

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2: PSALM 1

We all reap the fruits of what we have sown in our lives. Lives lived in the company of the dishonest, the immoral, and the violent have consequences. That life finally shows. One realizes eventually that he is just like those with which he has spent his life. But the pious man or woman has cultivated virtues. Few things are more beautiful than the older men and women who have spent their lives studying the Word and practicing piety and discipline. They have a calm strength. They have resolve. They are Christians we should emulate. And yet, they would be the first to tell you that those virtues did not come from them, but from the Lord.

Such saints learned about their Lord by meditating day and night on the Word. They became more like Jesus by spending time in His company. Good company improves character, and there is no better company than Jesus. But Jesus is more than just a good example or good company. He makes you holy as He dwells within you. Jesus doesn't just improve your character, He makes it possible for you to "stand in the judgment." There is spiritual life in "the law of the Lord." Jesus works through His Word to make the saints into what they were always meant to be. The evidence of our lives will often show how we spent our time, and with whom.

We pray: Lord Jesus, help us to remember who it is we need to cling to. May we always reflect You to the world around us. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



NOVEMBER 5–DECEMBER 2, 2017

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

The Calendar

November 1 (W)	All Saints' Day
November 5	Trinity 21
November 6 (M)	Gustavus Adolphus, King and Confessor
November 9 (Th)	Martin Chemnitz, Doctor and Confessor
November 10 (F)	Martin Luther, Doctor and Confessor
November 12	Trinity 25
November 19	Trinity 26
November 26	Trinity 27
November 30 (Th)	St. Andrew, Apostle

Support for St. Ignatius Lutheran Theological Seminary

It is hard to believe that another year of seminary instruction is passing by very quickly. By the time you read this, we will only be a few weeks away from the end of the Fall Quarter! Seminarist Josiah Scheck's studies continue; this quarter his classes include *Homiletics I*, *Sacramental Theology*, *Post-Reformation Lutheran History*, and *Theology and Practice of Confession and Absolution*. He is doing very well in his studies, and I would ask that you would continue to keep him in your prayers as his seminary education continues.

Keeping in mind the ongoing work of St. Ignatius seminary, this would be a very good time for you to speak with men whom you believe would make good candidates for the holy ministry. If you would be interested in studying at St. Ignatius, or know someone whom you believe should be encouraged to study at the seminary, please feel free to contact me either via email (bishopheiser@me.com) or by mail (c/o Salem Lutheran Church, 718 HCR 3424 E, Malone, Texas 76660).

Financial support is also needed, so that we can continue to keep seminary affordable for future students. Support for the seminary should be sent care of the diocesan treasurer, Pr. Michael Henson (Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, 1000 North Park Ave. Herrin, IL 62948).

—*Yours in Christ, Bishop Heiser*

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1: LUKE 1:46–55

This poor, ordinary girl was profoundly joyous over being chosen to be God's servant. She rightly acknowledges in this song that she sings that God has had mercy upon His people time and again in the past: the Passover, the Exodus, the return from Babylon, and now He would perform a great and merciful act for His people through her.

As God's presence was with His people in the tabernacle in the desert in the Old Testament, now God's presence would be in the tabernacle of her womb. The God whom Mary called "my Savior" would now be within her. And the presence of that saving God within Mary's womb would bring joy to the world as He brought joy to John the Baptist as he was in his Elizabeth's womb.

God is with us; Jesus Christ is Immanuel. The girl who bore Him was the mother of God. That title is right and necessary. Mary was not just the mother of a human boy which God the Father adopted. The One within her was God from the very start. And so she must be called "the Mother of God." As she received the Lord into her body, similarly we receive the Lord into our bodies through the Supper. Our Lord is within us, saving us and giving us eternal life.

The Virgin Mary is such a beautiful example to us of faithfulness to God. Have we been remiss in honoring her? Have we ignored her? Have we failed to call her "blessed"? Let us do so no longer. Let us join our voices with hers and say, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." No more fitting words were ever spoken by a Christian. Mary is truly a blessed example to us all.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30: MATTHEW 27–28

Yes, it was the wicked, evil chief priests and Pharisees who manipulated the crowds like puppets on strings. They manipulated them just like the public is manipulated today by political “spin doctors” and television “newsmen”. But those crowds were willing to be manipulated. They wanted blood. They wanted revolution. They wanted it so badly that they called the blood of Jesus down upon their own heads and upon their children’s heads. The innocent blood that Pilate was so dreading to put on his hands these Jews were glad to have it poured on their heads. And it has been on their heads ever since.

Christ’s blood brings forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and numerous blessings to all who receive it in faith. But for those who reject it and trample it underfoot, there is nothing but death and curses in that blood. So who is responsible for Jesus’ death? Is it the Jews? They are clearly the most directly responsible. Was it Pontius Pilate? Clearly he was the one who had the authority and gave the order. But was it these people alone? Or are there other murderers who need to be pointed out? There are. The other murderer is you. For it was ultimately not Pilate, or Caiaphas, or the bloodthirsty mob in Jerusalem that sent Jesus to His death; it was you and your sins. Christ willingly went to the cross for you, because you needed Him to do so. We should not deny the facts of history, but the theological truth is paramount: Jesus was put on the cross for us.

We pray: Lord, thank You for dying for me. Amen.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6: OBADIAH, JONAH

On account of the unbelief in Nineveh great wickedness was done there, so it deserved to be destroyed. But in His mercy our Lord God determined that a warning should be preached to the people of Nineveh. For this task the Prophet Jonah was chosen. Unfortunately, he forsook the call given to him by the Lord God and was eventually swallowed by a large fish.

The Lord God shows His mercy throughout this book. There is mercy for the Prophet Jonah. There is mercy for the sailors who threw Jonah overboard to receive a calm sea. There is even mercy for the Ninevites who listen to the Word of the Lord through Jonah and repent in sackcloth and ashes.

No sign is given to the city of Nineveh, only the Word of the Lord. But they believed that Word. The Lord Jesus references this when He declares that the wicked and evil generation in which He lived only wanted signs. They refused to listen to the Word—to the Lord Jesus. The only sign they would receive was the sign of Jonah, who was in the belly of a great fish. The Son of Man—the Lord Jesus—was also in the grave three days, so that He might become the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead for those who believe on His Name. We have this same promise through the preaching of the Word through the ministers of God. Believe the Word and receive His gifts.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through Thy protection she may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 7: MICAH 1–3

The people of Judah and Israel had a hearing problem. They refused to listen to the Lord, who spoke through the prophets. The prophets would proclaim the Word of the Lord, but the people would respond with the words, “Do not prattle.” The Lord was trying to lead them into repentance so that they might cling to Him in faith, but they refused to listen. The words of the prophets were useless to them. Therefore, the Lord planned their destruction on account of their unbelief.

All was not lost, however. There was still a remnant of people in both Israel and Judah who listened to and heard the prophets, who repented of their sins and clung to the Lord and His promises in faith. He promises through Micah that He would gather these remnants from the northern and southern kingdoms into one flock. He would be their Shepherd. It would be a large flock. And the Lord would be their Head.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this prophecy. He gathers together into one flock all those who hear His Word and believe on Him for their forgiveness, life, and salvation. He is our Shepherd, our Head. He leads us by His Word to cling to Him and His promises. And, like a Good Shepherd, He will rescue us from the destruction reserved for unbelievers and lead us into our eternal home in Heaven. There we will rejoice in our Shepherd who gave His life for us sheep.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through Thy protection she may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29: MATTHEW 25–26

What if God does not accept everyone? Our world has no problem accepting a loving God, a gracious God, a forgiving God. Such a God makes people feel good and doesn't disturb one's life. But what is forgotten is that in order to have a forgiving God one must have a need to be forgiven. In order to have a gracious God, one must be in need of grace. In fact, grace and forgiveness lose all meaning without a judgment. If God simply embraces everyone, then no one needs to be pardoned, no one needs to escape a coming catastrophe of judgment.

But Jesus is clear about this in His Mount Olivet discourse to His disciples. There is a judgment coming on the world, and He is the judge. He judges men by the works that show the living faith of the heart, or lack thereof. Faith is the determining factor in entering heaven or hell. Real Christian faith is seen by others in the things we do. This active faith is the only one that is truly living.

The Day of Judgment is approaching. It is nearer today than it was yesterday. Too many nominal Christians in our world have a dead faith that results in no actions. In view of the fact that these things are so--that there is indeed a judgment and that faith without works is dead--let us soberly re-examine our lives. Let nothing keep you from hearing the words, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

We pray: Lord God, by Your Holy Spirit make us to truly live in our faith in Christ. Amen.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28: MATTHEW 23–24

Along with the destruction of national Israel and temple worship, there is yet a remnant. Matthew 24:22 says that the days of destruction brought on by the Roman army would be “cut short.” That is, not all would be destroyed. God would preserve the Christians and even some of the unbelieving Jews. He would preserve the Christians because His Church will remain until He comes back, and He preserved part of the Jews as living symbols of what not to do. If they had passed out of existence, they may have been forgotten, and the message of their punishment by God may have been forgotten. But preserved, they act as a living cautionary example.

God also always works to bring them to repentance and faith. God allows these terrible things to happen to them so that they might ask the question, “Why?” “Why is our history uniquely horrible? Why do we seem to be cursed among all people? What is it in our history that has brought upon us God’s wrath?” God uses history to bring about these questions. And hopefully through those questions truth, light, and salvation will come to some.

Even in wrath and judgment God is working to bring about salvation for those whom He has predestined to share in the glories of heaven. What sense is there to suffering and hardship? He strengthens us, and helps us to grow through suffering. He has a purpose to all the events of this world and all the events of your life. He wants you to mature as a Christian. He wants you to become more like Jesus.

We pray: Lord, may we take suffering as opportunity to draw closer to You. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8: MICAH 4–6

The Church is surrounded by her enemies just like Jerusalem was surrounded by the army of Babylon. There are those who attack the Church from the outside, mocking and ridiculing all those who cling to the Lord God in faith. There are also those who claim to be a part of the Church, who preach and teach false doctrine, leading those who are deceived to unbelief and other great sin and shame. The Church’s work is symbolized by a woman in pain giving birth to her child.

The Blessed Virgin Mary endured the pains of childbirth in order to bear our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. This town was associated with sorrow and pain, for it is where Rachel gave birth to her last son, Benjamin, but died during the birth. Now this would become the place of promise. The Messiah, the Anointed Savior of the Church, would be born in this small town.

Our Lord was born in Bethlehem so that He might fulfill the Law perfectly for us, and suffer and die in our place on the cross. He endured the pain of the cross so that we might have life. He bore our reproach so that we might have the promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation. He gathers all those who believe on Him into the Church to receive His gifts and lead us into our eternal home in Heaven.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through Thy protection she may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9: NAHUM

It is often said in our society that “sex sells.” The same is true of evil. The Lord God through the Prophet Nahum compares evil to a harlot. A prostitute lures her prey into her bed by enticing them with pleasure. A person is lured into evil through pleasure and self-gratification. Moreover, Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, is portrayed as a city full of harlots, a whole society whose inclination is toward seeking pleasure and self-gratification. Sound familiar?

Nineveh is the evil city, but the spiritual Jerusalem is a place of righteousness. The Church is the spiritual Jerusalem. All the wicked acts of Nineveh are the result of the greatest sin, unbelief. In the Church the saints are not righteous because of their keeping the Law, but on account of their faith in the One True Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is credited to them for the sake of their faith.

Unbelievers seek their own pleasure and are only concerned about themselves in this life. The believer in Christ rejoices in the gifts that the Lord gives. He gives these gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation because He atoned for the sins of the world on the cross. On the cross He endured the evil of evil men, all while bearing the evil of our sin. He bought the whole world, and especially those who believe on Him.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through Thy protection she may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27: MATTHEW 21–22

Our text says that He “again” called them to Himself. This corresponds to the message that came to the Jews by Jesus and His apostles. The apostles, and deacons, and pastors of the earliest Church called to the Jews to repent and believe in the Messiah who had come to them. But we see the result of that call. This violent rejection of the Gospel by the Jews is foretold by Jesus right here in the Gospel. And so we see the division of ancient Israel into the cultural adherents who became the Jews of today, and the genuine sons of Abraham who followed Jesus and became the first Christians.

This division of Israel by Jesus into cultural and genuine infuriates the Jews. Remember the context of this Gospel passage. Jesus has just triumphantly entered Jerusalem to cheering crowds. He is teaching in the temple when He tells this parable; it is in front of “the chief priests and Pharisees.” They were so furious that they would have killed Him right there had they not feared the crowds. Jesus was telling them that they were nothing more than cultural Israel, and His followers were genuine Israel.

It would be those of genuine Israel that would share the banquet hall with the Gentiles in our parable. Many of the Jews were called, but few were chosen. And then in the parable Jesus tells everyone what the difference between the cultural and genuine believer is. God, the King, had provided the wedding guests with the garment they needed to attend the wedding. Most importantly, God had provided the righteousness the Jews needed to enter His kingdom. He provided it for the Gentiles too.

We pray: Lord, thank You for providing us Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. He is all we need. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Last Sunday after Trinity

ARTICLE XVII.

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

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

—The Augsburg Confession

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10: HABAKKUK

It was customary in days past to place above the door to the entrance into the nave the words from Habakkuk 2:20, “But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.” The purpose was to establish the fact that the only word that should be preached and used in the House of God was the Word of the Lord. It is His Word we are to hear, not the word of society, or our thoughts or desires.

When viewed in the context of the book of the Prophet Habakkuk, these words take on an even greater meaning. Prior to these words Habakkuk describes the images of false idols. Those who had forsaken the Lord and turned to false idols, worshiping wood, gold, and silver. These things cannot speak, but the persons who molded them would attribute to them words.

There is a contrast here between the Lord God who proclaims destruction of the unbeliever and salvation for all those who hear His Word, and the false idols who cannot say anything at all. Listen only to the Lord God, and stop attributing wisdom to your false idols, which cannot say anything at all. They are teachers of lies.

On account of our inbred unbelief and our chasing after false gods, the Lord took it upon Himself to bear our flesh so that He could redeem us from those who had us trapped by false wisdom and lies. Now the just live by faith in Him.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through Thy protection she may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11: ZEPHANIAH

The Prophet Zephaniah ends with the good news that the Lord would remove the enemy from the midst of the remnant of Israel and Jerusalem. This is a Messianic prophecy. The Lord Jesus Christ was born in our flesh in order to conquer our enemies: the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. He accomplished this on the cross. He humbled Himself, suffered, and died so that we might have a reason to rejoice.

Our enemies in this life—the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh—cause us great harm. They entrap us into great sin and vice. We also suffer at their hands through the consequences of sin in this world, not only attacking our souls, but our bodies as well. We suffer often as their prey, falling again and again into the temptations and traps they set. The same was true of the people of Israel and Judah.

There is, however, the promise of redemption for all those who believe on the Savior who has come into the world to redeem all who suffer at the hands of the enemies of the Church. In Zion—in the Church—the Lord saves His people by proclaiming to them what He has done for them on the cross. He gathers us back from our enemies, and gives us a new home in the Church through faith. He implants His Word in us so that we rejoice in what He has done for us.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through Thy protection she may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25: MATTHEW 17–18

When Jesus says that we must become as little children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, He is not teaching us to become innocent and rid ourselves of every sin. The Scriptures are clear that all people born in the natural way are born sinful and corrupt because they are born from the line of Adam. There is no way to purge oneself of every sin and to make oneself innocent of transgression and guilt, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Even if we suppress outward sin, we cannot purge our hearts of its evil inclinations and wicked thoughts. Innocence and true righteousness cannot be attained by our works or strivings.

To become like a little child mean to become one who readily believes God's Word and humbly looks to the Triune God for all our needs. As newborns look in faith to their mother to feed them, so we are to look to our heavenly Father for our daily bread. As little ones expect their parents to give them every good thing, so we are not to trust in our devices or works, but look to Christ for every good gift and every perfect gift, trusting that He will give us what we need when we need it. To become as a little child is not to rid oneself of every sin, for that is impossible in this life. To become as a little child is to confidently believe the promises of God made in Jesus Christ. That faith makes you righteous in God's sight, for by it Christ's righteousness and true innocence is credited to you.

We pray: Lord God, grant us grace to live daily by Your promises, trusting every Word as Your dear children. Amen.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24: MATTHEW 15–16

During Jesus' earthly ministry there was confusion about who He was. The disciples admit that there were many confessions about Christ. "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" John the Baptist. Elijah. Jeremiah or one of the prophets. By the power of the Holy Ghost, having been taught by Christ, Peter confesses rightly: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." There was just as much confusion about what He came to accomplish. After feeding the five thousand in John 6, the multitude wants to take Jesus by force and crown Him their king. In Luke 12 some want Jesus to be a judge and arbitrator in a legal dispute. Most often He is addressed simply as "Good Teacher." Even after Peter confesses Christ, he is confused about Christ's work as He tries to dissuade Christ from suffering, death, and resurrection.

There is just as much confusion in our age about Jesus' identity and work. Many think of Him only as a good teacher. Among those who confess Christ to be both God and Lord, many treat Him as a "bread king" who exists to give us whatever we want in this life, while others deny His words about baptism and the Lord's Supper in order to have a Jesus that fits their preferences. It is no longer enough to simply confess "Jesus is Lord." In our age we must confess what kind of Lord Jesus is, one who atones for the sins of the world upon the cross and lives to justify those who repent and believe the Gospel, giving these gifts through His means of Grace.

We pray: Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word, and in the pure confession of who You are and what You do for us poor sinners. Amen.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13: ZECHARIAH 1–5

The prophet and priest Zechariah ministers to God's people after their return from their Babylonian captivity. He speaks to God's people during the rebuilding of the Temple. Zechariah's eight prophetic visions lay out the future of God's plan for His future kingdom: the Church! These visions present with pictures what the Small Catechism describes with the words, "In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

The Israelite forefathers had received seventy years of exile for their unrelenting, unrepentant rejection of God. Here, their children are exhorted to repentance and faith in God's Word. In the first vision, God calls the people by promising to show mercy on Zion and Jerusalem. In the second, God defeats the anti-Christian rulers (horns) who have scattered God's people, so that they might be gathered. In the third, God has the Gospel message of Jesus' advent proclaimed throughout the world—"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst" (2:10). Having become God's people, they are enlightened. In the fourth, Satan is rebuked and the people are sanctified by the forgiveness of sins "in a single day" (3:9). In the fifth, the anointing oil of the Holy Spirit will equip and sustain God's people. It is "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," (4:6) that He keeps them strong in the Christian faith.

We pray: O almighty Lord, who directs all history to serve Your purposes, lead me to repent of my sins and trust in Jesus Christ that Your kingdom might come to me, also. Amen.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14: ZECHARIAH 6–10

During the restoration of the Temple the Prophet Zechariah spoke eight prophetic visions laying out the future of God's plan. Not only is the prophet giving the believers great comfort concerning the future, but he is also warning them against falling from grace:

“Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets preached, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Turn now from your evil ways and your evil deeds.” ’ But they did not hear nor heed Me,” says the LORD (Zechariah 1:4).

We continue with the sixth vision (ch.5), in which hypocrites and wickedness will be removed from the Church. We know that hypocrites will not share in the inheritance of God's people. With the seventh vision (6:1-8) the judgment begins. Like the horses of Revelation 6, divine judgment goes out over all the earth. On the Last Day the Lord will punish His Church's enemies and save His people. With the eighth vision (6:9-15) the Messianic King-Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, takes His reign. Zechariah calls Jesus “the Branch” (3:8, 6:12) who will rule in glorious majesty. This Savior will come (branch out) to build His church.

In Israel's rebuilding of the Lord's Temple we see the repentant children's support of the pastoral ministry, unlike their fathers. God is working to build His Kingdom so that we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives. The promise is given, “Even those from afar shall come and build the temple of the LORD. Then you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. And this shall come to pass if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God” (Zechariah 6:15).

We pray: Thy Kingdom come, O Lord Jesus. Amen.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23: MATTHEW 13–14

Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a tiny mustard seed. Though it appears insignificant, when planted the small seed grows into an enormous tree, one so enormous that birds of the air can build their homes in its branches. The kingdom of heaven is also likened to leaven. Yeast is even smaller than a mustard seed. It is a microscopic fungus. But when it is planted into dough it multiplies and fills the entire lump.

The kingdom of heaven works in a similar fashion. The Word of the Gospel is like a seed, planted in man's hearts through simple preaching. That implanted seed of the Word takes root and sprouts into faith. Faith receives all God's promises. Where there is faith there is Christ. Where there is Christ there is the forgiveness of sins. Where there is the forgiveness of sins there is peace of conscience. Where there is peace of conscience there is joy. Where there is joy there is the praise of God on one's lips and a confession of Christ before men. All this comes not from our works, our merits, or our personal holiness, but from the small seed of the Word which is planted in our hearts through the simple means of preaching, baptism, and Christ's Word of absolution.

The Devil will try to snatch that seed from our hearts. The cares of this life will do their best to retard the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven within our hearts. Satan tries to use tribulation to stop the spread of the yeast of the Word. Against all these things we pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.”

We pray: Lord God, grant us grace to receive Thy implanted Word with meekness so that it may grow in our hearts for our forgiveness and edification. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22: MATTHEW 11-12

“For by your words will you be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Jesus is not condemning justification by faith alone here. He says several verses before this one, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” If the heart is wicked and unbelieving, wicked and unbelieving words will spew from the mouth. If the heart has been renewed by faith in Christ and filled with God’s Word, then faithful and God-pleasing words will erupt from the mouth. In this case, words are the fruit and the heart is the tree. The heart vivified by the Holy Ghost will confess Christ before men, and therefore will be confessed by Christ on the Last Day. The heart still dead in trespass and sin will deny Christ, and will therefore be denied by Christ on the Last Day.

Jesus teaches us to weigh our words carefully because they reveal what lurks in our hearts. In this life our renewal is incomplete, so there will be times when we lose control of our tongue. In these moments do not let your heart fear, but use the same mouth that spoke foolishly to confess your sins to God. Then believe the Word of God that He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This faith makes you into a good tree and will cause you to bear good fruit. This faith justifies you so that you have nothing to fear from the final judgment, for by it your sins are covered.

We pray: Heavenly Father, forgive our erring tongues and misspoken words and make us always into that good tree by faith in Christ, that we may bear good fruits in this life to Thy glory. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15: ZECHARIAH 11-14

The rejection of the promised Messiah is clearly portrayed by Zechariah. The Messiah-Shepherd came to shepherd the people with two staffs, Favor and Unity (ch 11). Jesus secured His people’s forgiveness and brought the Father’s undeserved grace and favor. Through this Good Shepherd the Father sought to unite them in one holy Christian Church through the hearing of His Word. They fought against God’s shepherding and made His life bitter. Zechariah 11:8 says, “My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.” They thought so little of His salvation that they set the value of His holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death at a mere pittance (“thirty pieces of silver” 11:12). Just as Moses’ throwing down of the tablets of stone proclaimed the breaking of the Ten Commandments, so this Shepherd broke the staff of “Favor,” proclaiming their rejection of God’s Covenant, and the staff of “Unity,” proclaiming their separation from God’s people.

However, that same rejected Messiah will be treated differently by those who love God and keep His Word. Zechariah 12:10 says, “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” John 10:16-17 says, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore, My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.”

We pray: O Lord, open my ears to hear the Good Shepherd’s voice and follow Him. Amen.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16: MALACHI

The Calvinist teaching of double predestination seems to be making a comeback in popular American religion. Having endured fluffy praise songs and subjective small-group therapy for years, many are clamoring for some definite dogmatic teaching. Double predestination says that God, before time began, arbitrarily determined to create and send people to heaven while others he arbitrarily made and destined for hell. Calvinist teaching directly contradicts the Word of God which says, “God wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). It is true that God elected believers to eternal life before the creation of the world (Romans 9), but He never predestined people to hell. One of the passages which has been used in attempts to support double predestination is Malachi 1:2-3: “‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ Says the LORD. ‘Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated...’”

This passage does not say that God arbitrarily loved Jacob and hated Esau. God is reassuring His forgiven children—who had gone through a severe discipline in the Babylonian exile—of His love. Despite their great trials in the rebuilding of the city walls, God loves them and they should not lose hope. For those proud, prosperous--yet wicked--countries who boast in their worldly greatness God prophesies their destruction. “They may build, but I will demolish” (1:4). “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Psalm 127:1). As Malachi teaches, the Lord is building His kingdom on the promised Lord Jesus Christ who will come to His Temple (3:1). Trust in the Lord’s forgiveness as He launders away His people’s sins (3:2).

We pray: Give us faith in Your Son, O Lord, that we bring acceptable thank offerings in righteousness. Amen.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21: MATTHEW 9–10

There’s no reason to think the paralytic didn’t have faith in Christ. When St. Matthew writes, “When Jesus saw their faith,” we should not assume that he means “when Jesus saw the faith of the men who brought the paralytic to Him.” The Scriptures are clear that one person cannot believe for another. Nor should we assume that the paralytic was an unbeliever who told his friends, “Don’t take me to Jesus. He’s a charlatan and fraud!” The Scriptures are clear that only those who believe the good news about Jesus have their sins forgiven and are justified.

Jesus sees the faith of the paralytic and those who brought him, and that faith saved him, just as faith has cleansed the leper in Luke 17:19 and the woman with the flow of blood in Luke 8:48. He was brought to Christ, and Jesus said to him, “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.” Jesus heals his soul from the stain of sin, for that is the paralytic’s greatest need. Then, to demonstrate that He has authority to forgive sins, He does what no ordinary man can do. With a word He restores the man and heals his paralysis.

We cannot believe the Gospel for another person. Christ calls all men to repent and believe the Gospel for themselves, and not another. That faith also receives what Christ promises: the forgiveness of every sin. Christ tells you what He tells this man: “Be of good cheer.” Do not dwell on your sins. They are taken away. Do not despair because of them. Take heart. Christ removes them as far as the east is from the west.

We pray: Heavenly Father, grant me faith each day to believe the promise of the Gospel and be of good cheer. Amen.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20: MATTHEW 7-8

Do you ever look around during the Divine Service and wonder why more people aren't there? It's hard not to, especially when one considers the great gifts God gives to us poor sinners. He speaks to us in Holy Scripture. In Baptism He makes us His own children. He absolves us from all our sins through the pastor. He nourishes us with the body and blood of Christ. Yet our churches are emptier than we'd like them.

Jesus tells us why in today's reading: "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it." On the broad path you can have whatever god you want, even yourself. The broad path does not require repentance and faith in the Gospel, but teaches men to ignore their sins, or embrace and celebrate them. This path leads to destruction and, sadly, many walk that path to its destination.

On the other hand, "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." The narrow path is difficult for sinners because it teaches the only true God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as the only name by which men are saved. It is difficult because it requires men to repent of their sins and trust in the merits of Christ as their righteousness. There are few who find this path. Do not despair though. Christ has told us this is the way it is so that we do not despair. Instead rejoice that Christ preserves a remnant who walks the narrow path of repentance and faith by the power of His Holy Spirit.

We pray: Heavenly Father, keep us this day on the narrow path which leads to life through Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17: MATTHEW 1-2

St. Matthew's Gospel begins with a three-fold genealogical record. The first record starts with Abraham, who believed the promise of Jesus, the coming Savior. Genesis 15:6 says of Abraham, "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness." Later when some Jews rejected Jesus, but claimed to be sons of Abraham (Matthew 3:9), Jesus corrected them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39). They did not believe in God's Son, nor did they do the fruits which flow from faith, as Abraham did.

The second record starts with King David. Even the Pharisees agree that the Christ would be his descendent. Matthew 22:42 says, "Jesus asked them saying, 'What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?' They said to Him, 'The Son of David.'" Jesus is that promised Christ "who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3). Salvation by faith in Jesus was rejected by some Jews, even though "David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works" (Romans 4:6).

The third record starts with the Babylonian exile. With the coming of the birth of Jesus it was time for repentance and a return to the Promise. It was time to reject a false trust in works and leave behind the works of the sinful flesh. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2).

The Magi came seeking the promised King of the Jews, while King Herod sought to kill Him. And the chief priest and teachers of the law had answers, but no faith.

We pray: Immanuel, Lord Jesus Christ, lead us to repentance and firm trust in Your salvation for us. Amen.

The people were going out to confess their sins and be baptized by John the Baptist, whom St. Matthew introduces in chapter 3. Those who trusted in their works and claimed a righteousness based on their physical descent from Abraham refused to confess their sins and be baptized for salvation. John gave them only judgment and warned them of the coming wrath for those who reject the promised Christ.

When the sinless Jesus came to be baptized and be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12), John tried to stop Him. However, Jesus’ words, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15), convinced John to baptize Him. Jesus’ baptism was not to secure His own righteousness, but ours. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Jesus united Himself with us so that He might put our sins to death. We have been united with Christ in our baptism (Romans 6:1 ff), that we might be clothed in Jesus Christ, our Righteousness (Galatians 3:26-27).

“Thus, and much more even, you must honor Baptism and esteem it glorious on account of the Word, since He Himself has honored it both by words and deeds; moreover, confirmed it with miracles from heaven. For do you think it was a jest that, when Christ was baptized, the heavens were opened and the Holy Ghost descended visibly, and everything was divine glory and majesty?” (Large Catechism, Holy Baptism, 21-25). We honor our baptism when, trusting in Christ, our righteousness, we lead a life of repentance and true faith.

We pray: O Lord, grant us Your righteousness in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Twenty—sixth Sunday after Trinity

CHAPTER III, ARTICLE VI.

But they [Romanists] object, that love is preferred to faith and hope. For Paul says (1 Cor. 13:13): “The greatest of these is charity.” Now, it is in accordance with this, that to justify is the greatest and chief virtue. Although Paul, in this passage, properly speaks of love toward one’s neighbor, and indicates that love is the greatest, because it has most fruits. Faith and hope have to do only with God; but love has infinite offices externally towards men. Nevertheless we grant to the adversaries that love towards God and our neighbor is the greatest virtue, because the chief commandment is this: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God” (Matt. 22:37). But how will they infer thence that love justifies? The greatest virtue, they say, justifies. By no means. For just as even the greatest or first Law does not justify, so also the greatest virtue of the Law does not justify. But that virtue justifies which apprehends Christ, which communicates to us Christ’s merits, by which we receive grace and peace from God. But this virtue is faith. For as it has been often said, faith is not only knowledge, but much rather to wish to receive or apprehend those things, which are offered in the promise concerning Christ. Moreover this obedience towards God, viz. to wish to receive the offered promise, is no less a divine service, *λατρεία*, than is love. God wishes us to believe Him, and to receive from Him blessings, and this He declares to be true divine service.

—The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, ¶104–107