

Advent Devotions

2025



("Ezekiel Prophesying" by Gustave Doré, public domain)

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

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who arrived in a manger, still arrives in His Word and Sacraments, and will arrive again on the last day (the Latin word *Adventus* means to arrive)! We, the pastors of the St. Cloud Circuit, hope and pray these devotions are beneficial to you during this season of Advent.

This year's devotions are based on the prophets. The prophets were all about Jesus. We need their words as much as their original hearers did because it wasn't merely their words, but God's Word. They were looking forward to Christ's 1st Coming, while we're waiting Christ's 2nd Coming.

These devotions aren't intended to replace your daily devotional routine, rather they are intended to supplement it! Looking for a daily devotional routine? Ask your pastor! He'd love to help you out. But if you're looking for something immediate, here's a plan for praying the Psalms during Advent –

Advent	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	24	122	33	50	18:1-20	102	90
Noon	129; 131	135	137; 140	144; 145	146; 147	148	149; 150
Evening	25; 110	40; 67	85; 91	14; 16	126; 62	130; 16	80; 72

God's blessings to you this Advent. Please check out our other resources at lcmscloud.org.

In Christ,
 Rev Joshua Reber (Editor; Faith, St. Cloud; Trinity, Clear Lake, Circuit Visitor)
 Rev David Steege (Immanuel, Albany)
 Rev Jeff Manthe (SonRise, Avon)
 Rev Dr James Gimbel (St. John's, Kimball)
 Rev Joel Kosberg (Love of Christ, St. Cloud)
 Rev Zach Hoffman (Holy Cross, St. Cloud)
 Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud; 2nd VP Minnesota North District)
 Rev Dr Tim Rehwaltd (St. John's, Popple Creek, Circuit Visitor Little Falls Circuit)

November 30 by Rev Dr Timothy Rehwaldt

Zechariah 9:9-10

*Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he.
Zechariah 9:9b*

Could there be a more appropriate verse to begin this Advent season? Recently, there has been a lot of focus on the concept of a 'king'. Is having a king a good thing or not?

Kings are kings because they are born to be kings, or they had enough power or influence to take the position of king. In the Old Testament kings came about because the people of God wanted to be like the other nations, who had kings. So God gave to Israel a king. He allowed them to have a whole line of kings throughout history.

The first of Israel's kings was Saul, and the greatest king was David, both of whom were anointed to be king by God's command. There's no debate that there were good kings and bad kings in Israel. Whether good or bad, kings are always under God and His Kingdom.

When the prophet Zechariah writes about a king in the verse for today, he is speaking about a king who is first born to be king, and a king who has the power and influence to be our king. He is announcing that a king will be born as an eternal King and He will be all-powerful, bringing with Him the gifts of righteousness and salvation to give to His people. Throughout this Advent season, may we rejoice in our all-powerful King born to be our Savior, our Redeemer, and our Lord Jesus Christ!

Almighty Father, Bless us in this Advent season, that we may faithfully worship the King of Kings, who brings peace to the nations! Amen.

December 1 by Rev Bruce Timm

Jeremiah 23:5–6

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch (Jeremiah 23:5a).

Whenever someone says “behold” or “look” it’s time to pay attention. You’re about to see something out of the ordinary.

The prophet Jeremiah had the unenviable task of preaching judgment on God’s people. The Babylonians were coming and they would carry the Israelites into captivity. Punishment was coming upon Israel for her disobedience and rejection of God. Jeremiah was about as welcome as your pastor when he tells you your daughter can’t commune because she’s living with her boyfriend.

Sin demands judgment and justice. If you reject and rebel against God you should expect His punishment. The God of Scripture is a holy and just God. He does not overlook sin. But He is also a merciful and compassionate God. That is why Jeremiah proclaims, “Behold.”

Israel would be cut down. Her kings would be carried into exile, but from the stump of Jesse God would raise up a righteous Branch. Branches are the fruit-bearing part of the tree. This Branch, from the root of Jesse, the tree of David, bears the fruit of righteousness. In verse 6 Jeremiah calls Him, “**The Lord is our Righteousness.**” By our sins, we deserved to be cut down, but “behold” God has raised up His Son, David’s Son, to be our righteousness, obeying God’s Law and dying for our sin. The fruit of this branch is forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Heavenly Father, You sent prophets like Jeremiah to proclaim judgement and mercy. Help us to see our sin and behold our Savior, Jesus, the righteous branch of David. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

December 2 by Rev Zach Hoffman

Micah 4:1–5

but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree... (Micah 4:4a)

Hot take: figgy pudding is a cake. You mix together flour, eggs, butter, sugar, and you mean to tell me that the outcome won't be a cake!? Sure, figgy pudding is steamed and not baked. However, just search for an image of figgy pudding or make some on your own, and tell me that it isn't cake.

Like figgy pudding, there is much in life that lives under false titles. For example, this time of year, companies will promote their products with phrases like: "Give joy" or "Give a gift that matters" or "Give a gift of 5 years of a large car payment for the sake of having a single good moment in your driveway." Give *me* a break!

Micah reminds us of what *God* will give:

**"but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,
and no one shall make them afraid,
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:4).**

Micah repeats a promise that goes all the way back to Deuteronomy 8 when Israel longed for the Promised Land, and he says it to us now when we long for our inheritance. Jesus our tree of life, under Him we rest. Jesus our shelter from every danger. Jesus our true vine. Jesus the promised blessing whose name means exactly what it says - Savior. He Himself will be our peace. He will always be even more than what our words and titles can describe.

Almighty Father, grant us the faith to trust that your Son, is all the prophets said He will be. Amen.

December 3 by Rev Joshua Reber

Isaiah 7:10–14

Ask a sign... the Lord Himself will give a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son (Isaiah 7:11, 14).

Jews demand signs (1 Corinthians 1:22), except for King Ahaz when God tells Him to ask for a sign. It was fake piety, like fasting for the world to see or making a donation, but only if it's given on a gigantic check.

Greeks seek wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:22). How's the virgin birth for wisdom? Most objections to Christianity involve the virgin birth and the resurrection. The virgin birth is not wisdom for the world, but God's foolishness is wiser than the world's wisdom! (1 Corinthians 1:25)

We preach Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23). Even at Christmas time. "What Child is This" puts it best – "Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the cross be borne for me, for you." The wood of the manger turns into the wood of the cross. Christ goes from a virgin womb to a virgin tomb.

Unlike Ahaz, the world demands signs. But Jesus says no sign will be given except the sign of Jonah.

Are the signs that Christ gives enough for you? The virgin birth? Christ crucified? The empty tomb? Bread and wine? Water? I sure hope so. "Why lies He in such mean estate?" Our Lord still comes to us in humble signs that the world considers foolishness. Thanks be to God!

Father, thank You for giving us the sign of the virgin birth. We praise you for sending us Your Son in such a humble way, and we pray that You would send Him again soon in all His glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 4 by Rev David Steege

Isaiah 9:1–7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light (Isaiah 9:2).

Advent begins in the dark. Isaiah's world was full of fear, political instability, unfaithful kings, and spiritual blindness. Ours is not much different. Yet into this darkness, Isaiah speaks a promise so bright it breaks the night wide open: **"To us a child is born, to us a Son is given" (Isaiah 9:6)**. The answer to darkness is not a stronger army, a better king, or a wiser strategy. The answer is a Child.

This Child is unlike any other. He is Wonderful Counselor—wisdom in the flesh. He is Mighty God—strength made human. He is Everlasting Father—the Lord who shepherds His children forever. He is Prince of Peace—the One whose reign brings wholeness where sin has shattered lives.

In Advent we remember that God did not stand far off from our darkness. He entered it. He came down into the chaos, into the fear, into the sin, into the death, to bear it all in His own flesh. The Child of Isaiah 9 is the Crucified and Risen One, whose light no darkness can overcome.

For those who walk in shadows—whether shadows of grief, shame, uncertainty, or sin—this Child comes still. He shines His forgiveness, His mercy, and His peace into every corner of our lives. His reign grows, not because the world receives Him, but because God keeps His promises.

Lord Jesus, Light of the world, shine into the darkness of our hearts. Drive out sin and fear, and establish Your peace within us. Come quickly and reign over us with Your grace. Amen.

December 5 by Rev Dr Timothy Rehwaldt

Malachi 3:1–4

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me (Malachi 3:1a).

Recently, a young pastor called me. He was a pastor I had met a few months before and he had talked to me previously of some issues he was facing in his congregation. This is an occurrence that happens often now in the later years of my pastoral ministry. Sometimes I feel like I give off a vibe that I know how to deal with difficult ministry issues. Other times I think this happens because young pastors are looking for guidance from a seasoned pastor, and I just happen to have survived long enough to be one of those.

In the church we often interpret this passage from Malachi as referring to John the Baptist, who preached repentance and the coming of the Messiah. While I believe that to be the correct interpretation, I can also see a basic principle for ministry. John and Jesus both were in the ministry of calling people to repentance and to being prepared for the coming of God's Kingdom. The principle is this: it was beneficial to Jesus to have had someone come before Him to open up the hearts and minds of God's people to receive the truth of God's redemptive plan.

John, like the pastors and faithful witness before us, have prepared the way for Jesus, and for pastors and faithful witnesses today to be witnesses of the love and forgiveness of God through His Son our Savior Jesus Christ. May we be thankful for those who have come before us to prepare the way, even as Jesus was thankful for John.

Lord Jesus, give us thankful hearts that the way has been prepared for our witness of Your life-giving and life-sustaining Word. Amen.

December 6 by Rev Bruce Timm

Isaiah 11:1–10

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1).

We talked about this fruit bearing branch from the stump of Jesse five days ago. The stump of Jesse is the line of Davidic kings. David was the son of Jesse and the Kings who continued in Judah were His descendants. But through rebellion and sin Israel was cut down. Her last King, Zedekiah, was captured by the Babylonians. His sons were executed in front of him. He was blinded and carried off to Babylon. That's how far down the tree of Jesse was cut. The wages of sin is death.

But the Lord is merciful and He brings life. The Lord, through Isaiah, promises a new king. A little shoot will spring forth from Jesse's stump. He will be greater than David, greater than any earthly king, for He will not only be David's son, but David's Lord.

There are two words to describe this King's reign. The first is *righteous*. He isn't ruling for Himself, but for the Lord. His ears will not hear lies and His eyes will see the truth. This King isn't on your side. He is on the Lord's side. He is on the side of goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Thankfully He wants you on His side which is shown by the second quality of His kingdom: *peace*. He puts an end to the violence that sin has wrought. The wolf and the lamb are playmates. The infant child doesn't fear the cobra. Toddlers play with poisonous snakes.

How does such peace happen? The King makes peace by accomplishing righteousness. Jesus lives a righteous life, dies with the sins of the world, and rises again. That's the little shoot from the stump of Jesse that Mary gives birth to in David's city.

Dearest Lord Jesus, O Shoot from Jesse's stump, rule over us with Your righteousness and grant us Your peace. Amen.

December 7 by Rev Zach Hoffman

Jeremiah 31:31–34

...though I was their husband, declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31:32)

Shattered relationships, like shattered Christmas ornaments, often have little hope for repair. This time of year, you might have to spend some time with those who with whom you have a broken relationship. The hope is to just get along for a week, or a day, or just a few hours for a family meal! We say to ourselves: “Don’t make it like last Christmas! Do better this time!” Sometimes our highest hope is just getting through.

However, God is not content with lowered hopes and broken relationships. He remembers well how His people have broken His covenant with them. He was like a husband to them, and they were His cherished and beloved bride. Yet, they were sinful, unfaithful, and forgetful. The relationship was broken. Still, God will heal the relationship.

God promises total repair, and raises our hopes yet again. The prophet Jeremiah says that God will not write His commandments on tablets of stones which can be broken. He will write it on His people’s hearts. They will be filled with the knowledge of Him, and he will forgive their sins. This is total repair. It will come through the appearing of Christ who will make a new covenant with us through the shedding of His blood.

If Christ has repaired our relationship with God to the point that we can call ourselves the bride of Christ, then there is hope that He can heal our relationship with others as well.

Almighty Father, thank You for Your Son who made a new covenant with us through the shedding of His blood. Heal all of our relationships with His blood. Amen.

December 8 by Rev Dr Timothy Rehwaldt

Isaiah 2:1–5

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord (Isaiah 2:5).

Biblical writers often refer to themselves. Almost all the Gospel writers refer to themselves by name. This is called an illeism. It is the act of referring to oneself in the third person instead of first person. Isaiah does this at the beginning of Chapter 2, where he writes, **“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.”**

Why does he refer to himself in the third person?

Isaiah wanted to emphasize that what he is preaching is not from him, but from God. Isaiah was about to tell the people of God the Word of God contained in a vision that came from God. This is a very important lesson for all of us. Every word of Scripture is the inspired and revealed Word of God, and the writers of it are merely “secretaries” sharing what God has said, done, or revealed.

“O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:5). As we draw close to Christmas, we a lot of light. The angels radiate with light, the star beams its light over Bethlehem, John calls Jesus light at the beginning of his Gospel. God through Isaiah calls His people to walk in light.

This Advent, as you light candles, as you see the lights of countless Christmas trees, and as you see colorful lights on neighbors’ houses, remember the true Light that shines in you. It is the Light of the Lord, Jesus, and His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Lord of Light, shine bright in us this season. Guide us through the darkness of this world and into Your marvelous Light forever. Amen.

December 9 by Rev Dr James Gimbel

Isaiah 35:1–10

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away (Isaiah 35:10).

Isaiah 34 describes God's judgment against the nations for their idolatry, a judgment impacting humans, animals, and all creation (including barren deserts). Since 2007 the multi-national Great Green Wall Project in the Sahel region of Africa has planted millions of trees, managed meager water resources, and utilized creative land management techniques attempting to restore habitation in the desert.

Isaiah 35 presents a different solution: God's "great reversal" that unfolds for His people and creation – beginning when the Messianic Age began at Bethlehem, revealed in Jesus' miracles, and finally fulfilled when the Messianic Age is completed upon Jesus' return.

So in this Messianic Age, why are there still deserts? Why do people still have fears, doubts, weaknesses, anxiety, and physical ailments? Why is there still sin and guilt and shame; pain and suffering and death?

There is a "now and not yet" in God's promises. Yes, we are free from the bondage to sin. Even though we struggle in temptation and *do* still sin, *we are forgiven through the Messiah*. People still suffer and die, but the power of death is broken in the resurrection *promise of the Messiah*. In the Messianic Age God works quietly within us. The joy and singing come from within the heart of God's elect. With unwavering hope we anticipate the completion of God's restoration on the Last Day and into the life to come. We rejoice in this glory of the Lord!

Dear Jesus, give us patient trust in Your promises at work in us now as we await completion on Your return. Amen

December 10 by Rev Bruce Timm

Hosea 11:1–4

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son (Hosea 11:1).

Hosea never makes the Sunday School curriculum. It isn't hard to understand why. God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute to demonstrate with his life God's faithfulness to His people, even as they were faithless and fooling around with every god under the sun. This is how the Lord describes His beloved Israel **"The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols" (Hosea 11:2).**

God's people were faithless. We still need Hosea's powerful condemnation of our idolatry and adultery with other gods. We must confess our sins of having other gods.

God is faithful. Through Hosea the Lord reminds His beloved people that when Israel was a child, the Lord called him, the nation of Israel, out of slavery in Egypt. In doing so the Lord destroyed their enemy Pharaoh and also brought them to the promised land. This promise of God's love in Hosea is fulfilled when God's love for us is fully manifest in His Son. When Jesus of Nazareth was a little boy, Joseph, His guardian, whisked Him away to Egypt to save Him from Herod's sword. Then like Israel of old, Jesus, God's beloved Son, was called out of Egypt, to return to the land of Israel, to accomplish our salvation. God is faithful to His Word and loving to us, His people, in His Son.

Forgive us O Lord, for our faithless adultery with other gods, and help us to trust in Your faithful love to us, in the Son You called out of Egypt – Jesus our Lord. Amen.

December 11 by Rev Joshua Reber

Malachi 4:1–6

The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings (Malachi 4:2).

The darkest day of the year is almost here (December 21st). The Old Testament was ruled by the moon, which was the lesser light (Genesis 1:16). The old pattern was evening *then* morning. “There was evening and there was morning” (Genesis 1). Night determined the days – the Jewish day is sundown to sundown. The Jewish feasts were determined by the lunar calendar – that’s why Easter changes dates every year.

But the New Testament is ruled by the sun, the greater light. The sun is the Son, the light of the world. One could argue, then, that we should have a fixed date for Easter which is determined by our solar calendar! I’d advocate for the 1st Sunday in April. Who’s with me?

The Messiah has come. It’s a new dawn. We worship on Sunday mornings, not Friday nights, because the Sun of Righteousness arose on a Sunday morning. Just as the Philistines could not contain Samson (Samson means sun), the grave and the night cannot contain Jesus Christ. It’s a little brighter now, but we’re still waiting on the sun to arrive again. Right now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we’ll see face to face. When Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, returns again, everything will be revealed and will be glorious!

Jesus, Son of God and Sun of Righteousness, come not in terrors as the King of Kings, but kind and good with healing in Thy wings. Amen.

December 12 by Rev Zach Hoffman

Zephaniah 3:14–20

He will exult over you with loud singing (Zephaniah 3:17).

“JOY to the World...” I love how the hymn starts loud. Forget the build. Forget the crescendo. Forget how tired pastor is when he sings it multiple times over Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. It’s time to be loud.

Why? Because volume demands volume. The angels who appeared to the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night did not hold back when they sang “Glory to God in the highest!”

I do not think that the joy in heaven over one sinner that repents is a quiet celebration (see Luke 15:7).

The celebration of the marriage feast of the Lamb in Revelation 19 would do more than just shake the dust off the rafters of any church, it would bring them down completely.

When it comes to your salvation, God is loud, heaven is loud, even the angels are loud. Why, because He is brimming with love over you.

His love has led Him to send His Son - a Son born to you, a child given to you. Let His love quiet all despair. Set worry and fear aside. Be ready to meet the moment. Christ has been born. Sing about it with joy. Sing with volume. Sing for all the marvelous things He has done for you.

Get the dust off those rafters!

Heavenly Father, fill us with joy over the salvation You have accomplished for us through Jesus. Amen.

December 13 by Rev Bruce Timm

Daniel 7:9–14

And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him (Daniel 7:13)

When Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were thrown into the fiery furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar was surprised to see four men in the fire. He saw them all walking around and the appearance of the fourth was like a son of the gods (Daniel 3:24).

No doubt that fourth man was the Son of God, even as the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is Jesus of Nazareth. With his writing Daniel not only preaches God's presence with us, but also reveals Christ's victorious and eternal kingdom.

Daniel, in his vision of chapter 7, receives a glimpse into heaven. Was it on the day Christ ascended? Was it on the day of His return? Is it right now? I think "yes" is the appropriate answer.

The beast has been killed. Sin, death, and the Devil are undone by Jesus. Their power has been taken away, though they still fight against us for a season and a time. But the Son of Man reigns. He ascended on high and entered His Father's throne room, and now everything is under His feet – all of world history is governed by Jesus, your life, your death, your days are in His hands. You are in His Kingdom and it has no end. That's something to see, to believe, and in which to rejoice.

Lord Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, grant us Your presence. Help us to trust in Your victory and to rejoice in Your reign. Amen.

December 14 by Rev Dr James Gimbel

Habakkuk 2:1–4

I will ... look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint (Habakkuk 2:1).

The prophet Habakkuk lived in discouraging times. Evidence of sin was everywhere: indifference to God's will, injustice toward the poor and orphaned, disregard for worship and God's Word, selfish values over godliness, idolatry from the surrounding countries. As a faithful and pious adherent to God's Word and will, Habakkuk prayed, "God, don't you see it? Aren't you going to come and do something?"

God's response set Habakkuk aback: "Yes, I see ... and will take care of it. I'll send the Assyrians to overthrow the country. That will resolve things." In our day, it would be as if God said to us, "Don't worry, I'll allow ruthless terrorists to destroy the country and stop the wickedness." We would say, like Habakkuk, "No, God, surely not *that!*"

It is heartbreaking for God - and for the godly - to see so many unholy ideas, beliefs, and practices infiltrate our world, our culture, even our church members, our families, and our own minds and hearts. We yearn for God's answer.

God, in justice, has every right to bring judgment. But for the sake of Jesus, the Father deals with us in mercy, letting us live. God shows mercy to me as well, promising that I, as a justified one, will LIVE by faith (seen by God "Just-as-if-I'd" never sinned – for Jesus' sake). Believers are made right with God through faith, trusting in God's promises and the coming of Jesus the Messiah. We await Christ's return in answer to our longing in these days.

Dear Jesus, we await Your second coming as The Day of Your justice and Your mercy upon us through faith in You. Come soon, O Lord. Amen.

December 15 by Rev David Steege

Isaiah 40:1–11

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God (Isaiah 40:1).

Isaiah 40 is a turning point—not only in Isaiah’s book, but for God’s people. After chapters filled with warnings, judgment, and the consequences of sin, the first word God speaks is *comfort*. Not advice, not scolding, not strategy—comfort. And it is comfort grounded in His own action: **“Her warfare is ended, her iniquity is pardoned” (Isaiah 40:2).**

Advent reminds us that God’s comfort is not sentimental. It is not a warm feeling or a vague hope. God’s comfort comes in a Person. A voice in the wilderness would prepare the way! John the Baptist would one day stand in that wilderness, calling sinners to repentance because the Lord Himself was coming. The glory of the Lord would be revealed—not in fire or storm, but in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

This comfort is needed because people are like grass—fragile, fading, unable to save themselves. But the Word of our God stands forever. And that Word is not merely spoken; He is born. He becomes flesh. He carries the lambs in His arms. He tends His people like a shepherd who refuses to lose even one of His flock.

Advent comfort means this: your sins are forgiven, your warfare with God is over, and the Lord Himself comes to bring you home. Lift up your eyes. Your God comes with might—and with mercy.

Lord Jesus, our Shepherd, speak Your comfort into our weary hearts. Strengthen us with Your unchanging Word and prepare us for Your coming. Lead us gently and hold us close. Amen.

December 16 by Rev Dr Timothy Rehwaldt

Joel 2:28-32

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Joel 2:32a).

What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? According to this prophecy, if you call on the name of the Lord you will be saved, which means you will inherit eternal life. But, if you do not call upon the name of the Lord, you will not inherit eternal life, which means you'll face eternal death.

This verse has been interpreted to describe those who respond to the call of the Lord. In other words, those who call on the name of the Lord are those who have been called by God's grace and delivered from sin, death, and all that is evil through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Joel preached to God's people and called upon them to trust the promise of God that they would be delivered. Jesus reveals that God chooses those who are called to be His faithful disciples. They are those who respond to the call of the Gospel, and live according to the promises that He provides in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In this Advent season we who have been washed by the waters of Baptism, renewed by the presence of His Spirit, and have been forgiven by the faithful reception the Body and Blood of Jesus and His real presence, have been given the strength of faith to call upon the name of the Lord. Therefore, we shall be saved.

Spirit of the Lord, strengthen our faith, comfort us with Your presence, and guide us to know the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen.

December 17 by Rev Joshua Reber

Haggai 2:6–9

The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former (Haggai 2:9).

Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord leave the Temple. God got up and left. It was judgment on Judah's rebellion, and an empty Temple meant an empty people.

A few generations later, Haggai was standing in front of a new Temple that was underwhelming. Those who remembered the 1st Temple cried when they saw the reconstructed 2nd Temple. The 2nd Temple wouldn't become a wonder of the world until Herod "remodeled" it half a millennium later.

God promises that the latter glory of the Temple would be greater than Solomon's Temple, and He wasn't talking about Herod's Temple. That Temple would be thrown down. He was talking about an eternal glory, and that greater glory entered the Temple for the first time as a child. Jesus was brought to the Temple on the 8th day and circumcised. He was brought again 32 days later to be presented to God. The greater glory of God came humbly in a manger.

And because the Son of God took on our human flesh, *you* become God's dwelling place. We are Temples of the Holy Spirit. The glory that once departed a stone temple now dwells in a heart of flesh. It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me! Advent reminds us that God came back, and He came back to stay. He's always Immanuel now – God with us.

Glorious Father, thank You for sending Your glory back to the Temple. Make us Your Temple which receives Your Son with joy. Amen.

December 18 by Rev Dr James Gimbel

Isaiah 42:1–9

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; ... a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice (Isaiah 42:1, 3).

This is the first of four “Servant Songs” that Isaiah includes in his prophecies pointing to Jesus the Messiah. The Heavenly Father announces with pride, **“Behold, my Servant,”** words again at Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:17) and His Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5).

To behold God the Father, or His Son, would be a frightening prospect. God told Moses that no one shall see the face of God and live (Exodus 33:20). The thunder and lightning and earthquake of God’s presence on Mount Sinai were terrifying to God’s people. We rightly live to *fear*, love, and trust in God above all things.

Yet the Messiah, the Servant of the Father’s will, would **“not come to judge the world, but the world might be saved through Him” (John 3:17).**

We are unworthy to be in the presence of God, to approach Him in worship or prayer, or to physically receive the perfect Savior’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. We are well aware of our sins, our doubts, our fears, our selfishness, our faltering faith, and might fear approaching God’s presence altogether.

Yet the Servant of the Lord comes to serve us rather than destroy us. In our sin-bruised hearts and souls and lives, He does NOT break us off completely. In our dimly burning faith, He does NOT snuff us out completely, but welcomes us.

Dear Jesus, thank You for seeking and saving us by Your mercy and grace, establishing faith within us to welcome and receive You this Advent. Amen

December 19 by Rev Bruce Timm

Isaiah 49:1–13

And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified (Isaiah 49:3).

The Lord chose a particular and peculiar people to be His chosen people – the nation of Israel. The Lord is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel by the Lord after their wrestling match at Bethel, because he had **“striven with God and prevailed” (Gen 32:28).**

In the latter chapters of Isaiah (39-66), Israel is referred to as the Lord’s servant, doing the Lord’s work, such as bringing glory to the Lord, restoring Jacob and Israel, and bringing comfort and consolation to the sorrowful and delivering the afflicted.

As you read these latter chapters though you might be confused. Is Isaiah referring to the people of Israel or to a singular person? The answer is “yes.” God used His Old Testament people Israel (plural) for the purpose of delivering His Servant (singular) into the world. The saving work was done by Jesus, sometimes referred to as “Israel reduced to One.”

The Old Testament is like the 9 months of pregnancy. The people were waiting on the birth of the One who would save them. Moses and Isaac and Samuel and Isaiah and Jeremiah were all the Lord’s singular servants, born among His people, to give His name glory and proclaim His promises. They all point ahead to the One, called from the womb of Mary, with the sharp sword of the Word in His mouth to comfort us and have compassion on us.

O Lord, You chose Israel to be Your people through whom the world’s Savior would come. Grant us comfort and consolation in the singular saving work of Your Servant Jesus, that we may give glory to Your name. Amen.

December 20 by Rev Joshua Reber

Isaiah 52:7–10

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace (Isaiah 52:7).

Go tell it on the mountain! Jesus Christ is born! Those tiny feet lying in the manger are the most beautiful feet the world has ever known. Mary must've counted those toes over and over again.

Those feet are the feet that God promised long ago. He told the serpent, **“He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15)**. That baby lying in a manger would grow up and use those feet to bring good news everywhere.

He walked into the Temple at the age of 12, and everyone was astonished at this young publisher of peace. He walked into the Jordan River to be baptized after John the Baptist had prepared the way and made the way straight for His feet. He walked everywhere, with nowhere to lay His head, and the crowds followed Him, begging to touch Him.

Those feet would be anointed a couple times with expensive perfume (Luke 7, John 12). Judas would complain about such a lavish anointing of Jesus' feet, but when those feet would crush the serpent's head, is there anything too expensive to anoint Jesus with? “So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh; Come, peasant, king, to own Him!” Christmas is a great time to give gifts, and the best gift is publishing the good news that Jesus Christ is born. So go tell it on the mountain!

Jesus, thank You for humbling Yourself by becoming an infant born in a manger. Teach me that humility, and give me beautiful feet that bring good news. Amen.

December 21 by Rev David Steege

Isaiah 53:1–12

He was pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5).

Isaiah 53 stands at the very center of God's saving plan. The Child promised in Isaiah 9 and the Shepherd proclaimed in Isaiah 40 is now revealed as the Suffering Servant. Advent prepares us not only for Jesus' birth, but also for His cross. The cradle points to the cross; the manger points to the mercy-seat; the swaddling cloths point to the burial cloths He will leave behind.

Isaiah says that the Servant grows up like a root out of dry ground. He was nothing impressive or attractive. The world overlooks Him, despises Him, rejects Him. Yet hidden beneath His humility is God's mighty work: **"He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4)**. Every sin that breaks us, every wound we carry, every grief that weighs down our hearts—He takes them into Himself.

This is the astonishing truth of Advent: the coming King comes to suffer. The Lord comes to be crushed. The innocent One comes to be numbered with transgressors so that transgressors might be numbered with the righteous. And because He was wounded, you are healed. Because He made His soul an offering for guilt, your guilt is taken away. Because He was raised, He now justifies many, including you. As we wait for Christmas, we also wait for the day when the risen Servant will come again. The One who carried your sorrows then will wipe away your tears forever.

Lord Jesus, our Suffering Servant and our risen King, thank You for bearing our sins in Your body on the cross. Heal our wounds, strengthen our faith, and keep us steadfast as we await Your glorious return. Amen.

December 22 by Rev Joshua Reber

Ezekiel 34:11–24

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the LORD GOD (Ezekiel 34:15).

Gentle Mary laid her child, and that child was her little lamb who would make us as white as snow. One of the most compelling juxtapositions is that Jesus is pictured as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and as our Good Shepherd. John sees this in heaven. **“The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd” (Rev 7:17).**

Israel had bad shepherds. Bad kings. Bad priests. Bad leaders. They abused the sheep. They killed the sheep and took the proceeds. God had enough! He couldn't trust a sinful man to be the Good Shepherd. He Himself had to become the Good Shepherd, and the only way He could do that was by becoming one of the sheep.

We've got bad shepherds, and I mean bad leaders in society. Corrupt politicians. Businessmen who bribe their way to the top. Oftentimes pastors, who are called to feed the sheep, are exposed as being so sinful that not even the pagans would tolerate it.

God will have none of it! He will return again as our Good Shepherd, to wipe away every tear from our eye. Our Shepherd came once in a manger as Mary's Little Lamb, but He will soon come again in all His glory, and we will lie down in green pastures, world without end.

Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, give us faithful leaders who represent You until You return. Come quickly and give us peace. Amen.

December 23 by Rev Dr James Gimbel

Ezekiel 36:22–28

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes... (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

Approximately 42 days after conception, an ultrasound picks up the first flicker of a heartbeat. Over an 85-year lifespan, the average human heart will beat 3-3.3 *billion* times.

Pretty amazing for a heart of stone, at least until it is transplanted in the waters of Holy Baptism. One of today's greatest challenges is recognizing what original sin has done to our heart, making it *totally incapable* of beating for God – until the transplant. Even as a stone is dead, we are born spiritually dead.

In the waters of Holy Baptism, we are drowned and die ... the stone is removed and replaced by the living heart of faith. God's Spirit then animates a new life that desires to live and walk in God's will and way.

Why does God choose to love the heart of stone? Simply because it is His character. He does it for His name's sake, within the nature of God. Ezekiel says, **"Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name" (Ez 36:22).**

Dear Jesus, thank You for coming to make our essential heart surgery a reality through the waters of baptism, for giving us life in Your name. Amen.

December 24 by Rev Zach Hoffman

Isaiah 60:1–6

Arise, shine, for your light has come (Isaiah 60:1).

It rained the evening of December 23rd. The rain continued into the early morning hours of Christmas Eve and it woke me up at about 2 am. Truthfully, the rain did not wake me up so much as worry did. I laid awake in bed, because a terrible thought came to my mind.

I have not heard the sound of my sump pump in a while.

I was filled with paranoia, because we had basement floods in the past. I argued with myself about whether or not I should check on it, and I caved. A few minutes after 2 am on the morning of Christmas Eve, I was downstairs in the dark checking for wet carpet.

So much of life has us fumbling around in the dark. The darkness of the unknown. The darkness of uncertainty, or despair, depression, or the always-looming potential for disaster. These things can cause us to either lay down or clumsily try to struggle through the darkness that they bring.

But now, light has come. God has given us his Son, Jesus! In Him, we have light that no darkness can overcome. A light that we can see in our deepest gloom. Christ, the Light of the world, has shined upon you. Get up this day with full hearts, open eyes, and (hopefully) dry basements to worship Him who has called you out of darkness. Things are looking up!

Christ, Light of the world, cause the light of Your truth and grace to shine upon us. Amen.

December 25 by Rev Joshua Reber

Isaiah 61:1–11

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor (Isaiah 61:1, 2).

This is one of Jesus' first sermons. He came back to Nazareth, where He grew up, and read Isaiah 61 and said, **"Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21)**. They responded by trying to throw Him off a cliff. Let's responded differently to good news. Here's your opportunity - **"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law to redeem those under the Law" (Galatians 4:4)**

Christmas is the fullness of time. Isaiah 61 is fulfilled in your hearing. The year of the Lord's favor is probably a reference to the Year of Jubilee, something that was supposed to happen every 50 years in Israel where debts were forgiven and land was returned to the original landowner. The Year of Jubilee is never recorded as actually happening in the Old Testament, and that's because forgiveness is impossible without God taking on human flesh.

But now God has taken on human flesh. Now God has sent His Spirit to rest upon you! It's the fullness of time! Let's have a jubilee! Break out the cranberry sauce, sing Christmas carols, watch a movie. Do something materialistic because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The fullness of time means that God took on His creation to redeem His creation, and God is giving you the Kingdom, a better promised land.

Almighty God, grant that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the bondage of sin. In Jesus' name, Amen.