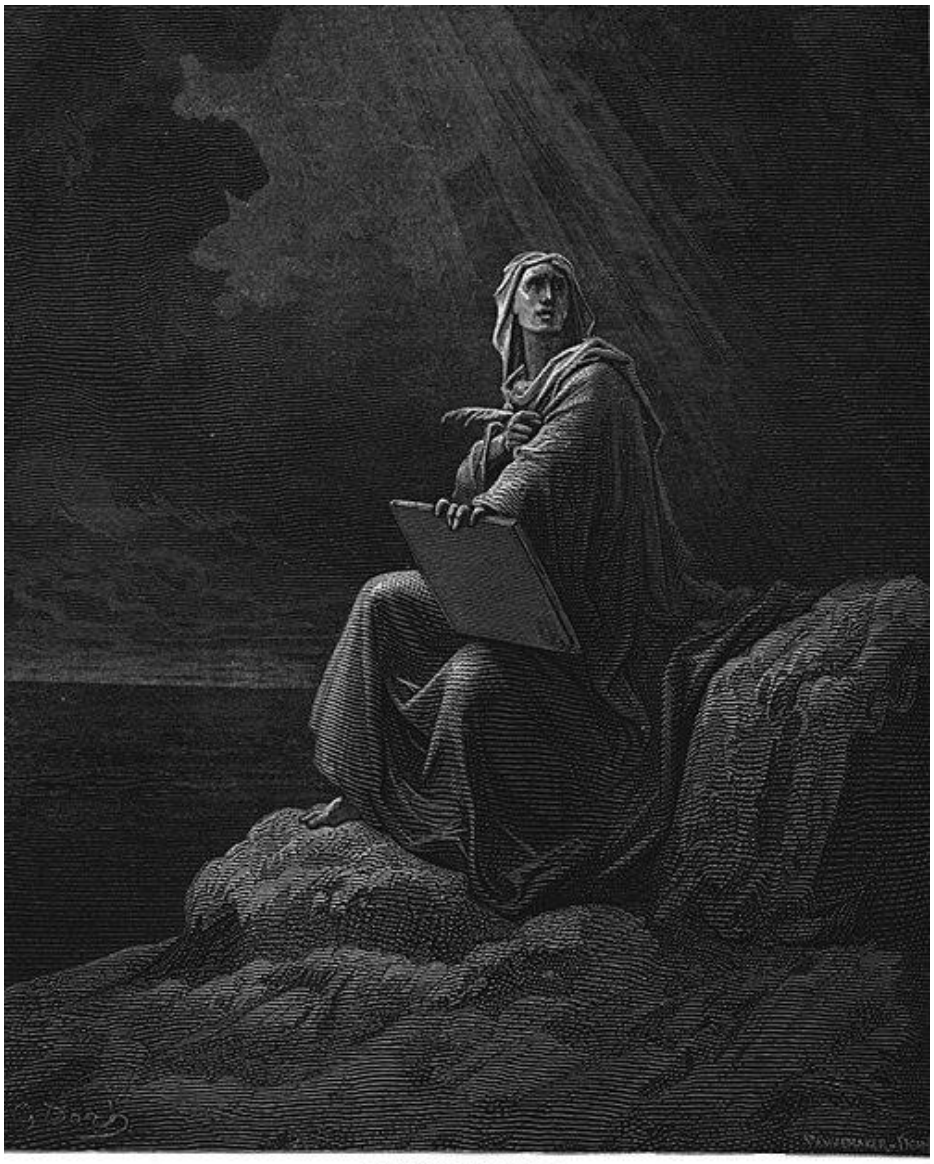
Advent Devotions

2026



ST. JOHN AT PATMOS

I John, who also am your brother . . . was in the isle that is called Patmos . . .
(Revelation 1: 9)

("St. John at Patmos" by Gustave Doré, public domain)

Written by the Pastors of the St. Cloud Circuit (LCMS)

November 29 by Rev Dr Timothy Rehwaldt

1 John 1:1-4

Today we have begun the Advent season. Advent developed as a season of preparation for Christ's coming, beginning in the 4th century. By 567 AD, the Council of Tours encouraged fasting before Christmas, and by the 6th century Advent was established in much of the Western Church, eventually becoming the four-week season observed today.

The point is that Advent is not a biblical mandate, nor a theological imperative for the Church. For many years I served congregations where Advent was observed religiously. Then I took a call where the congregation did not observe the tradition of Advent mid-week services. Yes, we held to the practice of the Advent wreath and the lighting of candles on Sundays to count "up" to the Nativity of the Lord.

The words of the reading for today guide us to a better purpose for Advent: That *which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life, the Life was made manifest, and we have seen it…*

This is what Advent can be for each believer, a time when we contemplate what has been made known to us, that we have seen with believers' eyes opened by the Word of Life, Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit.

John writes the reason for Advent, *so that our joy may be complete.* Advent is all about Jesus, who is the Word of Life made known to you and to me!

Lord of Life, we praise You in this season for being our Advent King and Savior from sin and every evil, so that our joy may be complete. In Jesus' name, Amen.

November 30 by Rev Dr James Gimbel

1 John 1:5-10

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 Jn 1:9a).

Advent is traditionally a season of repentance and preparation. Historically, churches were adorned in purple, reminding believers that the coming of Christ calls us not only to celebration but also to self-examination. That emphasis can seem out of step with a culture immersed in Christmas parties, concerts, decorations, early gifting, and holiday cheer. Yet the Church wisely remembers that there can be no true joy in the Savior without first recognizing our need for salvation.

Martin Luther captured this well in the first of his Ninety-Five Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." Repentance is not merely a seasonal exercise. It is the daily rhythm of the Christian life. We confess our sins and receive absolution. We pray, "Forgive us our trespasses." We come humbly to the Lord's Table, receiving Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

In today's text, John warns against two lies. First, we deceive others when we claim to walk in the light while living in darkness. Second, we call God a liar when we deny our sinfulness. Scripture plainly teaches that we are sinners by nature and by action. We carry the guilt of original sin and daily commit actual sins in thought, word, and deed.

Advent does not leave us in despair. The same Lord who exposes our sin also provides the remedy. Christ came into the world in mercy, to bear our guilt, suffer our punishment, and reconcile us to the Father.

Heavenly Father, thank You for revealing our sin and calling us to repentance. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive and save us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

December 1 by Rev Joel Kosberg

1 John 2:1-6

“But if anybody obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him” (1 Jn 2:5).

What does it mean to know Jesus? Two things. First, it means that we know that He is the place to turn in the midst of our sin. He is the Righteous One, the atoning sacrifice, and our defender.

When we fall into sin again and again, our natural inclination is to hide from God. We skip our Bible reading, or feel hesitant in prayer, or look around the room at church with an impulse to get away because we think we don’t measure up.

But knowing Jesus means that we know how He responds to sinners — how He responds to us. Jesus speaks a word of forgiveness over us. So, we come to Him even while we are still sinners.

Second, to know Jesus means that we know His word is living and active in our lives. His word guides us. His word corrects us. His word comforts us.

And over many years of obedience to His word, Jesus slowly shapes us into His own image. To know Jesus means to let the effect of His word take root in our lives and to walk as Jesus did.

Father, You have given us Your Son as an atoning sacrifice. Help us to know Him well, trusting in His forgiveness and walking in His word. Amen.

December 2 by Rev Zach Hoffman

1 John 2:7-11

“Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling” (1 Jn 2:10).

It’s a season of stumbling and remembered stumbles. These early Advent Days can be filled with regrettable moments or memories of actions that are regrettable.

Maybe you will be throwing a Christmas party, or thinking about who you might invite over for Christmas Day. There might be some people you just cannot invite. They have hurt you, or you cannot face them because of the hurt you have caused.

The giving and receiving of presents open up the potential to reveal a certain thoughtlessness about our giving or receiving. A card that is intended to say something nice turns out to be read as a passive-aggressive statement.

During this season of Advent, we ought to feel encouraged to make right whatever we can to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord.

This is even more true when it comes to worship. Where will you go for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day for church? Will you avoid going to a certain church because you have offended some there or they have offended you? A lack of love and a lack of forgiveness can present stumbling blocks for your faith and for others. However, the two best gifts we can give are the gifts that we have already received from Jesus in abundance — love and forgiveness.

Heavenly Father, teach us to love our brothers and sisters so that we do not cause them to stumble. Amen.

December 3 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 John 2:12-14

"I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake" (1 Jn 2:12).

Here's a poem full of threes. Three groups are addressed — children, fathers, and young men. Three spiritual benefits are given — forgiveness, knowledge, and victory. Three reasons are given at the end for why John writes to young men — you are strong, the Word abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

When John uses the terms children, fathers, and young men, he doesn't only have literal age in mind. It's true that young men are strong and need to have that strength directed toward godliness. It's also true that we who believe, no matter our age, have become *children* of God (Jn 1:12-13), and the chief benefit of that is forgiveness (1 Jn 2:12).

Christians vary in age and in spiritual maturity. Children need spiritual fathers (and mothers, like Deborah) who know God and can pass that knowledge on to them. Notice in verse 13 that the children now know the Father! And the Greek word for children has changed — it was *teknia*, which emphasizes the child's likeness with their parents. In verse 13, it's *paidia*, which emphasizes a child under training.

Older Christians need younger Christians, too! Rather than lamenting the younger generations, admire their tenacity and ambition to change the world. They need godly wisdom from the older generations if they are to overcome the evil one.

Father, thank You for forgiving our sins for Jesus' sake, for revealing Yourself to us through the Son, and for giving us strength to live and overcome the devil. Abide with us always. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 4 by Rev Bruce Timm

1 John 2:15-17

"…the world is passing away" (1 Jn 2:17a).

It happens every year and not just when you are a little child. You set your heart on something. Maybe it is a new "toy." Maybe it is a new experience. It doesn't even have to be during the month of December. It might be a "Christmas" of your own making. You finally acquire what you desire and then what always happens? It disappoints. It doesn't deliver. The pursuit was more fun than the catch. God has just taught you what Saint John is preaching: "the world is passing away."

Saint John is teaching us first commandment faith and obedience. We should fear, **love**, and trust in God above all things. There's nothing wrong with loving Legos or PlayStation or Pokémon. There's nothing wrong with loving a new vehicle or a remodeled kitchen or a new gadget. What is wrong is to **love** those things instead of loving God — to measure your life by what you possess or experience instead of Who possesses you.

The desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life are not from the Father but are from the world. The world pursues the desires of the sinful flesh and coveting eyes and becomes proud when it acquires its desires. But all this is passing away. God is not. His Word endures forever. His Son rules over sin, death, and hell for all eternity. So John calls you to love the Father and to do His will — which is to look to the Son, believe in Him, and have eternal life. That is why He warns you against what is passing away and calls you to that which is eternal — Jesus.

Father, by Your Spirit, turn our hearts away from the desires of the world and help us to fix our eyes on Jesus, that doing Your will and believing in Him we might abide with You forever. Amen.

December 5 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 John 2:18-25

"This is the antichrist" (1 Jn 2:22).

John tells us that many antichrists have come (1 Jn 2:18). What's an antichrist?

Anti can mean "against." From the moment He was born, people in authority opposed Christ. Herod the Great wanted to kill the babe born in Bethlehem. Herod is an antichrist.

Anti can also mean "in the place of." So an antichrist is someone who pretends to have the authority that the true Christ has. John tells us that antichrists **"went out from us, but they were not of us."** Many people have worn the name Christian while denying fundamental Biblical doctrines like the virgin birth and the divinity of Christ and the resurrection. Their teachings take the place of what Christ really taught. It's a helpful exercise to think of everyone who tries to take the place of Christ in our lives.

Antichrists teach lies which lead to eternal death. Their key lies all revolve around Christ. They deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn 2:22). They deny that Jesus is the Son of God (1 Jn 2:22-23).

Christ is the Truth who gives us life, and He gives it to us abundantly! **"This is the promise that he made to us — eternal life" (1 Jn 2:25).**

Father, You sent Your Son as Light and Truth to our world. Send us Your Spirit so that we may have our eyes and minds opened to the Light and Truth which leads to eternal life. Amen.

December 6 by Rev Dr Timothy Rehwaldt

1 John 2:26-27

“I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in Him” (1 Jn 2:26-27).

False teachers often sound convincing because they wrap error in spiritual language. John wrote to believers facing this challenge, reminding them that their confidence rests not in persuasive voices but in Jesus' presence within them.

John warns that some were trying to deceive the church and pull believers away from the truth about Jesus. Instead of encouraging fear, John points to a greater source of security: the anointing they had from God, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was not a visitor but one who remained in them, guiding them into truth and helping them recognize deception.

John's words do not eliminate the need for biblical teaching. Rather, they remind us that no human teacher holds ultimate authority over our faith. Every message, sermon, book, or opinion must be tested against God's truth. The Holy Spirit helps believers discern what is genuine and what is false.

This passage calls us to *“abide in Him.”* The goal is to remain connected to Christ. As we spend time in Scripture, prayer, and obedience, the Spirit continues His work of teaching and shaping us. When many voices compete for our attention, we can rest in His promise: Christ defends us from evil and His Spirit leads us into the Truth of God.

Lord, help me to recognize Your truth, reject deception, and faithfully abide in You each day. Amen.

December 7 by Rev Dr James Gimbel

1 John 2:28-29

"And now, little children, abide in Him" (1 Jn 2:28a).

85 years ago, President Roosevelt declared that the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor would make the day "live on in infamy." Most people today have forgotten that history. What seems unforgettable today may be largely forgotten tomorrow. By contrast, the Apostle John repeatedly directs Christians to something enduring and eternal: **abiding** in Christ.

To ***abide*** means to remain, continue, dwell, and persevere. John uses this language frequently because it lies at the heart of the Christian life. Christianity is not a baptism-day, big event, or Sunday-only phenomenon; it means ***abiding in Him***. Jesus says that believers need to ***abide*** in His Word to remain His disciples (Jn 8:31-32). ***Abiding*** in His Light drives out our darkness (Jn 12:46). Those who ***abide*** in Him are like branches connected to a vine, receiving life and strength and producing fruit (Jn 15:4-10). God sustains our faith as we abide in Him and receive the Lord's Supper (Jn 6:56). Through His gifts, Christ continually draws His people to ***abide,*** remaining in fellowship with Him.

This abiding is not done through our own determination. The Holy Spirit keeps us in the faith through the means of grace. Through the preaching of the Gospel, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Lord's Supper, Christ ***abides*** with us to strengthen and preserve faith.

Advent presents many distractions. Travel plans, family obligations, shopping lists, and seasonal activities can easily crowd out what is most important. Thus Christ calls us to ***abide*** in Him. Jesus, who came to ***abide*** with us on earth, helps us ***abide*** in Him until the day of His return.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to **abide** among us and accomplish our salvation. Through Your Word and Sacraments, **abide** with us to keep us steadfast in faith until the day of His return; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

December 8 by Rev Joel Kosberg

1 John 3:1-3

“And that is what we are!” (1 Jn 3:1).

With John, we too can marvel at the miracle and grace that we are called God’s children. Because God has chosen us, because His Son has died on the cross to reconcile us, and because we have been baptized into Him, we have been brought into the family.

And even beyond the best earthly father, God our Father in heaven lavishes His love upon us through His word, through the sacraments, and through the mutual, fervent love we share with one another. You are God’s child and you are loved!

Being God’s child also means that there will be times when we are rejected by the world. This should come as no surprise. The same world that rejected God’s first-born Son, Jesus, will reject the children that have been born to Him by water and word. As we face rejection and disapproval from the world, we find great comfort in the approval we have from our Father.

And we look forward to the day when Jesus returns and all of us in Christ are shaped finally into the image of God’s child, without blemish and pure.

Father, You lavish Your love upon us through Your Son Jesus. Thank You for calling us children. In Your grace, give us the endurance to trust You as our Father even in the midst of rejection. Amen.

December 9 by Rev Zach Hoffman

1 John 3:4-10

"You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin" (1 Jn 3:5).

What is unwanted just keeps showing up.

As I write this devotion we are nearing midterm elections. Text messages appear on my phone telling me how to vote. Like most of you, I did not sign up for this! *Buzz buzz* "Vote to stop the rising cost of living." *Buzz buzz*

"Vote to stop fraud in Minnesota."

"Text 'STOP' to unsubscribe." One word makes it all go away, and that's the best part.

Oh, if that were the same for sin. Just text "STOP", and it all goes away.

The sin you see in your spouse makes its appearance again? STOP. Your boss points out to you how you have messed up again? STOP. Your own heavy sense of guilt brings a shameful memory to your mind's eye? STOP.

To a certain extent we can ignore some people some of the time when their sin bothers us, but we cannot avoid ourselves. Our conscience accuses us with no regard for our desire to stop, but something else has come into view now. He appears before you, and you can set your eyes on Him. Christ, our Savior, has come to take away sins; just one name, Jesus, makes all of our guilt disappear.

Heavenly Father, Your Son, our Immanuel, has appeared to take away our sins. Help us to set our eyes on Him. Amen.

December 10 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 John 3:11-15

"We should not be like Cain" (1 Jn 3:12a).

What's wrong with Cain? John puts it plainly — **"He was of the evil one… his own deeds were evil" (1 Jn 3:12).** Cain's problem was two-fold. He didn't love God, and he didn't love his brother, Abel.

Genesis 4:1-16 tells us the story of Cain and Abel. Cain was a farmer who brought a fruit offering, and Abel was a shepherd who brought the firstborn of his flock and the fat portions. The implication is that Cain did not bring the first fruits and the best; he brought the leftovers.

There's more, though. **"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22).** Abel's sacrifice was bloody. Cain's was not. In order for Cain to be accepted by God, he'd have to be covered by Abel's bloody sacrifice, and Cain was unwilling.

Instead of being covered by the blood of Abel's lambs, Cain decided to shed Abel's blood. The story is the same in the New Testament. Jesus is the Lamb of God, and the only way to be reconciled to God is through Christ's blood. Many people were unwilling to be covered by Jesus' blood, and so they killed Him. But Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:24). Abel's blood demands vengeance and a curse. Jesus' blood appeases God's vengeance and offers a blessing to everyone who believes. John sets two paths in front of us here — life and death. Blessing and curse. Choose life (Dt 30:19). Choose love. How do we know what love is? We'll see tomorrow.

Father, thank You for sending us Your Son who laid down His life and whose blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Let no hate reign in us, but empower us to love You and others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 11 by Rev Bruce Timm

1 John 3:16-18

"Little children, let us … love … in deed and truth" (1 Jn 3:18).

The love of God is not merely an emotion. God does not simply desire you to be His own child. He does not just speak about His love for you. He loves you in *deed* and with the *truth*.

You can follow the deeds and truth of God through the entire Bible. He loved Adam and Eve with the truth about sin and death. He loved them in deed by promising a Son born of a woman who would crush the serpent's head. He told the Israelites the truth that they were His chosen people. He loved them in deed when He brought them out of Egypt and led them to the promised land. He gave His people men — judges, kings, and prophets.

Saint John speaks of God's ultimate deed and final truth when he writes, **"the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). The Son** of God came in the flesh to die for your sins so you could be God's child. Water was poured on your head. The word of forgiveness is spoken in your ear. The body and blood of your Savior are placed in your mouth. There in Christ, in Word, and in Sacrament you have God's love in deed and truth.

And now, what does God ask of you, but to be a child of your heavenly Father? He wants you to love as you have been loved — with the truth of Jesus, with deeds of love, using the worldly goods He has given you to serve others.

Dear Father in heaven, You have loved us in deed and truth, with Your clear Word and the deeds of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ our Savior. Strengthen us as Your children to love, as You have loved us — in deed and truth. Amen.

December 12 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 John 3:19-24

"By this we shall know that we are of the truth" (1 Jn 3:19).

How do we know if we're actually Christians? We can't listen to our hearts. Our hearts often condemn us (1 Jn 3:20). Our consciences are often pricked.

Praise God that He is greater than our hearts (1 Jn 3:20)! John gives us practical advice to reassure our hearts that we are of the truth.

First, pray. **"Whatever we ask we receive from Him" (1 Jn 3:22).** When's the last time you prayed for peace, joy, and a clean conscience? Peace and joy are a part of the fruit of the Spirit, and the Spirit wants to give us these things!

Second, obey His commandments (1 Jn 3:22). Isn't that what gives us a troubled heart to begin with? Yes, but John says more and is illustrating that Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden is light. **"This is His commandment, that we believe… and love one another" (1 Jn 3:23).** It's just like we pray in the post-communion collect — faith in God and love toward one another.

Third, cling to God's promises. **"By this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 Jn 3:24).** Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, and so He has! Cling to all the other promises of Christ — forgiveness, protection from the devil, and eternal life.

Jesus, we have sinned and fallen short of Your glory. Reassure our hearts by Your Gospel and Spirit that Your promises are eternally true. We believe; help our unbelief. Amen.

December 13 by Rev Brandon Johnson

1 John 4:1-6

"… every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (1 Jn 4:2b).

We have already heard John tell us that some false prophets/antichrists have gone into the world bringing a false message. In a world where everyone wants to define their own truth and decide what is right or wrong, we desperately need a way to test claims against what is objectively true. We need discernment and steadfast faith, so John points us to a test we can use.

The Spirit of God reveals the true confession of faith that we can use: "every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." This confession is the litmus test for distinguishing between true and false spirits. The failure to confess Jesus rightly lies at the heart of the deception told by the antichrists (see 2:22).

Confessing Jesus rightly is not limited to the incarnation — "who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary," as the Apostles' Creed states — but includes the entire person and work of Jesus. He has come in flesh and blood so that He might redeem those whom He loves from their fallen flesh. To confess Jesus rightly is to confess that by His atoning sacrifice on the cross, by His blood, the Christ, the Son of God, has cleansed us from all our sins.

O Lord God, heavenly Father, we give You thanks that by Your great goodness and mercy Your only-begotten Son became incarnate to redeem us from sin and everlasting death. Enliven our hearts by Your Holy Spirit that we may confess that Jesus has come in the flesh; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

December 14 by Rev Dr James Gimbel

1 John 4:7-12

"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us" (1 Jn 4:10).

Watch any Hallmark Christmas movie and the formula of the love story is similar. Someone is too busy for love, too selfish for love, too wounded by prior love, too afraid of love to be part of a relationship. But … circumstances force two people — often natural enemies — to interact. Barriers and hesitations come down; a relationship grows. Then a crisis — often a miscommunication — nearly breaks up the relationship, until the full truth is uncovered, and there is a happy ending. Maybe the Hallmark formula is so popular because of an innate human yearning for love.

Human love is challenging. Compatibility conflicts and inconsistency of feelings abound. It is hard to maintain focus on service, sacrifice, and forgiveness. Persistence, patience, and commitment wane. Once-loving relationships get distracted or run out of gas. Enduring love is elusive.

Enter God.

God's love is pure love because God ***is*** love. We could not love Him or others without Him first loving us; His love is the source of all human love. God's love sent Jesus to save a loveless and love-broken world. God's love came down at Christmas in the form of Jesus, who as true God and true man, came to fix broken love and broken lives by His dying love on the cross.

This truly ***is*** love … not that we loved God, but that He first and forever loves us. May we live in His love always, through and beyond Advent.

O heavenly Father, thank You for loving us and sending Your Son to be our Savior. Fill us with Your love, that we may gladly love You and serve our neighbors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

December 15 by Rev Joel Kosberg

1 John 4:13-21

"… so that we may have confidence on the day of judgment…" (1 Jn 4:17).

Confidence is something we all crave and something that many people are willing to sell us. Confidence as a parent. Confidence as a leader. Confidence as a man. Confidence to stand before people and be judged worthy. And yet the confidence that God gives us is not something that we can buy, or achieve.

It is something that can only be received in love. John speaks of God's love. And it is the love of God given to us in His Son Jesus that makes us stand confidently. This confidence is something that stands outside of ourselves and depends entirely on the cross and empty grave.

Whether I win or lose, I have the true victory in Jesus. Whether I am winsome or stumble over my words, I have the approval of Jesus. Whether I get a 'yes' or I get turned down for a date, I am loved by Jesus. And if we have the confidence that comes from God's love, there is nothing to fear. God's love drives out fear.

So, as one confident in Christ, do what the most confident people do. Listen, serve, and love the people around you.

Father, we have such confidence to stand before You on account of Your Son Jesus. Lord, let that confidence lead us to love and serve the people You have placed in our lives. Amen.

December 16 by Rev Zach Hoffman

1 John 5:1-5

"Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 Jn 5:5).

I love a good rhetorical question. The good news for me is that there are plenty in the Bible! "Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory!" (Ps 24:10).

"Whom shall I send?" As if God did not already know! Still, He let Isaiah give an answer: "Here I am! Send me!" (Isa 6:1-8).

The rhetorical questions reveal the obvious, and the answer is so well known that the question almost becomes unnecessary.

That takes us back to the first question. Who is it that overcomes the world? You ought to know. It cannot be anyone else. Only Jesus can say about Himself "…but take heart, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). Only He can share His victory with you.

Who overcomes the world? Not your works, not your mindset, not those who boast in their own righteousness, not even the people who seem to win in every other way. Only Jesus bears the name of savior, and by no other name under heaven or on the earth can people be saved.

To answer the obvious, it's us; the ones who believe that Jesus is the Son of God!

Heavenly Father, You gave us the name Jesus when through an angel You announced it to Mary. Help us to keep this name on our lips as the obvious answer to our need for salvation. Amen.

December 17 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 John 5:6-12

“For there are three that testify” (1 Jn 5:7).

God requires evidence for a charge to be established, and it has to be good evidence. Deuteronomy 17 and 19 both state that two or three witnesses are required. Due process is thoroughly biblical!

John presents his witnesses here. He starts with two witnesses — the water and the blood. He wrote down an oath in his Gospel that he really saw the water and the blood flow out of Jesus’ side (Jn 19:35). But then John adds a third witness — the Spirit. Jesus handed over the Spirit on the cross (Jn 19:30), and then breathed out the Spirit on the disciples after He rose from the dead (Jn 20:22).

Why should you believe in Christ? Because the evidence and the testimony of God is undeniable, and God Himself gives us the test to see if something is reliable. Right in the middle of Deuteronomy 17 and 19 (which have the requirement of two or three witnesses), Moses tells the Israelites that God is going to send a prophet like him (Moses), and that they needed to listen to that Prophet (Dt 18:15). Moses then says you can tell if a prophet is true if what he says comes true.

Everything Jesus has said has come true. He’s the Prophet like Moses, but even better. Moses came by blood and water — the blood of the Nile, the blood of the Passover, and the water of the Red Sea. The Spirit guided the Israelites in Moses’ day into the Promised Land. Jesus saves us from sin, death, and the devil through blood and water, and He breathes out His Spirit so that we may believe for eternal life.

Father, give us Your Spirit so that we can believe Your testimony. Amen.

December 18 by Rev Bruce Timm

1 John 5:13-15

"And this is the confidence that we have toward Him" (1 Jn 5:14a).

Saint John speaks of confidence four times in his first letter (1 Jn 2:28, 3:21, 4:17, and 5:14). His letter might be dubbed a confidence booster.

Twice John urges us to be confident about the coming judgment. If we abide in Him, we can be confident and not ashamed when He comes (2:28). Because we know and believe the love God has for us and we abide in Him, we have confidence for the day of judgment (4:17).

And twice John urges us to be confident right now, as we pray. If our heart does not condemn us (and it doesn't in Christ), we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him (3:21-22). If we know that He hears us (and He does in Christ) we have confidence toward Him as we pray for whatever we need (5:14-15).

You have confidence now because you are counted among the little children of God, baptized into Christ, with God as your heavenly Father. He has loved you in Word and deed, so you know He will hear you, as a dear Father hears His dear children. You have confidence for the future, for whatever tomorrow brings, because your sins are forgiven, because Christ has died and been raised, because death has no power over you, because the Devil cannot accuse you, because in Christ you have no shame or guilt, and therefore you will stand before God on the last day.

Confidence now. Confidence then. Confidence in Christ your Savior.

Dear Father in heaven, in Christ You give us confidence. Help us to pray for whatever we need according to Your will, and strengthen us as we await the return of Your Son on the last day. Amen.

December 19 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 John 5:16-17

"There is sin that leads to death… there is sin that does not lead to death" (1 Jn 5:16-17).

Time for some dogmatic theological vocabulary! There are two types of sin - mortal and venial.

Mortal sins are those that lead to (eternal) death. These are intentional, unrepentant sins. These are done by the enemies of God, which is why John says that **"one should not pray for that" (1 Jn 5:16).** These are sins that people do not fight against and to which they are enslaved.

Venial sins are sins that do not lead to (eternal) death. These are sins done from the weakness of our flesh. These are the sins that Christians commit. We are well aware that we sin often and that we need to daily drown the old Adam and receive forgiveness. We pray every day in the Lord's Prayer for forgiveness. The difference is repentance. We don't want to sin. We are living the life that Paul describes in Romans 7 - **"I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Rom 7:15).**

What do we do with our sins? What John already told us to do in chapter 1! **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9).**

Father, we have sinned against You. Grant us repentance and faith so that our sinful flesh does not lead us to eternal death. Give us Your Spirit so that we can walk according to the Spirit and put our sinful flesh to death. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 20 by Rev Brandon Johnson

1 John 5:18-19

"… but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him" (1 Jn 5:18).

I was quite puzzled by the second phrase of verse 18. Part of the problem is figuring out who the pronouns "he" and "him" refer to.

First, we tackle "he." You might remember from the Gospel of John (Jesus talking to Nicodemus in Jn 3:3-8) or earlier in the book (1 Jn 4:7, 5:1) that the phrase "born of God" usually refers to a believer. Here in 5:18-19, this phrase refers to someone else, namely Jesus. "*The One who is born of God"* here is the eternally born Son of God who was also born in this time. So "he" is Jesus.

Figuring out the "him" is much easier. We just look earlier in the verse and see that we are "the everyone who has been born of God"; therefore the "him" is us.

The evil one has no power or ability to "touch" us. The devil never intends any good to come from his "touch"; instead, he intends to lay hold of us, even seize us, that we may be deceived or led away from the protective arms of our loving Savior. We who are born of God by water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5) in the waters of Holy Baptism, cannot be touched or seized by the evil one because he is powerless against the Only-Begotten One.

Almighty God, direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of Your laws and in the works of Your commandments that through Your mighty protection we may ever be preserved in both body and soul; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

December 21 by Rev Dr James Gimbel

1 John 5:20-21

“He is the true God and eternal life” (1 Jn 5:20c).

One of the challenges facing the early Christian Church was confusion about the identity of Jesus. Some denied His true humanity. Others rejected His full divinity. John writes clearly and forcefully: Jesus Christ is both true God and true man. This confession stands at the very center of the Christian faith.

Human reason struggles to comprehend this mystery, yet Scripture teaches it plainly. The Son of God took on human flesh without ceasing to be God. He became like us in every way except sin. This was necessary for our salvation. Humanity's debt of sin could only be paid by a human substitute, but no ordinary human being could bear the burden of the world's guilt. Therefore, the Savior had to be both fully human and fully divine.

As true man, Jesus stood in our place under God's Law and bore our punishment. As true God, His sacrifice possessed infinite worth, sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world. In the amazing grace of the Gospel, Jesus’ precious blood purchased our redemption and secured forgiveness, life, and salvation for all who believe in Him.

John concludes his letter with the warning, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” In the ancient world, idols were often carved images and false gods. During Advent, idols take many forms. Idolatry is untruth. Anything that claims our highest focus or loyalty or trust can become an idol: money, success, entertainment, relationships, or even holiday traditions.

Advent calls us to fix our eyes on Christ alone, avoiding distracting seasonal idols. The Child born in Bethlehem is the eternal Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord. This is our Christmas truth.

O Jesus, true God and true man, Savior of the nations, keep us from every idol. Draw our hearts ever closer to You. In Your name, Amen.

December 22 by Rev Joel Kosberg

2 John 1-3

"…because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever…" (2 Jn 2).

When I think of truth I think of it mostly as a static thing. The truth never changes. The truth stands firm. The truth is the remarkable message of the gospel — the good news of what God has accomplished for us in Jesus. And that truth will stand the test of time.

It is a truth that we pore over in Scripture, understanding its mysteries and letting it structure the way we think. The truth is an intellectually satisfying and profound doctrine.

And… The truth is a life-giving power. The truth lives, as John reminds us. And like any living thing it grows and spreads and takes up more and more territory in our lives. This truth lives in us and it grows in us, breathing life into our marriages, and families, and workplaces, and budgets, and churches. This truth animates our very being and will do so into eternity.

So, as you study God's truth let it shape your mind and let it live and grow in your heart. Let it give you wisdom and enthusiasm as you follow Jesus.

Father, Your truth brings clarity to our world. Let it also live in us bearing fruit that lasts into eternity. Use Your truth to deepen our intellect and expand our imaginations for how You are at work in the world. Amen.

December 23 by Rev Zach Hoffman

2 John 4-13

"Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son" (2 Jn 9b).

It's the day before the Christmas celebration begins in earnest. Do you have a moment to contemplate the Trinity?

Still reading?

The wonder of Christmas is that God gave His divine Son to the world. He is divine in nature, and this is why we say He is God incarnate (God in the flesh). He has all the attributes of the Father. Eternal, all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful, unchangeable, full of grace and truth.

When you read that last paragraph, you might have thought about how you have none of those characteristics. Funny, how when we stare into what is perfect we tend to see our imperfections.

Fortunately, He is not the God who is only over and far above us. In fact, John says that He is so near that *we can have Him*. Though He is fully divine, He is as human as you and I, and He tells us that we can abide in Him. We read that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He is God with us, God in us, and the God we can live with who came to be our brother.

You can be sure that He is sent from the Father, the King of the universe. You have Him if you have the Son. You have the Son if you hold His Word in your heart.

"For God so loved the World that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

Almighty Father, thank You for the precious gift of Your Son. Grant us Your Spirit so that we hold His word in our hearts. Amen.

December 24 by Rev Joshua Reber

3 John 1-8

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 Jn 4).

Joy. Children. Truth. That's what Christmas is all about.

Joy. "Joy to the world, the Lord is come!" Jesus talked quite a bit about joy, and He did so on the night He was betrayed. **"When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world" (Jn 16:21).** It must've been quite the journey for Mary, but holding Jesus, she had joy. All of creation was groaning, waiting for a Savior, and now He's finally here.

Children. The eternal Son of God was born a child in Bethlehem. Jesus said that we must become like children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus became a child for us so that by believing we could become children of God. This Christmas, become a child again. Have that childlike faith and awe and wonder under the Christmas tree.

Truth. "Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born!" That's the truth. Jesus is the truth. **"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6).** The truth is that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The truth is that God sent His Son, born of a virgin, born under the Law to redeem those under the Law. The truth is that God so loved the world that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Father, thank You for sending Your Son to be born as a child so that we might become children of God. Give us childlike faith in Jesus. Amen.

December 25 by Rev Joshua Reber

3 John 9-15

"I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face" (3 Jn 13-14).

Diotrephes is a grinch trying to steal Christmas! **"Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority" (3 Jn 9).** We have to deal with grinches all the time. They can't really steal Christmas, though — God took on human flesh for eternity!

This morning at church, you heard or will hear, **"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).** The Greek word for Word is *logos*, where we get our word logic from. Jesus Christ is the logic and reason behind the universe, and He holds it all together (Col 1:17).

It sounds philosophical, and it is. But it's not abstract philosophy. It's real, concrete, material philosophy. God, who is Spirit (Jn 4:24), took on our flesh. Flesh in the Bible usually means that which is totally opposed to God. The Son of God took on that which was opposed to Him to reconcile us to the Father! That's why Christmas is so merry!

It's not only John who would rather talk to us face to face. God writes us letters, like John did. God's letters are the 66 books of the Bible, and He is happy to give us His grace through those words. But God has something better in mind than words on a page. He wants to see us face to face. He did it 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, and He'll return again so that we can see Him. **"We know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn 3:2).**

Father, we praise You for sending Your Son who became flesh and dwelt among us. Give us faith in Your Son born in Bethlehem so that we can dwell with You for eternity. Amen.