

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

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Salem Lutheran Church, Malone, TX

Rev. Jeffrey Ahonen

Good Shepherd L.C., Tony, WI; Apologia Lutheran Mission, Deer Park, WI; Peace L.C., Ironwood, MI; Pure Blessings Lutheran Church, Brandon, 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; St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Mission, UAC, Ormond Beach, FL

Rev. Douglas Handrich (Emeritus)

Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Peoria, IL

Rev. Kent Heimbigner

Charity Lutheran Church, Burleson, TX

Rev. Benjamin Henson

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Rev. Michael Henson

Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Martin Jackson

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Rev. Daniel Mensing

Faith Lutheran Church, Tualatin, OR

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

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

Rev. Brandon Warr

St. Patrick Lutheran Church, Chipley, FL

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Trinity Lutheran Church, Herrin, IL

Rev. Dcn. Jacob Henson

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Rev. Dcn. Anthony Oncken

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THE LUTHERAN HERALD



DECEMBER 4-30, 2023

**A PUBLICATION OF
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The Calendar

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

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

December 3	Advent 1	ASBH 1
December 6 (W)	St. Nicholas	ASBH 66 (in this issue)
December 7 (R)	St. Ambrose	
December 10	Advent 2	ASBH 2
December 13 (W)	St. Lucy, Martyr	ASBH 67
December 17	Advent 3	ASBH 3
December 20 (W)	Wednesday in Ember Week	
December 21 (F)	Friday in Ember Week/ St. Thomas, Apostle	ASBH 68 (in this issue)
December 23 (S)	Saturday in Ember Week/ St. Thorlak	
		ASBH 69 (in this issue)
December 24	Advent 4	ASBH 4
December 25 (M)	–Feast of the Holy Nativity	
		ASBH 5
December 26 (T)	St. Stephen, Martyr	ASBH 70 (in this issue)
December 27 (W)	St. John, Apostle and Evangelist TLH 271	
December 28 (R)	Holy Innocents	ASBH 72

Update on the Augustana Service Book and Hymnal (2024)

Work continues on all aspects of the Church Order project as preparation continues on the draft hymnal for consideration at the 2024 Synod.

Approximately ten hymns are still needed to complete the list of Office Hymns; 42 hymns for the general section of the hymnal have been typeset for the draft hymnal. (A list of these hymns is included at the end of this issue.) Please note: the hymns included thus far have been drawn primarily from the public domain hymns of *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) of the Synodial Conference and the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnal* (1908) of the Ohio Synod. This is because we are moving through a couple sources at a time. *The Lutheran Hymnary* (1913), *The Hymnal* (1925—Augustana Synod), and other sources have only begun to be utilized for hymns. Also, no final decisions have been made regarding the inclusion of new hymns (though we have received submissions from multiple individuals). Copyright issues preclude inclusion of hymns from *LSB* and *LW*, and some desirable hymns from *TLH*; it is anticipated that congregations will retain these books for use of faithful hymnody which cannot be included in *ASBH*.

An “Order for the Burial of the Dead” has moved through the Liturgics Committee and been approved by the Bishop for inclusion in the draft hymnal.

General Hymns added thus far to the draft of ASBH (2024)

“A Great and Mighty Wonder”	TLH #76 (public domain)
“A Star is Moving Thro’ the Sky”	Ohio #58
“Abide, O Dearest Jesus”	TLH #53 (public domain)
“All Glory, Laud, and Honor”	TLH #160 (public domain)
“All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above”	TLH #19 (public domain)
“All Praise to Thee, Eternal God”	TLH #80 (public domain)
“Almighty Father, Bless the Word”	TLH #52 (public domain)
“Almighty God, Thy Word is Cast”	TLH #49 (public domain)
“As with Gladness Men of Old”	TLH #127 (public domain)
“At Jesus’ Feet Our Infant Sweet”	Ohio #223
“Awake! Sons of the Kingdom”	Ohio #16
“Before to His Sad Death He Went”	Ohio #263
“Behold! Behold! What Wonders Here!”	Ohio #25
“Blessed Jesus, at Thy Word”	TLH #16 (public domain)
“Come, Humble Soul”	Ohio #268
“Come, Lord, Thyself with Thine Abounding Grace”	Petursson (1913)
“Come, Thou Precious Ransom, Come”	TLH #55 (public domain)
“Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People”	TLH #61 (public domain)
“Dearest Jesus, We Are Here”	Ohio #222
“Forsake Us Not—O Lord, Be Near”	Ohio #181
“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”	TLH #83 (public domain)
“Full of Reverence at Thy Word”	Ohio #271
“Glad Hosanna! David’s Son”	Ohio #17
“God, in Human Flesh Appearing”	Ohio #224
“Hail to the Lord’s Anointed”	TLH #59 (public domain)
“Hallelujah! Let Praises Ring!”	TLH #23 (public domain)
“Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes”	TLH #66 (public domain)
“Hark, A Thrilling Voice is Sounding”	TLH #60 (public domain)
“Help Us, O Lord! Behold We Enter”	TLH #120 (public domain)
“How Blessed Are They Who Hear God’s Word”	TLH #48 (public domain)
“In His Temple Now Behold Him”	TLH #139 (public domain)
“In Prayer Your Voices Raise Ye”	Ohio #48, alt.
“It Is A Time of Joy Today”	Ohio #26
“Jehovah, Let Me Now Adore Thee”	TLH #21 (public domain)
“Jesus Came, The Heavens Adoring”	TLH #56 (public domain)
“Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now”	TLH #3 (public domain)
“Lord Jesus, Though But Two or Three”	Ohio #7
“Lord, Open Thou My Heart to Hear”	Ohio #4
“Now Are the Days Fulfilled”	TLH #99 (public domain)
“Now Christ, the Very Son of God”	Ohio #221
“Now Praise We Christ, the Holy One”	text: Ohio #30; tune: TLH #104
“Ye Baptized People, One and All”	ALH #41

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30: LUKE 2:15–20 CHRISTMAS OCTAVE

The glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ is a wondrous blessing from heaven. But the work that we are called to do in service to that Gospel is often very simple and humble. We don't have to try to make spectacles of ourselves when we tell others about Jesus Christ. We don't have to rely on gimmicks, publicity stunts, bait-and-switch tactics, flashy entertainment, or any other such thing. Most of the time we are just called to speak the truth and do what is good and proper according to our vocations!

The devil often tempts us to make our faith about ourselves. He wants us to turn inward and seek our own glory. The glory of the Gospel is in its focus on the Son of God who became true man, born of the virgin Mary, and was crucified for our salvation. We cannot add any glory to that amazing work of God! But He blesses us poor, lowly people from all nations to carry that glorious message to all who might hear and believe. Again, we are called to simply carry out the good works that He teaches us to do, and speak the truth according to His holy Word. God will handle all things according to His power and good will!

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the new Birth of Thine Only-Begotten Son in the flesh may set us free who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin; 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.

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.

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 full 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,

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29: LUKE 2:1-14 CHRISTMAS OCTAVE

The good tidings and great joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be to all people. The virgin birth of the true Christ was to be a great blessing of promises answered to the Jews. They were to have kept the faith of the Holy Scriptures, remember God's promises to their forefathers, and bring up their little ones in the teaching and covenant of the Lord. For all the other nations of the world, this Gospel was to be proclaimed among them so that they might know the true God who made all things and would have all men repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

Unfortunately, only some hear and believe. Only some receive the good tidings and great joy. Too many others are stiff-necked and hardhearted, rejecting Christ and ignoring God's Word. Those who disregard the Gospel of Jesus Christ miss the blessings and joy that God desires to give them.

This is why it is important that every year—and throughout the year—God's faithful people continue to live according to His Word and support the teaching of the Church, so that more and more people might continue to hear this great message of Jesus Christ and believe on Him by the gracious power of His Holy Spirit!

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the new Birth of Thine Only-Begotten Son in the flesh may set us free who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin; 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.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28: MAT. 1:18-24 HOLY INNOCENTS

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who was ever born innocent of all sin. He took on flesh in Mary, but He did not inherit the sins of Adam. As true God and true man He was perfect and holy. On the other hand, every baby that was ever born—other than Him—has been born into the guilt and sin of Adam and Eve. False teachers will say that babies are born without sin and guilt because they don't like the idea that babies are sinful, but if we say any of us are without sin, the truth of God is not in us (see Ps. 51:5; 1 John 1:8).

The Holy Innocents we remember today were innocent of any crime or wrong against the king who had them murdered. The baby boys in the area around Bethlehem were martyrs, killed because satanic men hated God and His Word. Our Lord Jesus would also be killed by satanic men, but His time to die was not to be in those early years. Later He would lay down His life and submit to the wrongful condemnation from evil, prideful sinners. Those who die for the sake of the Gospel are made to serve a holy and innocent purpose: they confess that Christ's death on the cross is more important than any man's earthly life. On account of God's gracious work for mankind, we remember and give thanks for the witness and sacrifice of the martyrs, and we pray God makes our lives and deaths also serve His Gospel!

Collect: O God, whose praise the martyred Innocents confessed, not by speaking, but by dying: destroy in us all wickedness, that our life may proclaim the faith in word and deed, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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

And that fu-ture years shall see
First re-vealed His sa-cred 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 praisees 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.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4: JEREMIAH 33:14–18 1ST S. IN ADVENT

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that I will perform that good thing which I have promised.” These words summarize the whole season of Advent. While Advent is a time of preparation, it is also a season filled with hope—the faithful anticipation of God’s fulfillment of His Word. Hope, like a candle, shines brightest in the darkness. And darkness was the state of God’s people when Jeremiah penned this prophecy.

While the Lord promised King David that his Seed would sit upon his throne, the house of David had fallen into disrepair. His kingdom was torn apart, and the dynasty which was promised to endure like a great tree was seemingly felled as both king and people departed more and more from God’s Word. But the Lord never forgot His promise. He made good on His Word and directed the Prophet to kindle hope in His faithful people. The description of our Savior as a tender plant springing up from a desolate place is the very image of hope: from the dead stump of the house of David the Messiah came forth, like a shoot springing up from the roots.

In our current age of spiritual darkness, when hope seems scarce, let the words of the Prophet rekindle hope in His promises to us in this latter time, so that we always look forward to the day when our righteous King will come and deliver us from this sin-darkened world into the world to come.

Collect: 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.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27: I CORINTHIANS 2:6–10 ST. JOHN

St. John, the Apostle and Evangelist, emphasized the truth and light of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the very wisdom that St. Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians. It is from God, not from the wisdom of man. It has been given to man from the beginning. Adam and Eve received the promises of the Seed. The people throughout the Old Testament were taught to keep the faith in those promises and look for God’s help and power as He fulfilled His promises. Now we have the ongoing history of His wisdom and power as it has been revealed by His Spirit in the Gospel of Christ crucified for our salvation.

Apart from this wisdom we would not know that the Baby born to blessed Mary was the Word of God made flesh. We would not understand that He was the very strength of God that would overcome worldly powers and save man from sin and death. Apart from God’s Spirit and enlightenment, we would be like so many others who pridefully and foolishly say there is no God, Jesus was not born of a virgin, and that His death was just the consequences of Him being a social trouble-maker.

But as we have been made alive in His Holy Spirit, we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and we understand the deep wisdom of God that is proclaimed in His glorious Gospel!

Collect: Merciful Lord, we beseech Thee to cast the bright beams of Thy light upon Thy Church, that it being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed Apostles, may so walk in the light of Thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

By God's grace and power the saints before us confessed the truth of His Gospel. The blessed people who were there for our Lord's nativity affirmed what He was doing in those events. The saints and martyrs of the early Church continued to affirm God's promises fulfilled.

St. Stephen witnessed the powerful work of God in the early days of the New Testament Church. He confessed the truth and light that was passed on to him from the time of the Old Testament and through the Apostles. The proud and blasphemous hypocrites who imagined that they were God's people hated the truth of the Gospel. They rejected the Son and resisted the Holy Spirit. But even as they tried to kill the faithful messengers of God, they were still scattered and afflicted in the ages to come. They experienced the consequences of their faithlessness.

Those who reject Jesus Christ and His holy Gospel are liars if they say they believe God. The Father Almighty made Himself known in the holy Son who came to us at Christmas, died on the cross, and rose on Easter! True life and blessings only come from this truth that is passed on to us in His holy Christian Church.

Collect: Grant, O Lord, that, in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of Thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of Thy first martyr, Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to Thee, O blessed Jesus, Who standest at the right hand of God to succor all those that suffer for Thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

The season of Advent is the beginning of the Church Year. And at the beginning of the Church Year we are reminded of the beginning of Creation, but not in Adam. Instead, the Apostle Paul teaches us about the beginning of the New Creation founded upon the work of Christ, the Second Adam. While Adam's sin condemned this world to condemnation, the work of Jesus—the babe of Bethlehem and the eternal Son of God—reconciles all things back to God.

The light of the Nativity is the light of redemption, rebirth, and renewal. While He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary, the Lord Jesus also pre-existed all things, created all things, and reconciled all things. The Church is His New Creation—His Kingdom, His Body, and His Temple. All the faithful who believe in the Son of God, who hold fast the Gospel of the Christ-child, are members of this kingdom.

What a glorious hope we have in Christ! What a joyful Adventide we enjoy, looking forward to the consummation of this kingdom when Christ comes again, not meek and humble in a manger, but on the throne of His glory with all His holy angels!

Collect: 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.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6: HEBREWS 10:19-25 ST. NICHOLAS

Today is the festival day of St. Nicholas, the real figure behind the commercialized icon which the world recognizes on Christmas. This real person was not a magical or mystical figure, but real flesh and blood. More than that, he was a servant of God, a bishop of the Church of Christ.

While he was known for his charitable gift-giving, the real Nicholas of Myra confessed and taught the truth of the Gospel and pointed his listeners to the greatest Christmas gift that has ever been given: the only-begotten Son of God, gifted to us by the Father of all mercies to redeem fallen mankind from its sins. This is also why we Christians celebrate the Nativity with gift-giving and acts of love. It is not to distract us from the cold and sometimes grim weather of winter, not to overload the senses with the superficial trinkets and songs of the season, but to remind one another that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

It is good for us to remember historical figures such as the saints of the Church, because it reminds us that our faith is not based on myths or fables, but on the historical Gospel account of our Savior.

Collect: 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

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7: MATTHEW 11:25-30 ST. AMBROSE

Today is the festival of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. It is important for us to remember the fathers and doctors of the Church, not only for what they taught as pastors and shepherds of the faithful, but also because of the examples they left us to follow.

The Lord Jesus thanked His Father that He kept the mystery of the Gospel from the wise and conceited, but revealed it to the simple and childlike. It's no wonder that the Christmas season fills us with such childlike wonder and joy! But along with this merriment comes the serious reminder that, as followers of Christ, we must carry the yoke of discipleship. St. Ambrose served during a time when there was political and theological persecution against those who endeavored to hold fast to the Gospel. We, too, must struggle against the devil, the world, and our flesh. But Christ comforts us by telling us that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He invites us saying, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We should strive to follow the example of those who have taught us the Word of God, remembering the good end of their way of life, i.e., that there is a rest for the people of God, founded upon the work of our Savior.

Collect: 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.

Christians long to see the coming of the Son of Man. Advent puts this in the forefront of our minds, focusing us not only on the coming of Christ as the babe of Bethlehem, but also as the mighty King who will judge both the living and the dead on the Last Day. In faith, we do not fear, but rejoice in hope to see that day, knowing that our sins are forgiven and that we have become heirs of that kingdom by God's grace through Jesus' redemption.

We might not live to see the Last Day come in our own age. We might have to be satisfied to die in hope, as the saints before us have. But we have this confidence, that at the resurrection we will see our Lord and Savior with our own eyes, coming in the clouds of heaven. In the meantime, let us not grow weary or be drawn away by false Christs or by false teachers who try to draw us away into misbelief.

While we wait for that Day to come, we should always remember that the kingdom of God is already here—it is among us; it resides within us because the Holy Spirit has made us members of that kingdom and temples of the Triune God. Our God is not far away. He is always with us, living in us and among His Church. He is with us in His Word, in His Sacraments, and in our hearts by faith.

Collect: 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.

“He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.”

Even when our Lord was incarnate in the womb of His blessed mother, He was our almighty Savior! The honored Virgin and others around her were blessed with true faith by the Holy Ghost to recognize and confess the powerful work that God was doing with the baby she carried. Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, and Zacharias are rightly remembered as special, holy people in the story of our Lord's coming in the flesh. They were God's true people, saints who heard and believed His holy promises.

Today the Church continues to remember, believe, and confess the great promises of our Lord. We also have the added blessing of confessing that His mighty deeds most certainly fulfilled the great things about which the saints before us prophesied! The believers of the Old Testament era trusted that the Savior would come and show His power. The saints of the New Testament era now sing and praise God with “Amen!” and “Hallelujah!” because He did show this power from the cross and empty tomb of our Lord Jesus. All the miracles and all the power He manifested, from His holy conception, to His birth, through His ministry, showed mercy toward us sinners. By His divine strength He saves us, and whosoever believes in Him, from sin and death!

Collect: Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that the new Birth of Thine Only-Begotten Son in the flesh may set us free who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin; 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.

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.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9: ROMANS I:16–20 1ST S. IN ADVENT

Nowadays, the world tries to draw us away from the faith by making us feel ashamed for what we believe. They ridicule us for putting our faith in the God of our Salvation. Really, they ought to be ashamed for closing their eyes and covering their ears to the truth that not only does our God exist, but that He is the God of all creation. He has demonstrated His power and Godhead to all people from the very existence of the world.

On the day when Christ judges the world, they will have no excuse for their unbelief, and they will be the ones who will feel ashamed for their spiritual ignorance. But we who have been brought to the knowledge of the truth should never feel ashamed of our Lord, because He is not only the God of creation, but the God of salvation. He has redeemed us by His Son, our Savior. By the powerful Gospel He has brought us to justifying faith. Let us grow ever-more bold in our proclamation of that Gospel, and give thanks to our loving Savior that He was born in Bethlehem to save us from our sins and to deliver us from the corruption of this fallen world.

Collect: 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.

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

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23; LUKE 3:10–20

ST. THORLAK

John the Baptist's preaching was known as a preaching of repentance; and the text for this devotion is the most extensive recorded example of what he said. First, John preaches the Law, which calls us to repentance for the sins we have committed against God and our fellow man. The Law also instructs us in what we should be doing, that those who have means should share with those who do not; that tax collectors and soldiers should not use their authority to extort money from people.

We see that greed, or the desire to abuse power, come easily to people. By recognizing this sin in ourselves, we can see that it is not through our own works or merit that God's grace comes to us. As John says, he is not the Christ, but Christ is most definitely coming. The coming of the Christ is the great Good News that God, through His life and death, will have mercy on us and forgive us our sins. As the Holy Ghost works faith in us through this preaching of God's Word, He also gives us strength to do good works—not because we want to earn our salvation, but out of love and thanks to God for what He has done.

Collect: 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, one God, world without end. Amen.

John the Baptist's ministry was unusual in many respects. Here came a man wearing camel hair, living in the wilderness, and eating locusts and wild honey. As an unborn child he confessed about the also unborn Christ, who had now come. As an adult he fearlessly preached repentance, and his preaching against King Herod would cost him his life.

While John was in prison he sent two of his disciples to ask if Jesus really was the Christ or not. Did John the Baptist doubt at the end, or was this question for the benefit of the disciples he sent? It is completely inconsistent with everything else we read of John that he would have doubted like this. Jesus' response to his question, and His followup statements, seem to indicate that the multitudes thought less of John because this question had been asked.

John the Baptist was a great man, and a great prophet. But the role and work of a great prophet is specifically to point people to Jesus Christ as their only hope for salvation. As great of a man as John was, that avails nothing for the forgiveness of sin—only Christ's obedience and blood can do that. While we may want to take credit for ourselves, we know that we can do nothing without Christ. John knew this too, and preached it faithfully.

Collect: 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.

“God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.”

St. Paul speaks words of Law. For those who condemn others, the Law condemns them too, for they are likewise guilty. For those who do not have the Law as revealed to Moses, their own consciences will show them their guilt, for they have a natural knowledge of right and wrong. Even those in darkness can figure out that they have failed to live up to whatever internal standards of right and wrong they may have.

But then St. Paul asserts that “God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.” Whose gospel? St. Paul says “his”. That may seem odd, until we realize that the Gospel doesn't just float around out there in the ether somewhere. God locates it in called and ordained men, whom He has set apart to be His *forgiveness-of-sins-distributors* in this world.

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus died on the cross for the sin of the world. As we come to faith in Jesus Christ through hearing the Word and receiving the Sacraments by way of the Apostolic Ministry, God judges us to be forgiven, righteous, and heirs of eternal life.

Collect: 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, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Let it be to me according to your word.”

The angel Gabriel appears to the blessed virgin Mary and declares God’s intentions for her. She does not doubt God’s Word; she asks only about “how is this going to work?” The angel answers: the Holy Spirit will come upon her, and so she will conceive and give birth to the only begotten Son of God. Once the angel answers, she speaks the faithful words: “Let it be to me according to your word.”

The Lord has His use of our lives. As children, we sometimes get asked, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” If ever St. Mary was asked that, she likely would not have imagined that she would become the “*Theotokos*,” the “Bearer” or “Mother of God”!

Our lives likewise take twists and turns that we could never have imagined, and they sometimes turn out completely different than we had thought. When He wills something we could not have foreseen, God grant us, like St. Mary, to submit to the plans He has for us, to rejoice in them, and at the last to receive our heavenly reward through faith in Jesus Christ.

Collect: 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, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

As we continue our look at the life of John the Baptist, today we focus on his most important confession and preaching: his work of pointing to Jesus as the Christ, the promised Messiah. The first task of this confession was to confess what John was not. He was not the Christ, not Elijah (though he did preach in the spirit of Elijah, as Gabriel had said to his father before he was born), and not “the Prophet,” the one that Moses prophesied would arise (which is another name for the Christ).

As John says, he was the “voice of one crying in the wilderness; ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” (John 1:23). And the Lord has come, not to grant us worldly peace and prosperity, but to suffer and die for our sins. Thus, He is the true Lamb of God, who is both true man and true God at the same time, as Scriptures have plainly foretold.

It was to bear witness to this vital truth that John the Baptist was called, and why John was baptizing. This Advent season we also do well to fix our eyes on the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life and died a perfect death to pay the debt we owe to God for all of our sins.

Collect: Grant 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.

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, did not immediately believe the angel Gabriel's announcement that he would have a son, and that his son would be the forerunner of the promised Christ. But Zacharias indicated that the child's name would be John, and Zacharias then uses his newly restored voice for a great prophecy.

That prophecy highlights many things that are good for us to remember. Zacharias confesses that salvation is entirely the work of the Lord God of Israel; that the Christ who was coming was of the house and lineage of David; and that God had made and repeated this promise through His prophets since the world began. This means, of course, that the promise of the Christ was not built up and refined by human knowledge over the course of time, but delivered by God through the prophets.

Once again we are reminded that our God would be known first and foremost as the God of grace and mercy; the God who alone can and does give us the forgiveness of our sins. John would serve this God by preaching repentance, to prepare the way for Jesus. And while John was known for his preaching of repentance and the Law, he did this to properly prepare God's people to hear the Gospel, which he also proclaimed to them, pointing out that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Collect: 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 would strengthen our faith in Christ Jesus, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

"From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Today is St. Lucy's Day (known as St. Lucia in some places). It is believed that she lived A.D. 283–304. She was a virgin from a well-off family in Sicily. She was betrothed to a wealthy young man from a pagan family. When her fiancé found out she did not want to marry him and was giving away her family fortune, he denounced her as a Christian, and she was martyred. "*Lucia*" is related to the Latin word for light, so her commemoration often involves a girl with a wreath of candles on her head.

In his second letter to St. Timothy, St. Paul writes, "from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." This is really the point of most commemorations of a martyrdom: we have the example of someone who not only knew the Scriptures, but who had been "made wise for salvation" by them, as the Holy Spirit worked through them to create faith in Christ Jesus.

So we remember the saints and martyrs of the past. God grant us grace to be like them, esteeming the treasure of our salvation, through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord, to far exceed any of the riches or pleasures of this world.

Collect: 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.

“For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“If these things are yours...” What things? Faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love; these all flow from “the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ our Lord.” Through that knowledge we have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

Lust is all about “what I want.” These virtues listed by St. Peter are “*others-centered*,” restraining our self-centeredness and teaching us to attend to the needs of others. Christ sacrificed Himself to attend to our needs—forgiveness of sin, deliverance from the power of the devil, victory over death. His gifts overflow from us to others. With hearts full of the joy for our salvation in Christ Jesus, we rise up in the morning and lay hold afresh of our Baptism. Thereby we again have the old Adam in us drowned, even as the new man arises, who will live before God in righteousness and purity. God grant us strength to live according to that new man this day, to confess before the world who and what we are in Christ Jesus.

Collect: 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, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Imagine, if you would, serving as a priest in God’s Old Testament Temple. Imagine, after many long years of service, being found to be blameless. And then imagine the angel Gabriel appearing to speak directly to you, and telling you that after all these long years you would have a son. Would you think you would be happy at this news? Grateful? Amazed? Zacharias had just such an opportunity, and at first, as recorded in Luke 1:19-20, he did not believe it. As a consequence, He was struck mute until John the Baptist’s birth, which would be around nine months later.

So it was that when John was born, the question came up about how to name him. Elizabeth, his wife, had learned of what Gabriel had said; she indicated that the child’s name would be John. The onlookers sought a second opinion, and Zacharias wrote on a tablet that the child’s name should be John, indicating that he finally trusted and accepted what Gabriel had told him. Zacharias had been told what to expect; but now others, who saw that Zacharias was able to speak after being mute so long, came to understand that John would indeed be a very extraordinary child. Indeed, the time for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’s long-promised incarnation was close at hand, and John would be the herald of it.

Collect: 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.

As we approach Christmastide we rightly focus on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, especially on the accounts of His birth. It is absolutely right and proper to understand the circumstances concerning our Lord's birth.

One circumstance that can be easy to overlook is the announcement and birth of John the Baptist, the great forerunner of Christ who identified himself as the voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord!"

Not many people—prophets, priests, or kings—have their births foretold by an angel. John was one such person. John would go on to leap for joy in the presence of Jesus while both of them were still in their mothers' wombs. John would go on to baptize Jesus, and point Him out as the true Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John would eventually be put to death due to fearlessly pointing out the sin of Herod, who had his brother's wife. In all of this, he resolutely pointed not to himself, but to Christ, even saying, "He must increase; but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

May God give us the same hearts to always look to, and point others to, Christ. And may God give us the same faithful hearts to do what we know is right, even when we must suffer consequences for it in this world.

Collect: 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.

"Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ."

"Patience is a virtue," we are told from a young age. Yet we live in a world that does not really teach this virtue. We expect instant gratification: "the fast food better come in five minutes, not seven"; "the web-page better load in three seconds or less!"

Faith embraces patience. The Old Testament book of Lamentations, amid bitter circumstances, says, "It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (3:26). St. Paul speaks of the Lord directing our hearts into "the patience of Christ." He speaks thus, even while praying that the Word of the Lord may run swiftly. Children learn patience when they see presents under the tree, but know they must wait till Christmas to open them.

Most of the Christian life is like that. Repentance and forgiveness of sins we always have, but the unfolding of God's purposes for our own lives, and even for the whole world, happen in His time. God grant us patient and prayerful endurance, even as God is patient with us, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to saving faith in Christ Jesus, our coming Lord.

Collect: 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, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

“Take heed that no one deceives you.”

“Do not be troubled,” our Lord admonishes us. He says this even as He warns of things to come: wars, earthquakes, famines, persecution of the faithful. He says, “take heed that no one deceives you.” One sure sign of a deceiver is that they invite you to feel troubled, and one sure sign that you have been deceived is if you allow yourself to be troubled!

False prophets thrive on getting people worked up and then presenting themselves as the ones who have the keys to making sense of the chaos. But, chaotic as some of those things may seem to us, our Lord has already told us that they are coming. He is still the Lord of history.

During this season of Advent, we ponder the “comings” of the Lord: His birth, His sacramental presence, His coming again in glory. In Christ, all that is necessary for our salvation has been accomplished, and in due course it will be brought to completion. Your single biggest need was for that salvation. All else is comparatively minor. Do not be deceived, and thus, do not be troubled. The Prince of Peace comes to you, to save you.

Collect: 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, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

He saves, and He a-lone, He con- quered
 And brake the cap- tive's chain. What though this
 A- wak- ing and in sleep. Christ is my
 From Death's cold shad- ow fly. O Grave, where
 death by dy- ing Up- on th' ac- cur- sed tree,
 earth- ly bod- y O- bey Death's dread be- hest?
 rock, my cour- age; Christ is my soul's true life;
 is thy tri- umph? O Death, where is thy sting?
 And from His death sprang glo- rious
 The soul soars free re- joic- ing
 And Christ- my still heart knows it-
 "Come when thou wilt, and wel- come!"
 E- ter- nal life for me,
 To man- sions of the blest,
 Will bear me through the strife,
 Se- cure in Christ I sing, A- men.

Festival of St. Thorlak
69. I Know That My Redeemer

Hallgrimur Petursson

Ach Gott vom Himmelreiche
"Musae Sioniae," VII, 1609

1. I know that my Re - deem - er
2. Christ con - quered death by dy - ing—
3. I think up - on my Sav - iour,
4. Thus in Christ's name I'm liv - ing;

Lives crowned up - on the throne;
Je - sus, Thy mor - tal pain
I thus trust in His pow'r to keep;
Thus in Christ's name I'll die;

Lord o - ver earth and hea - ven
O'er - threw the King of Ter - rors
His migh - ty arm en - folds me
I'll fear not though life's vig - our

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

Festival of St. Thomas

68. From All Thy Saints in Warfare, For All Thy Saints at Rest

The Sarum Hymnal, 1868

Ach Gott vom Himmelreiche
"Musae Sioniae," VII, 1609

1. From all Thy Saints in war - fare,
2. All praise for Thine A - po - stle
3. A - po - stles, Pro - phets, Mar - tyrs,
Δ4. Then praise we God the Fa - ther,

For all Thy Saints at rest, To Thee, O
Whose short lived doubt - ings prove Thy per - fect
And all the sa - cred throng, Who wear the
And praise we God the Son, And God the

bles - sed Je - sus, All prais - es be ad - dressed,
two - fold Na - ture, The ful - ness of Thy Love.
spot - less rai - ment, Who raise the cease - less song;
Ho - ly Spi - rit, E - ter - nal Three in One;

Thou, Lord, didst win the bat - tle That they might
On all who wait Thy com - ing Shed forth Thy
For these, passed on be - fore - us, Sa - vior! we
Till all the ran - somed num - ber Fall down be -

con - querors be. Their crowns of liv - ing
peace, O Lord! And grant us faith to
Thee a - dore, And, walk - ing in their
fore the Throne, And hon - or, pow'r, and

glo - ry Are lit with rays from Thee.
know Thee, True Man, true God, a - dored.
foot - steps, Would serve Thee more and more.
glo - ry A - scribe to God a - lone. A - men.