

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29: ISAIAH 49:1-13

5TH CHRISTMAS DAY

With each passing day our thoughts about Christmas Day 2018 fade in our memories. The excitement of Christmas recedes as the realities of life in this world continue to bear witness in our lives. What are we to make of all the ups and downs of life in this world?

Today's reading from Isaiah gives a glimpse into the heart of our Lord Jesus. Though not yet born of the Virgin Mary, our Lord looks forward to His work as the Servant of God. He is the One sent from the Father to redeem Israel. Yet, of His work our Lord laments, "I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain." Though God will come in the flesh to His people Israel, many will reject Him. Indeed, His labor will look "in vain."

But in His mercy God goes beyond. To simply redeem Israel is "too small a thing." God sends Christ for the whole world. He will be "a light to the Gentiles." Though many will despise Jesus and abhor Him, those whom God has chosen will delight in Him.

Our ups and downs are not unknown to our Lord. He took all our burdens upon Himself at the Cross. Thus, we can know true joy in the midst of whatever comes our way. "Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, And will have mercy on His afflicted." Merry Christmas!

We pray: Enlighten our minds, we beseech Thee, O God, by the Spirit which proceedeth from Thee, that as Thy Son hath promised, we may be led into all truth. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



DECEMBER 3—DECEMBER 29 2018

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

The Calendar

December 2	Advent 1
December 9	Advent 2
December 16	Advent 3
December 21(F)	St. Thomas, Apostle (Red)
December 23	Advent 4
December 24 (M)	Christmas Eve
December 25 (T)	Feast of the Holy Nativity
December 26 (W)	St. Stephen, Martyr (Red)
December 27 (R)	St. John, Apostle & Evangelist (White)
December 28 (F)	The Holy Innocents (Red)

Ongoing Support needed for the Diocese

Please help support the ELDoNA's in meeting its ongoing budgeted expenses. Checks may be sent to ELDoNA through its treasurer:

Pastor Michael Henson
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church
1000 North Park Ave.
Herrin, IL 62948

(Please make checks payable to ELDoNA. Gifts to the seminary should designate "St. Ignatius Ev. Lutheran Seminary" in the note line on the check.)

Justification Made Clear—The Reformation 500 Years Later

Pastor Carver's superb documentary on the doctrine of Justification is now available on YouTube (DVDs will also be sent to every pastor of the diocese). To watch the nine chapters of the documentary, simply search YouTube for "Justification Made Clear" and you should find the channel of the same name.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28: ISAIAH 46:3-13

4TH CHRISTMAS DAY

By the Fourth Day of Christmas much of the newness of Christmas and Christmas gifts has worn off. After all, those new "toys" are already four days old! Indeed, how fleeting are our affections, especially toward the Lord who has saved us. This is why today's reading from Isaiah is so comforting: "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, Who have been upheld by Me from birth, Who have been carried from the womb: Even to your old age, I am He, And even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; Even I will carry, and will deliver you."

In spite of our lack of faithfulness, God remains faithful. He is the One who upholds you! He is the One who carries you! He is the One who "will deliver you!" Just when the newness of Christmas seems to be wearing off, God sends His Spirit to renew in you "a right spirit." When you begin to fall, He upholds you. When you can't go on, He reminds you that He is carrying you. When you begin to doubt, He delivers you.

Your salvation is God's work, His never-ending gift to you. Merry Christmas!

We pray: Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that the brightness of Thy glory may shine forth upon us and that the light of Thy light, by illumination of the Holy Spirit, may establish the hearts of all that have been born anew by Thy grace; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

On this Third Day of Christmas we hear again the Good News of the righteousness of God. Christ our King reigns in righteousness as He guards and protects His Church, His faithful people. Though we face an onslaught from the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh, our King continues to defend us and keep us in the true faith.

Sadly, what ought to be one of the most joyous times of the year is often met with sadness and depression. We may not feel all that merry as we may find ourselves lonely or having a heightened sense of grief over a loved one who has died. Maybe it is a matter of being estranged from a family member, or maybe having a sense of needing to please everybody, while at the same time you are miserable. Our Righteous King knows your woes. He uses such times of despair to bring you to your knees, asking for mercy and relief. Odd as it may seem, the need is another gift from God as it leads you back to your one and only Hope.

While there is nothing wrong with all the trappings of Christmas, the Christmas tree, the decorations, the presents, the family gatherings, etc., when any or all of those things replace the One whom Christmas is all about, it is a problem. Christmas is, and always is, about Christ. All our hope and joy rests on Him and Him alone. After all, that is why we say, “Merry Christmas!”

We pray: 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 Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. 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.

The sinful flesh of all of mankind cannot stand to hear God's Law. This hatred stems all the way back to the fall of mankind at the beginning of time. As Adam does not carry out his headship role of properly speaking the Word of God and protecting his wife, he, thus, allows his bride, Eve, to be attacked—and she then speaks where she shouldn't have. Satan entices Eve to doubt God's Word, closing her eyes and heart, so much so that she doesn't even realize that she is sinning.

What an important text that reveals how man is now (according to sinful flesh) naturally inclined to think that he can simply seek relief from sin by fleeing from God. Even when confronted with God's search for them ("Where are you?") the blame still gets thrown back at God. God asks His Law-filled question so that Adam will, by his own testimony, prove himself guilty. He does the same to all before whom His 10 Commandments are held.

As Luther wrote on this text "... this manifold corruption of our nature should not be minimized; it should rather be emphasized!" (Luther's Works, vol. 1, pg. 142). God's Word must open men's eyes to His truth through His Law, and further open their eyes to His promised way of escape through His Gospel. The Gospel is what He promises at Genesis 3:15.

Just as Christ came entering Jerusalem lowly, so He still comes to us now through His Word and Sacraments, pursuing us who continue to try to hide. Lord grant that we would repent and believe in His fully atoning merits for us. Christ is God's mercy seat—the only true way of escape from sin.

Pray Psalm 51

"On the Second Day of Christmas my true love gave to me..." Over the years there have been many versions of this Christmas song with various gifts being given. The most important thing to note about this song is its reminder that the season of Christmas began on Christmas Eve and lasts for twelve days. As Christians we have the great joy of celebrating the birth of our Lord over the course of twelve days.

But there is more to Jesus than just His birth. As we know, He is the One who lived a perfect life, died our death, and was raised again for our justification. But the promise we celebrate at Christmas has one last chapter. On this Second Day of Christmas we listen to the words of the prophet Malachi: "For behold, the day is coming..." The day is coming when our Lord will return. It will be a day of Law and a day of Gospel. Those who reject the Lord will be cast into the outer darkness. There they will suffer in never-ending punishment for their sins which they could have easily escaped had they trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

The thought of never-ending punishment can bring fear to the hearts of Christians, too. The Holy Spirit leads us to know that we "justly deserved Thy temporal and eternal punishment." Yet, as Malachi proclaims, "But to you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." Even when we begin to doubt, and fear comes over us, the Holy Spirit brings us the eternal gift of the Gospel of forgiveness for our sins. Merry Christmas!

We pray: Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Thy pleasure. Amen.

Today's reading is from the last of the prophetic books of the Bible. Malachi, whose name means "messenger of God," speaks of God sending His messenger. Sending messengers was something God had done over the centuries. Year after year, God would send His messengers to speak His Word to the people. The primary message was to call people to repent of their sins and trust in His mercy that He Himself would win for them by His death on the Cross.

Year after year the message would come to His people, creating faith to believe in God's mercy while sadly being rejected by many who wished to trust in the gods of their own making. Finally, in the fullness of time, the message would take on human flesh and dwell with His people. "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given..." (Isaiah 9:6). The promise of a Savior was fulfilled that first Christmas. He was both Message and Messenger, for everything one needs to know about salvation was "wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

As we take time to celebrate the birth of our Lord, we need also thank Him for continuing to send messengers to call us to repentance and to trust in His forgiveness. Your pastor is a messenger sent from God to "bring you good tidings of great joy." Merry Christmas!

We pray: 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 Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Genesis 3:15 (from yesterday) contains God's promised Messiah (Christ) to Adam and Eve (and to all of fallen mankind thereafter). So, likewise, today's reading bears a promise from God as well. He promised to never again cut off all flesh and destroy the earth through a flood. And He set His rainbow in the clouds as a covenant.

Sins are clearly excelling today—sometimes appearing worse than the times of Noah. Although various sins may appear to be growing acceptable (if not virtuous) in today's culture, we, the believing and baptized children of God, must also remember that we have our own sins that we do in thought, word, or deed that add to the depravity of the world. Joyous we are, indeed, to have God's promise that He will not bring a flood to destroy the earth again.

As it was with Adam and Eve, along with Noah and his family, so it is with all of mankind—God's promise is always there, His mercy endures forever! Through His Word and His Word empowered Sacraments forgiveness, life, and salvation are promised, because through those means of grace Christ's fully atoning merits are promised. Salvation does not come by avoiding certain sins that unbelievers attempt to validate, or that Christians attempt to rank (as if such an avoidance would make anyone better).

It is God's Word of Law and Gospel that create repentance and belief in what Christ won for us. Through Holy Baptism, Christ's blood—attached to the water (via His Word)—turns all baptismal waters into a blessed flood and lavish washing away of sin. May God's use of a rainbow ever remind us of His bringing us to truly live in the ark of His Church.

Pray Psalm 32

“The Lord will provide” was Abraham’s ‘Old Testament’ language, for he trusted in the true sacrifice that was promised to come through the Messiah (or Christ). Our ‘New Testament’ language says “The Lord has provided.” In both languages the focal point is the provision of the Lord offering the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. It is Christ’s atonement that is revealed as the object of faith!

Unfortunately, there is a false teaching that takes the focus off of Christ’s fully atoning sacrifice as the object of faith. It is a man-made philosophical idea of “objective justification”, which teaches the idea that God declared all of sinful humanity forgiven and justified (considered fully righteous) apart from faith; this would include unbelievers and those in hell.

It is taught that such an idea must exist—apart from faith—in order for forgiveness to be given at all. Such an idea is not what was passed down from Adam and Eve to Abraham. Holy Scripture teaches forgiveness and justification as only being declared through faith alone in Christ’s fully atoning merits. Thus, Christ (as the proper object) is the author and perfecter of faith—the Mercy Seat to which sinners flee for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Abraham was being tested in his belief in God providing the Messiah. Was there going to be a propitiation (substitute), One to make full satisfaction for sins? The answer is a Messianic, Christ-crucified-centered, “yes!” The Lord has provided Christ Jesus and His fully atoning merits. The Lord continues to provide as Christ and His merits come through His Word and Sacraments, and the Lord will provide conclusively, as Christ will come in His full glory at the end of time!

Pray Psalm 100

On this day the season of Advent comes to an end and flows seamlessly into the season of Christmas. On Christmas Eve we begin the celebration of God’s promise come true as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. During Advent we spent our days joining with the Christians of the Old Testament in anxious anticipation of the Savior’s birth. At the same time, we remember the promise of Immanuel, “God with us,” is as true as the Word made flesh who dwells with us now through His blessed Word and Sacraments.

The Babe in the manger is the resounding fulfillment of Isaiah’s words, “Behold your God!” This Babe in the manger would grow up as the One who lives a perfect life and dies a perfect death on the cross in payment for the sins of the world. This same God continues to come to His people. When God’s Word is read we can truly say, “Behold your God!” When the waters of Holy Baptism flow in the name of the Triune God we say, “Behold your God!” When absolution is pronounced we say, “Behold your God!” When we approach the altar to receive the Body and Blood of Christ the Church must say, “Behold your God!” Jesus, true God and true Man, is there in the flesh.

As Advent draws to a close and flows into Christmas you are reminded that your time on earth is fleeting and will soon come to an end. By God’s grace, your hope remains in Christ and His final Advent. Then you will be greeted by Christ and you will “Behold your God!”

We pray: Heavenly Father, keep us steadfast in the true faith and grant us patience as we await the coming of our Lord. Amen.

God's people are supposed to be a living testimony to His righteousness and grace. From the beginning He has taught us His ways and shown us His merciful works. He even gives us the power of His own Holy Spirit to have faith and do His commands. But people still act faithlessly and forget His blessings. Rather than be a testimony of His goodness, they receive His warnings and serve as examples for His wrath against wickedness.

In our time many people claiming to be Christians emphasize peace, love, and forgiveness, but they disregard God's teachings on righteousness and true faithfulness to His Word. Such people seek their own will and try to justify themselves, leaning on their own selfish understanding.

His Word does not just teach a cheap grace that ignores sin. He calls us to repent and be washed from the uncleanness of disobedience. He promises peace and mercy, but He gives it through the truth of His whole counsel. Rebellion against His commands must be condemned and sinners must be called to repent, otherwise His name is blasphemed by careless, false teaching. Instead, we are to act and confess faithfully so sinners may know that they have been redeemed from death without any money or power of their own, but by the holy blood of Jesus Christ crucified.

We pray: 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.

Jacob speaks honestly while giving his blessing to his sons. Then the waiting begins for them—and with the waiting comes the distractions of the world, the sinful flesh, and the devil! So it goes with the children of God. The struggles with the world, sinful flesh, and the devil always mount up where there is faith in God's promised Gospel.

Doesn't this reveal the very reason Christ gives His prayer to those who believe and are baptized! He knows what they need to pray against while they are on this side of glory. Each petition reveals the realistic struggle of believers according to sinful flesh: through the First Petition (we profane God's name), the Second Petition (we have unbelief), the Third Petition (we prefer our will), the Fourth Petition (we don't recognize His care through vocations and aren't thankful), the Fifth Petition (we are unforgiving sinners), the Sixth Petition (we comfortably give in to temptation), and the Seventh Petition (we prefer to stay on earth).

Although the Lord's Prayer confirms God's honest truth about all of sinful flesh, thankfully, within each petition believers are also brought to cry out for God's sustenance. His Spirit has us pray: through the First Petition (that God's Word be taught purely), the Second Petition (His Holy Spirit be sent for belief), the Third Petition (that a breaking, hindering, and being kept in His Word take place), the Fourth Petition (a recognition of all vocations, along with thankfulness), the Fifth Petition (that His grace bring us to forgive), the Sixth Petition (to be guarded against turning away from God), and the Seventh Petition (that we remember our deliverance through Christ, and look forward to His second coming). Within this temporary pilgrimage God ever equips us with His very words. What a blessing indeed!

Pray the Lord's Prayer

King Balak kept making great promises to Balaam in hopes that the curses would come about. Prophecies, however, must always remain true to the Word of the Lord, and Balaam confessed to this in the verses that precede today's text: "So Balaam said to Balak, 'Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, "If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the Lord, to do good or bad of my own will. What the Lord says, that I must speak"?' " (Numbers 24:12-13).

This is the same thing that happens as pastors stay true to the Word of God in their preaching, teaching, and practice (or, at least, it's supposed to happen). Balaam prophesies of the time when one would come who would "destroy all the sons of tumult." This is not only faithful prophecy, it is faithful preaching and teaching, for it is Christ crucified who conquered not just the sons of tumult, but His fully atoning merits conquered sin, death, hell, and the devil!

As Balaam prophesied about the conquering Christ to come, through those brought to properly carry out Word and Sacrament Ministry Christ continues His prophetic role. Man, sadly, is weak and vulnerable, and forgoes God's truth for the sake of self-comfort or self-security. Balaam reveals this (as he eventually turns from God to help Balak capture God's people), and many pastors these days simply forgo faithful preaching and teaching to give the people what their itching ears want to hear. But how joyous to know that God keeps a remnant for Himself to carry on His truth to future generations!

Pray Psalm 92

The old stories continue to point forward to the new story. The events of the Old Testament continue to be valuable to us in the New Testament Church because God is unchanging and His mercies endure. His holy Words and works in the past help us continue to learn and grow in mature understanding of the profound blessings that He has given us in Jesus Christ.

Some imagine that eternal life will be only a spiritual existence. But Eden and the garden of the Lord were physical places. God made heaven and earth, and the earth was very good! Our Lord continues to teach us that He uses physical realities to bless us, and He reminds us that the life of the world to come will begin with a bodily resurrection.

When the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ He showed us that salvation will be like the goodness that He originally bestowed on creation. Through Christ we are forgiven and made good, by His power alone! And the eternal life to which we look forward is foreshadowed in His own glorious resurrection. He comforts us with images that teach us this, and He reminds us that our future life will be only joy and gladness, when sin and suffering are no more.

We pray: 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.

Notice that this passage in Isaiah is a song. The Word of God through His prophet teaches the people to remember several ideas that are still important parts of our faithful confession in the New Testament Church!

We are taught to trust in God above all things. We are reminded that He will bring consequences and punishment upon those who reject His mercy. We confess that God works in us and we are faithful only by His power, not ours. We look forward to the healing and rest He has promised. And we believe that His “dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise.”

The doctrine of the Church in our time is not new. The things that we believe, teach, and confess are the continuation of the Lord’s teachings and commands that He established throughout His Word from the beginning! Many passages in Isaiah sound like they could be in the New Testament because they were vivid images that would find their completion in Jesus Christ!

Our new song of the Church is the faithful continuation of the song of the faithful prophets. That is why our tradition of liturgy and hymnody is so valuable. In these we continue to sing and remember those truths that strengthen and comfort us in God’s Word, and we rejoice that we can declare to new generations His glory in our Savior Jesus Christ with His faithful people who were before us!

We pray: 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.

This is one of those texts of Holy Scripture that clearly lays it all on the line. Christ Jesus became ‘the’ Prophet who spoke God’s Word, and for those who refuse to hear Him their very handling of that Word of God will be required of them; it will hold them accountable.

God speaks His Word of Promise to His people throughout time. He promised Adam and Eve that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. God blessed Noah and his sons, and promised to never send another flood. God blessed Abraham and promised, “in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” Through Jacob, God blessed Judah: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah.” The Word of God given through Balaam reiterated the blessing bestowed on Judah.

As we know from Scripture, God kept that promise by sending His Son. Jesus came into this world, took on our flesh, and fully atoned for the sins of the world—fully meriting forgiveness and salvation. Now, through faith in the promise of forgiveness of sins for Jesus’ sake, believers are rescued from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and are declared justified (righteous in God’s sight).

Through the mouth of the greatest Prophet, Jesus Christ, He spoke a promise for everyday: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus keeps that promise through His Word and Sacraments. Through His Means of Grace Jesus comes to us with the promise of His making full atonement, assuring forgiveness of sins and life eternal to all who believe. What blessed Advent remembrance to begin not just this Church Year, but each and every Church Year!

Pray Psalm 111

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

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19: ISAIAH 25:6-10 3RD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

“He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.”

It is no accident that this verse from Isaiah sounds like images of the Resurrection from Revelation. God’s promises and prophecies in Isaiah serve as a foreshadowing of the glory that He will give to all the people and nations that make up His kingdom at the end of the age.

No kingdom or nation can enjoy unending glory in this world. Sin and pride will attack it, from inside or from outside, and it will change. But the kingdom of God is different. It will stand against Satan’s worst attacks. And any glory or blessings that the Lord gives to the people of His kingdom now are only a glimpse of the greater glory of the life of the world to come. At that time all things will be made glorious in Jesus Christ and all Satan’s works and ways will be gone.

Now we face tears and rightfully receive rebuke as the consequences of our sin and pride. But even now these things are used by God’s Holy Spirit to bring us to faithful repentance. We are taught that suffering will come and we must repent of our sinfulness, but we also have the holy assurance that our sins are forgiven on account of Christ Jesus. In Him we look forward to the unending joy of the life to come!

We pray: 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.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18: ISAIAH 24:21-25:5 3RD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Being a Christian is not about keeping up appearances or supporting the right leaders. It is about observing all that Jesus Christ teaches us in the Word and trusting in His atonement for our life and forgiveness.

The world wants us to look at politicians, celebrities, and other “powerful” people. The devil wants us to learn to live from these people and place our hopes and trust in them. But our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psalm 124:8).

Our Lord comes to us in simple, everyday ways as well as in powerful ways. He shows us that the spectacles of men are passing, but His mercies endure forever. So rather than be distracted by the foolish power of the world, let us hold fast to the teaching of God’s Word and exalt His name. It is a matter of focus. We don’t have to ignore what is going on in society, but we don’t have to let its noise dominate our time.

Christ Jesus continues to work in this world to show people His light, life, and salvation. And He continues to work through us to make it known! Our time and powers should be focused on His truth, His teaching, and His forgiveness, because these are the things that truly help and bless others in the world around us!

We pray: 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.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 10: 1 CHRON. 17:1-27 2ND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

The Lord God promises to King David that his son would sit on the throne forever. Clearly this is not referring to Solomon, who only reigned for forty years. This cannot refer to any of the other kings of Judah and Israel, whose total amount of reign only lasted about five hundred years, when their reigns were ended by being led into exile in foreign countries.

This prophecy is clearly a reference to the Son of David, whose kingdom and throne is established forever in Heaven—the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Beloved Son of the Father. Through Him we are shown mercy. He overcame our enemies of sin, death, and the devil so that their wickedness can no longer oppress us. They are defeated, and through faith in this promise we share in His victory, being claimed by our heavenly Father as children in His eternal Kingdom through our Holy Baptism.

This promise given to King David is the same promise given to Adam and Eve, and to Noah, and to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was the same promise given to the Israelites through Moses, and now it is given to King David. Israel was the Lord’s chosen people, and now in the tribe of Judah, of the lineage of King David, the Savior of the world was to be born. This promise is for us as well, as we are made part of this kingdom whenever through the preaching of the Word we believe the promises proclaimed.

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

King Solomon is given the same promise that his father, King David, received: that the throne would not lack a man from his household to sit on the throne forever. King Solomon is given a warning, however, that if he does not remain faithful to the Lord God—if he chases after false gods—they would be cast from his sight. King Solomon did not remain faithful, but was drawn away into the false worship of his many wives. Many of his descendants followed in his example, worshiping false gods.

So it is with all of us. We are unable to keep the commands of the Lord God. On account of our sin we deserve His eternal wrath and displeasure; we deserve to be cast from His sight. For this reason our Lord Jesus Christ came down from Heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man. The Lord God establishes the Kingdom through His Only-Begotten Son, by having Him take on our flesh, live as we do, and endure our trials and temptations. He did all this so that through His work and merits the Law might be fulfilled and our punishment paid for on the tree of the holy cross.

Through faith in His works and merits we now share in that eternal Kingdom. We are made co-heirs with Him who sits on the eternal throne reigning forever. We therefore also share in the blessings He won for us—forgiveness, life, and salvation—for all eternity.

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

These holy words from Isaiah give us a picture of the Church. People have mistaken the purpose of the Church to be about particular nations or cultures, about social activities, about self-help, or about being entertained. None of these accurately sum up the Church.

This description of the Lord's Church given by Isaiah is confirmed by Jesus Christ. All nations would be called to behold the Son of God lifted up on the cross. In Him they would be made disciples, taught to observe all His commands, and baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins.

The Church is about teaching. We hear the Law of God proclaimed and we are rebuked and called to repentance. By God's grace and Holy Spirit we hear His Word and have faith to trust in Jesus Christ alone for our life and salvation. And in that Gospel we are made able to walk according to His teaching. All the other matters of culture, activities, and aesthetics should faithfully serve and proclaim the purpose of Law and Gospel teaching, not replace it as a false focus.

As the Church is one holy house in Christ Jesus, we also look forward to the life of the world to come where there will be true peace and unity. Conflicts, suffering, and sin will be no more, and we will be one people in the blessed household of our Lord!

We pray: 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.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15: JEREMIAH 33:14-26 2ND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

This is the third day in a row that we have heard the Prophet Jeremiah say, “Behold, the days are coming.” What “days” are coming? They are the days of our Lord Jesus Christ, the days that were promised to King David that he would never lack a man to sit on his throne. These days were certainly fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and was made man. He became incarnate to redeem mankind from sin.

But this prophecy is also for us, for we enjoy the fruits of His incarnation. He established His Kingdom on Earth through His Church. In this Church He draws all nations to Himself through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. In this Church He daily and richly forgives the sins of all those who believe on Him.

These days are upon us, but the day is coming when the Son of God will sit upon His throne and judge the quick and the dead. May we be made ready to receive that day with thanksgiving, for we will be taken from this vale of tears to our eternal home in Heaven, and there we will dwell with all the saints who have gone before us, with all the company of Heaven. Especially will we be with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who redeemed us from sin, death, and the devil, and brought us into His Kingdom.

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

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12: ISAIAH 11:1-10 2ND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

This week’s texts have so far been centered on King David’s promised descendant who would rule forever. This is expressed in the prophecy of Isaiah. A Ruler will come from Jesse. This King will delight in the fear of the Lord, and judge with righteousness and equity for the poor and meek. He will slay the wicked and lead His people into a peace that has never been known, where the wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard with the goat, and the young lion with the calf.

These things will be because the Ruler will fill all the earth with the knowledge of the Lord. The Word of God will be preached in its truth and purity to all nations, and they will believe on Him and cling to His promise to guard and protect them from evil, and trust that He will provide for all that they need.

The Lord Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, of the lineage of King David, to fulfill this prophecy of Isaiah. The Lord established His Kingdom by suffering your punishment on the cross. On account of this sacrifice the heavenly Father made Him ruler over all things in Heaven and on Earth. From this Rod all the nations of the world have blossomed with the holy Church. He reigns over this Church, of which we are a part, for all eternity. From Him we receive all that He has promised.

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

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13: JEREMIAH 23:2-8 2ND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

The Prophet Jeremiah prophesies that a King would come who would establish a new Kingdom. In this Kingdom all those who had been scattered on account of their sin would be drawn back into this Kingdom, and would be claimed as subjects to the King. This King would not be like the false shepherds who were supposed to feed the Lord God's people, but instead did what was evil in their hearts. It was because they did not remain faithful to the Word of God that the people were scattered and starved, and devoured by the wolves.

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS is the name of the new King. He feeds His people by preaching into their ears the Word of God in its truth and purity. He brings them to clean waters through the right administration of the Sacraments. He sends them faithful shepherds who also give the sheep the food and water they need, but also who guard and protect the sheep from the assaults of the wolf. On account of this King and what He does for His people, those who trust in Him have nothing to fear.

We have nothing to fear. Our Lord Jesus Christ has established a Kingdom for us so that we might be free from the bondage of our sin, that we might live as citizens of this heavenly eternal Kingdom, being cared for by Him with all good things.

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

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14: JEREMIAH 30:1-22 2ND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

On account of our sin we have been led into a captivity that leads to death. We are in bondage to enemies who seek to take our life. We are led into temptation daily and often. Daily and often we fail in resisting that temptation. We are the cause of our own destruction. We have led ourselves into captivity.

Our dear Lord Jesus Christ, however, cannot stand to see our daily affliction. Therefore, He came to the place where we were being held in bondage and freed us from our jailer. He took upon Himself our punishment, paid our ransom, and suffered what we deserved to suffer. Our sorrow was incurable by anything that we did. If not for our Lord Jesus, we would still be stuck in captivity, doomed to eternal death.

Conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, our dear Lord Jesus entered into our flesh to redeem us and bring us back into His Kingdom. He defeated our captors and destroyed our adversaries. He healed our wounds and restored us to health. He brings us into the Promised Land, where we will enjoy living with Him and all the saints for all eternity. For this great gift of our Lord we give thanks. We sing and make merry with psalms and hymns. We are His people and He is our God.

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