints who teach righteous wisdom and humility against foolish vanity. Christ has promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age. The long story of His Church and His saints show us that He is, indeed!

Prayer: O God, who didst give St. Ambrose as a faithful teacher of the saving truth in a time of great trial, grant to Thy people zeal for Thy Word and faithful teachers for Thy Church, that they may stand steadfast against all error, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Apostle John makes it very clear that the incarnation of the Son of God was a tangible reality. Many in the early days of the Church faced a heresy known as Gnosticism. Gnosticism believed that physical matter was evil. Gnostic teachers claimed that Jesus did not have a physical body, but only appeared to have a body.

The Apostle refutes this heresy by showing us the reality of the incarnation—that Jesus was indeed fully God and fully man. This is the Jesus that the Apostles preached and had fellowship with, whom the Gnostics and other heretics and unbelievers reject. If we believe the Apostle's teachings, we too have fellowship with this God-Man, Jesus Christ.

As we approach our celebration of the Christ's incarnation—when our Lord became flesh and was born in a manger—let us also be ready to stand against any false doctrine that would rob us of our fellowship with God. The Son came to be born of flesh, to dwell among us, and give His life for us. That is our hope and joy, and we must not lose the truth that gives us peace.

Prayer: Stir up, O Lord, we beseech Thee, Thy power, and come, and with great might succor us, that by the help of Thy grace whatsoever is hindered by our sins may be speedily accomplished, through Thy mercy and satisfaction; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Most Lutherans are familiar with this passage of Scripture as Mary's song, the Magnificat, which is often sung during the Matins service. It is also noteworthy that we see John the Baptist leaping in his mother Elizabeth's womb, showing us that even pre-born infants can believe and have faith.

This passage is also significant in that we find the mother of our Lord being called blessed among women. Mary is rightly called the Theotokos, or Mother of God, because she was the Mother of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Yet Mary did not focus on herself, but magnified the Lord and rejoiced in her Savior.

Mary gives us an example to follow of how we ought to submit to the Lord and focus on the Savior who is Mary's Son. Mary, like John the Baptist in the womb, has joy in what her Son will bring in the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting.

Prayer: Stir up, O Lord, we beseech Thee, Thy power, and come, and with great might succor us, that by the help of Thy grace whatsoever is hindered by our sins may be speedily accomplished, through Thy mercy and satisfaction; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“He who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins.”

It is easy to say, “I believe...” or “I repent...,” but the Lord also teaches us to bear fruit that is in keeping with these confessions. His Spirit endeavors to make us grow in faith and deeds. However, Satan continues to lie to us. He would have us think that we can neglect the works of love that God prepares for us, as long as we think the right things, or have the right doctrine “on paper.” As our Lord teaches in Matthew 25, the goats will call Him “Lord,” but they will not acknowledge that their carelessness toward good fruit and love was a failure to confess Him as their Lord.

Our Lord most certainly forgives us of our sins by His grace alone, only on account of Christ's death on the cross. He that believes and is baptized is most certainly saved, apart from works. Our Lord also calls us to walk and grow in all His holy gifts, which are connected with that forgiveness and salvation. Our works do not save us, but if we resist His Spirit who works them in and through us, we are in danger from the devil's works and ways. Christ saves us by His blood and His Gospel, and as we are cleansed from old sins, He blesses that new life with all the other things that He teaches and commands!

Prayer: 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, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus taught us to pray, “Deliver us from evil...” Many times we think of this “evil” as bodily harm, death, loss of a loved one, or some other type of traumatic, unusual event. But St. Paul’s words remind us that we also pray to be delivered from “unreasonable and wicked men.” Satan, the evil one, constantly works through unfaithful and self-seeking people to antagonize the work of God and His Gospel. We need to be delivered from this evil as well.

It is a misconception that Christians are free to do whatever we want. People wrongly believe that once they are forgiven in Christ they can do, think, and say whatever seems right to them, as long as they go back to God and occasionally say “I’m sorry.” God is glorified when His Spirit and His Word work through us. When we observe His commands and walk in the good order of faith, mercy, and discipline, we confess with our words and deeds that His will is to be done, not ours. But the world and Satan would have us do otherwise. Evil entices us to find reasons for justifying our self-will.

Our Savior teaches us the better way. He directs us into the way of love and patience through the prayer He has taught us and through the Word and example that He has shown us in the whole counsel of His Scriptures.

Prayer: 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, Thy Son, our Lord. 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.

St. John the Baptist, although born in sin, was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb, as Gabriel proclaimed to Zacharias. He was to baptize with water in the Jordan River, preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all those who came to him. The multitudes, tax collectors, and soldiers all heard the Law preached to them. All this was done to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, come into the world to baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire.

The Lord would baptize with the Word of God. Just as the voice proclaimed from Heaven "This is My Beloved Son," we who have been baptized are also called His beloved children. In our Holy Baptism He has placed His name upon us, calling us a new creation. This baptism is a work of the Lord God, not of the baptizer or any other man. We are baptized with water and the Word. We are baptized into the Triune Name; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Through this Holy Baptism we are gifted with faith. Faith produces works. A living faith in us is shown by the works of compassion that we show to our fellowman. Let us therefore give out of our abundance and not take more than we need, but be content with our wages. For we have already received the greatest reward we can ever receive: a life free from sin in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Prayer: O God, who seest that we are afflicted because of our iniquity, mercifully grant that we may be comforted by Thy visitation; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Our faith and life are not just about us. It is truly a good and joyful thing to know that we are saved through Jesus Christ's death for us, but it is also important that we remember He desires others to be blessed through us. He desires that all men be saved and have knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2:3-6). The devil would have us turn in on ourselves and flee from work and persecution, only clinging to our own sense of comfort. However, Christ makes us part of His Body and His Life, so He also calls us to continue in His works of love, and in the persecutions that come against Him.

The Gospel reminds us that God loves the world. Repentance, forgiveness and salvation are to be preached to everyone, especially to the unfaithful and those who are enemies of His truth. We don't support their unbelief, but we are sent in various ways to help them! And considering a lot of people do not want to be helped from their unbelief, this can be an unpleasant task. That is why our Lord teaches us to look beyond ourselves, and beyond the present sufferings. We are to love our enemies and endure to the end, because at the end we will have the fullness of His kingdom. The unpleasant work will be over and the glories of His promised kingdom will be greater than anything we have to endure now!

Prayer: 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, Thy Son, our Lord. 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

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16: MATTHEW 11:11–15

EMBER DAY

The wily serpent deceived Eve and she ate from the forbidden tree. Eve would become the mother of all living, but we would be tainted with sin, just like Eve and her husband Adam. Of all those born of a woman, no one had risen any greater than St. John the Baptist. But on account of the sin which we have all inherited, even St. John was not greater than the least of those in the Kingdom of Heaven.

He was greater than all those born of a woman because he was the Forerunner to the Christ; he was the one who prepared the way for the coming of our Lord Jesus. He preached repentance for the remission of sins. He called all those born of a woman to repent of their sins, and cling in faith to the promised Messiah, who stood among them, and who would baptize all of us born of a woman—born in sin—with the Holy Ghost. He would take away our sin by washing us in His blood; the blood of the spotless Lamb who takes away our sin.

All those baptized into the Lamb of God to which St. John pointed are a part of the Kingdom of Heaven through faith. We have been gifted with a new life and reality. No longer are we counted as born of a sinful woman, but we are now born in righteousness from above. One day we will live in paradise with all those born from above.

Prayer: Stir up Thy might, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and come, that they who trust in Thy loving kindness may be the more speedily freed from all adversity; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Forerunner must point to the Christ, to the Anointed One of the Lord God. The Pharisees try to get St. John to confess that he is the Christ, but he instead proclaims how unworthy he is of that title. He is not worthy even to untie the Messiah's sandal strap. There was One among them who was worthy to be called the Messiah. St. John the Baptist calls Him "the Lamb of God." Why a "Lamb"? This title designates what the Christ came to do. He came to be a sacrifice. Our Lord Jesus took upon Himself our flesh in order that He might be the spotless Lamb who takes away the sin of the world on the cross.

St. John came baptizing in the Jordan River for the remission of sins. He baptized with water, but the Son of God incarnate, the Lamb of God, would baptize with the Holy Ghost. All those who are baptized with the Holy Ghost are buried with the Lamb in His death. The baptized, gifted with faith, rise again from the waters of Holy Baptism as a new creation. Everyday we can live our lives in our Holy Baptisms by daily drowning the Old Adam in us through daily contrition. We can live each day in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Just as He rose again from the dead, we too rise again from the death in which our sins have buried us. To this Lamb of God let us cling in faith.

Prayer: Lord, we beseech Thee, give ear to our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Thy gracious visitation; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

St. Luke's Gospel begins with a priest, and ends with a Lamb. The angel Gabriel is sent to a priest named Zacharias at the beginning of St. Luke's Gospel. Zacharias is offering up incense—offering up the prayers of the saints—before the Lord in the temple. The Lord hears the prayers of the people and Zacharias, and his wife Elizabeth, are promised a son. He will be the forerunner to the Christ. He will be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. He will prepare the way of the Lord Jesus. He will prepare the way for the Lord God incarnate in our flesh. This Christ is the answer to the prayers of those of us who are burdened in this life with sin and death.

The incarnate Lord Jesus has come to conquer sin and death. At the end of St. Luke's Gospel this incarnate Son of God will be the true High Priest and offer up His perfect life as a ransom for sinful mankind. The High Priest will offer the Lamb on the tree of the holy cross. He will atone for the sins of the whole world, so that all those who cling to Him in faith will have forgiveness, life, and salvation. We are given a priest in today's reading whose son will prepare the way of this High Priest and Lamb. This Lamb's sacrifice will be the answer to the prayers of the people. Our Lord Jesus is our answer to sin and death, by giving us righteousness and life through faith.

Prayer: Lord, we beseech Thee, give ear to our prayers and lighten the darkness of our hearts by Thy gracious visitation; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

On account of St. John the Baptist's role as the forerunner to the Christ, it is often overlooked to what tribe he belonged. St. Luke pointed this out early in his Gospel when he wrote about the lineage of St. John's father and mother. His father Zacharias was of the division of Abijah, a division of the high priesthood. His mother, Elizabeth, was of the daughters of Aaron, the high priest. St. John, the forerunner to the Christ, was not only a Levite, but of the high priestly family. This is the person that the Lord God chose to announce the coming of the incarnate Lord Jesus to the lost house of Israel.

In this St. John the Baptist fulfills the meaning of his name. John means "the grace of God." The grace of God would proclaim the source of God's grace. He would point all those who came to him at the Jordan River to be baptized by him to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He would point us to the Lord Jesus Christ. This was supposed to be the function of a priest, to offer up sacrifices as a foreshadowing of the true sacrifice to come. It is the function of pastors to point to the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, as the perfect sacrifice for poor, miserable sinners. To this Lamb we cling in faith, even as St. Lucy, who we celebrate today, did to the point of martyrdom.

Prayer: O God, our Savior, hear us, we pray Thee, as we rejoice in the steadfast devotion Thou dost kindle and sustain in the hearts of Thy saints, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

When the angel Gabriel announced the fulfillment of their prayer for a child, Zacharias did not believe it. Then he remained silent from that moment until eight days after the birth of their son John. When he proclaimed in writing that his son's name was John, his tongue was loosed, he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and he prophesied concerning his son John.

He who was silent for over nine months proclaimed that this child would be the Voice that goes before the Lord. The prophets had long since ceased to be sent by the Lord God to proclaim the coming of His Messiah. The world was filled with silence. And with no voice to proclaim the coming of the Christ, the world was filled with darkness. This child would go before the Christ to prepare His way. The Voice would once more proclaim that not only was the Lamb of God on His way, but He was indeed standing among us, as one of us. The Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to us bearing our flesh, so that He might dispel the darkness once and for all by defeating death and darkness on the tree of the cross.

He now sends to us more forerunners of His second coming, who prepare the way for His return by preaching into our ears that salvation is found in Him. Through faith in this promise, we are filled with His light and look forward to eternal life.

Prayer: Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that with the coming solemnity of our Lord's birth to accomplish our redemption, through Thy holy Word and Sacraments Thou wouldst strengthen our faith in Christ Jesus, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.