

# IOWA DISTRICT EAST DEVOTIONS



**ADVENT 2014**

## **2014 ADVENT DEVOTIONS**

*Iowa District East is pleased to provide these devotions for the season of Advent. These devotions were written by pastors in the Davenport Circuit.*

*These Devotions cover Monday through Saturday of each week in Advent, ending on Christmas Day.*

# MONDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 1, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Isaiah 64:1-4

*"Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down!"* - Isaiah 64:1

A year ago, a tornado tore through Washington, Illinois. As I write this, the Kansas City Royals just punched their ticket to the World Series by tearing apart their A.L. opponents, the A's, Tigers, and Orioles, 8-0!

Like Isaiah, we want God to powerfully tear apart the heavens and come down. After-all, His voice tore through the darkness to boom creation into being, parted the Red Sea's waters to save His people, and rocked Mt. Sinai to give us His Law. We want God to show His power today to tear apart His enemies and ours to tell the world, *"Be still, and know that I am God"* (Psalm 46:10). But God doesn't always operate that way.

*"My ways are not your ways,"* says the Lord, and His ways are always good, just, and right (Isaiah 55:8). We want Him to come as a powerful King, but He comes as the Babe of Bethlehem, as One who serves and gives His life as *"a ransom for many."*

In His Son, God parted the heavens to come down to us in love. Jesus' flesh was torn from His body as He suffered and died on a cross. He forgives us for tearing ourselves from His Heavenly Father and others by our sin. He tore the temple curtain so we can come to the Father in peace, directly through Him. Jesus tore apart death's power by rising to win us eternal life. Jesus is God's Way to come to us! What a Way!

**Prayer:** O Savior, rend the heavens wide; come down, come down with mighty stride; unlock the gates, the doors break down; unbar the way to heaven's crown (*O Savior Rend the Heavens Wide* - LSB 355:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Bob Bartel, pastor at Park View Lutheran Church in Eldridge, IA.*

# TUESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 2, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Isaiah 64:1-4

*"Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him."  
- Isaiah 64:4*

My eyes have seen jaw-dropping sunsets, Americans on the moon, open-heart surgery, the birth of my four children, and mind-boggling technology. My ears have heard the roar of an African lion in the wild, crashing ocean waves, and music of world-class musicians.

But by faith, my eyes and ears have seen and heard things more amazing – the acts of God on behalf of all who trust in Him, on us who wait on Him for His grace and mercy.

Only the God of the Old and New Testaments cares for, protects, and delivers those who trust in Him in ways that can be seen and heard. Oh, to have witnessed Him feeding Israel in the desert for 40 years, protecting Jerusalem from 185,000 Assyrian soldiers, saving Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from a fiery furnace, and reclaiming His repentant people from Babylonian exile.

God's acts, on behalf of His people, reach their climax in His Son, Jesus Christ, as He becomes human, destroys the devil's works, swallows up His Father's wrath against our sin on a cross, and rises to turn death's stench into the sweet smell of eternal life.

God's awesome acts on our behalf continue through what appear to be simple ways. Joining His Word of pardon to water and to bread and wine, God brings us out of unbelief's death and into faith's life. As we wait for His return, Jesus still acts to care for, protect, and deliver us from sin's guilt, evil's onslaughts, and death's grip. Come, Lord Jesus!

**Prayer:** Come, Thou precious Ransom, come, only hope for sinful mortals! Come, O Savior of the world! Open are to Thee all portals. Come, Thy beauty let us see; anxiously we wait for Thee (*Come Thou Precious Ransom, Come* - LSB 350:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Bob Bartel, pastor at Park View Lutheran Church in Eldridge, IA.*

Now Sing we, now rejoice, Now raise to heav'n our voice;  
He from whom joy streameth Poor in a manger lies;  
Not so brightly beameth The sun in yonder skies.  
Thou my savior art! Thou my Savior art!

Come from on high to me; I cannot rise to Thee.  
Cheer my wearied spirit, O puree and holy Chile;  
Through Thy grace and merit, Blest Jesus, Lord most mild,  
Draw me unto Thee! Draw me unto Thee!

Now through His Son doth shine The Father's grace divine.  
Death was reigning o'er us Through sin and vanity  
Till He opened for us A bright eternity,  
May we praise Him there! May we praise Him there!

Oh, where shall joy be found? Where but on heav'nly ground?  
Where the angels singing With all His saints unite,  
Sweetest praises brining In heav'nly joy and light.  
Oh, that we were there! Oh, that we were there!

*(Now Sing We, Now Rejoice, LSB 386)*

# CHRISTMAS DAY

December 25, 2014

**Today's Reading:** John 1:1-18

*"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." – John 1:17*

The Law condemns the best of us; the Gospel saves the worst of us.

On Mount Sinai, God proclaimed His Holy Law summarized by the commands: "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" and "love your neighbor as yourself." This Law, given through Moses, is relentless in its demands for our full obedience and perfection. It is relentless in its ability to show us our sin. Compare your thoughts, words, and deeds to other people who are more openly sinful than you and you may come out looking good. Contrast your behavior with the Ten Commandments and all stand accused. The Law condemns the best of us.

Thanks be to God that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. This is another way of saying that the mercy God shows us in Christ and His cross can be relied on. His steadfast love endures forever. No one living is so unlovable or so irredeemable that the blood of Christ cannot atone for their guilt. God knows your thoughts, words, and deeds, yet loves you anyway. The Word who was in the beginning, who made all things, who became flesh and made His dwelling among us has become the atoning sacrifice, not only for our sins but also for the sins of the whole world. The Gospel saves the worst of us.

"Born to you in the city of David, Christ the Lord."

**Prayer:** He came down to earth from heaven, Who is God and Lord of all, and His shelter was a stable, And His cradle was a stall; With the poor and mean and lowly Lived on earth our Savior holy. (*Once in Royal David's City*, LSB 376:2).

*This devotion was written by Reverend David Anderson, pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

# WEDNESDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 3, 2014

**Today's Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

*"You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." – 1 Corinthians 1:7*

Are you wondering how many gifts you'll receive this Christmas? What will you do with them once they're unwrapped?

The apostle Paul thanked God for blessing the Corinthian congregation with many spiritual gifts. Today's reading says they were especially gifted in "speech" and "knowledge." One would likely hear eloquently crafted sermons preached in this church. Inspiring stories and talk of heavenly visions would have captivated the hearer's imagination.

The problem in Corinth, however, was that all of these gifts went to their heads. The Christians became so puffed up by their knowledge that they looked down on others. Instead of using their gifts to build up their brothers and sisters in Christ, they ended up dividing the congregation. Boasting in their brilliance, they lost sight of the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Instead of pointing others to Jesus, they pointed to themselves.

Gifts are meant to be shared, especially the greatest gift of all – our Lord Jesus Christ, who has saved you by His grace. As you celebrate once again His birth and await His glorious return on the Last Day, may all your gifts point others to Christ.

**Prayer:** Come, then, O Lord Jesus, From our sins release us. Keep our hearts believing, That we, grace receiving, Ever may confess You, Till in heav'n we bless You (*Once He Came in Blessing*, LSB 333:4).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Peter Hoft, pastor at Park View Lutheran Church in Eldridge, IA.*

# THURSDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 4, 2014

**Today's Reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

*"[He] will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."  
– 1 Corinthians 1:8*

The season of Advent reminds you to be ready. It's not so much about being ready for a house full of party guests or a Christmas tree surrounded by presents. It's about being ready for the day of our Lord Jesus Christ – the day when He returns in glory and judgment.

A careful inventory of your life would show that you are not ready to face the Judge. You see your sin. You're guilty and the thought of appearing before the judgment seat of God anytime soon frightens you. If only you had just a little more time to repent and make things right again! Perhaps, then, you might be ready.

God's Word, however, teaches that no amount of human work or tearful sorrow will ever make you ready. Only Jesus' finished work on the cross prepares you to meet your Maker. Jesus shed His blood, sweat, and tears for your forgiveness. Through faith in His righteousness you are declared, "Not guilty." And He will sustain you to the end. Through the promise of your Baptism and the nourishment of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, God is faithful. With joy, get ready to meet Your Savior!

**Prayer:** O Lord, how shall I meet You, How welcome You aright? Your people long to greet You, My hope, my heart's delight! O kindle, Lord most holy, Your lamp within my breast To do in spirit lowly All that may please You best. (*O Lord, How Shall I Meet You*, LSB 334:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Peter Hoft, pastor at Park View Lutheran Church in Eldridge, IA.*

# CHRISTMAS EVE

December 24, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Luke 2:1-20

*"And she gave birth to her firstborn son..." Luke 2:7a*

Christmas Eve, "The most wonderful night of the year!" Why is it a very special night for you? For most of us it is a night of memories; memories which go back to early childhood. The weeks of anticipation, the compiling of "wish lists," and the family gatherings are some of these pleasant memories. But, if Jesus is not our main Christmas focus, our future would indeed be sad, for we would be forever lost.

"There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins" (Eccl. 7:20). That is why God sent His only-begotten Son to be our Savior. That is why Jesus was born in Bethlehem. That is why He shed His blood for us on Calvary's cross. That is why He rose again on Easter Sunday; that our sins have been paid for and that we might know for certain that He has conquered death for us. This is our "wish list."

Yes, the Virgin Mary gave birth to her firstborn son who is Jesus our Savior. Mary was willing to be the Mother of our Lord even though she would suffer much because of this. Let us on this holy night rejoice with God's people everywhere and with the holy angels. Christ, our Savior is born!

**Prayer:** My heart for very joy must leap; My lips no more can silence keep. I, too, must sing with joyful tongue that sweetest ancient cradlesong. Amen (*From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*, LSB 358:14).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Gib Mueller, Emeriti Pastor assisting at Trinity Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## TUESDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

December 23, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Luke 1:26-38

*"For nothing will be impossible with God."* – Luke 1:37

When reading the story of the visit by the angel Gabriel to Mary, it is easy to focus on the angel, or on Mary and what they talked about in that visit.

But buried in the postscript of the story - that Mary's relative, Elizabeth, was also pregnant - are these words, "For nothing will be impossible with God."

Back at the beginning of time, everything was perfect. Then Eve and Adam rejected God's command. They gave in to the temptation to be like God. They ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; sin and death came into the world. All through the Old Testament we are reminded of God's promise to restore the brokenness made by Adam and Eve. Now, the Redeemer for that first sin, and all sin, was about to arrive.

Mary received the words that she is to be the mother of Jesus. She recognized her assignment as God's plan to rescue the fallen world. The baby conceived in her womb is true God and true man. He would obey the commands of His Father then sacrifice himself for all of mankind. By His death and resurrection all sin is forgiven.

No matter what troubles you today God has resolved it. "For nothing will be impossible with God."

**Prayer:** Savior of the nations, come, Virgin's Son, make here Your home! Marvel now, O heav'n and earth, That the Lord chose such a birth. (*Savior of the Nations, Come*, LSB 332:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Merle Warnsholz, pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## FRIDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 5, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Mark 11:1-10

Jesus finally made it to Jerusalem, the place where He knew He was destined to die. Many believed He would immediately set up His kingdom. In anticipation, they provided for Him a king's greeting. But the story was anticlimactic. This king's triumphal entry would end with His looking around the temple, crying, and leaving for nearby Bethany.

We don't know if anyone other than Jesus' mother had any recollection of Him riding on a donkey some thirty-three years earlier. At the end of this donkey ride, however, Jesus would allow Himself (Yes, allow!) to be stripped of His royal robe, crowned with thorns, and nailed to a cross. Why? So that by His death and resurrection, you receive triumphal entry into the Kingdom of Grace.

This King will come again. Perhaps tonight. Perhaps 1,000 years from now. When that final Advent occurs, the visible gates of heaven will swing wide open to all believers of all time. The faithful will physically join their voices, in a heavenly choir, singing lyrics never before uttered. They (you) will literally understand what the shepherds came to know when their silence, that starry night, was shattered by God's glory.

**Prayer:** Prepare the royal highway; the King of kings is near! Let every hill and valley, a level road appear! Then greet the King of glory foretold in sacred story: Hosanna to the Lord, for He fulfills God's Word (*Prepare the Royal Highway*, LSB 343:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Keith Piotter, pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Bettendorf, IA.*

## SATURDAY OF THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

December 6, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Mark 11:1-10

Jesus knows about donkeys. He knew, as He prepared to enter Jerusalem, there would be a colt tied in a certain place. He knew, when He sent some disciples to retrieve the colt, its owner would object. He knew, if the disciples told the owner He needed and would return the colt, the owner would comply. Jesus further knew the colt, having never been ridden, would not buck Him off. Who else could possibly know even the details of a donkey's day? None other than the Son of God.

Jesus knew shouts of "Hosanna!" would turn to shouts of "Crucify!" and three days later to shouts of "Halleluiah, He is risen!" Since Jesus knew all that - His suffering, death, and resurrection - it means that every other promise God has ever made in His Word is true as well!

Who else could possibly know even the details of your every day? Jesus knows you do not deserve to have Him as your King. Nevertheless, He allowed Himself to be crucified in your place to pay the high cost of our salvation. Who else can possibly say, by virtue of His unconditional grace and immeasurable love, "*Never will I leave you or forsake you?*" None other than the Son of God!

**Prayer:** Lift up your heads, you everlasting doors, and weep no more! O Zion's daughter sing, to greet your coming King; now wave the victor's palm, and sing the ancient Psalm: "Lift up your heads, you everlasting gates!" Your King awaits! (*Lift Up Your Heads, You Everlasting Doors,* LSB 339:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Keith Piotter, pastor of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Bettendorf, IA.*

## MONDAY OF THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

December 22, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Romans 16:25-27

*"Now to Him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed..."*

- Romans 16:25b-26a

Today, in homes around our nation, there are children looking under beds, into closets, and the dark recesses of unfinished basements. What are they doing? What are they looking for? They are trying to uncover the mystery of what they will find under the Christmas tree in just a few days! But why do they look so intently?

The answer is that while we love mystery, our need to know is even greater. Our Heavenly Father knows us perfectly. He has allowed His people of earlier centuries to experience mystery even as He has led all history to the times when His glory was revealed: in the manger, at the cross, and one final, future time at His Second Advent!

While we wait for that day, let us not forget that the Apostle Paul's Spirit-inspired letter to the Romans is also God's Word to you and me. The apostle was entrusted with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and he faithfully shared it and preached it. Because the apostles went out to the ends of the earth with the Good News of the Kingdom of God, what was once mystery is no secret today! God took upon Himself our flesh in the birth of Jesus Christ. By His Word and Sacrament, we see the mystery revealed now and forevermore. Then our response is like that of Johann Sebastian Bach: "S.D.G." And what does this mean?

***"To God Alone the Glory."***

**Prayer:** All who confess Christ's holy name, Give God the praise and glory. Let all who know His power proclaim Aloud the wondrous story. Cast every idol from its throne, For God is God, and He alone: To God all praise and glory! Amen (*Sing Praise to God, the Highest Good,* LSB 819:5).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Michael Vokt, pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## SATURDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 20, 2014

**Today's Reading:** John 1:6-8, 19-28

*"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him."*  
– John 1:6-7

Parents of infants and young children understand the importance of preparation, and not just for themselves. They must make sure their children are properly dressed, fed, diapered, and everything else that goes into a typical day. Gone are the days of convenience! The children, however, are well worth the extra time and effort.

John also lived in a time of joy and responsibility. The long-awaited Savior had come – what better time to rejoice? Yet for John, it was also a burden. He lived what seemed to be a lonely existence in the wilderness without the blessings of civilization. He endured the criticisms of Jewish leaders and spent his last days in prison before being executed. In spite of it all, he had a calling - a responsibility from God - to prepare people for Jesus, and he fulfilled that calling.

We, too, have a calling from God to love our neighbor and share the good news of Jesus with them. Inconvenient? At times, yes. Joyous? Always. We have a Savior who, because of the joy set before Him, left heaven to join us and give us life through the cross and the grave. It is His life and His joy that motivates us to prepare the world to receive Him in His coming.

**Prayer:** Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, Born to set Thy people free; From our fears and sins release us; Let us find our rest in Thee. Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art, Dear desire of ev'ry nation, Joy of ev'ry longing heart. (*Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*, LSB 338:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Tim Eckert, pastor of Word of God Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## MONDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 8, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Isaiah 40:1-11

*"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."* – Isaiah 40:1-2

All human beings need comfort. A newborn baby cries out to be nursed by her mother. An elderly man in a hospital bed grips his dear wife's hand as he dies. From the beginning of life to its end, we long for the comfort of loving family members and friends.

But there is another comfort we need even more. We need God's comfort for consciences broken by sin. When God's holy Law convicts our hearts we need more than just a gentle pat on the head. Shallow words like "There, there, it'll be okay," or "Cheer up! It'll get better," won't do. We need to hear God's sure and certain voice say, "Though your sins are many, they are forgiven. Though you have suffered much, your warfare is ended."

Your heavenly Father tenderly speaks these words to you today because of His Son, Jesus Christ. The babe of Bethlehem was born to pardon your iniquity. The One who suffered on the cross defeated sin, death, and Satan for you. And to make sure this word of forgiveness rings true in your ear, the Lord says it twice, "Comfort, comfort ye My people."

**Prayer:** Comfort, comfort ye My people, Speak ye peace," thus saith our God; "Comfort those who sit in darkness, Mourning 'neath their sorrows' load. Speak ye to Jerusalem Of the peace that waits for them; Tell her that her sins I cover And her warfare now is over. (*Comfort, Comfort Ye My People*, LSB 347:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Peter Hoft, pastor at Park View Lutheran Church in Eldridge, IA.*

## TUESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 9, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Isaiah 40:1-11

*"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."  
– Isaiah 40:8*

In Israel a scorching east wind can turn a lush, green countryside brown and lifeless within 48 hours. In a similar way, the breath of the Lord has the power to wilt us fragile people. As much as we try to preserve ourselves with wrinkle creams or plastic surgery, the effects of our sin take a toll on our bodies and we eventually wither and die.

God's Word, however, lasts forever. The Old and New Testament Scriptures have withstood the test of time because they are inspired—breathed out by the Holy Spirit. When they are opened we are introduced to Jesus, "the Word made flesh." All who hear this Word and believe in His name have eternal life. Therefore, with King David we can confidently say, *"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay."* (Psalm 16)

No wonder Martin Luther called the Bible "the cradle of Christ." This Advent let us not put our hopes in things that fade away such as physical beauty or strength. Let us open the Scriptures, put our trust in the Christ Child, and stand firm on His eternal Word.

**Prayer:** Not by human flesh and blood, By the Spirit of our God, Was the Word of God made flesh- Woman's offspring, pure and fresh. (*Savior of the Nations, Come*, LSB 332:2).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Peter Hoft, pastor at Park View Lutheran Church in Eldridge, IA.*

## FRIDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 19, 2014

**Today's Reading:** John 1:6-8, 19-28

*So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." – John 1:22-23*

Christmas always requires a lot of preparation – decorating the tree and the house, preparing food, making wish lists, shopping, and planning gatherings. Thankfully, there are a multitude of services and stores willing to help us by providing everything we could want. Online shopping and catered meals ease the burden of our preparation.

Against that backdrop of our worldly preparations comes John. John was not the party type, didn't require much variety in his food, and probably wasn't much interested in a new set of clothes. Instead of worldly trappings, it is his message that captures our attention: "Make straight the way of the Lord!"

John directs us to see the coming Lord who made His way into our lives in baptism. The celebrations of the season can have their place, but they are no substitute for Christ. The lights on the tree are no match for the Light of the world. Christmas cookies, as good as they are, are nothing compared with the Bread of Life. When Christ is in focus, the things of this world fall into their proper place. Let the preparations for the season remind you of the greater preparation of repentance and faith in our coming Savior.

**Prayer:** On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry Announces that the Lord is nigh, Awake and hearken, for He brings Glad tidings of the King of kings! (*On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry*, LSB 344:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Tim Eckert, pastor of Word of God Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 18, 2014

**Today's Reading:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

*"Do not despise prophecies, but test everything."* – 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21

Teachers have a difficult job. They are given the responsibility to instruct, encourage, motivate and inspire a classroom of students, each of whom is unique and different in their background, their experience, and in the way they learn best. On top of that, they are asked to test each student to determine their level of knowledge in a particular subject.

One of the tools a teacher uses to score the exam is an answer key. When a student turns in a test, the teacher compares the student's answer to the answer key. That will inform the teacher right away if the student's answer is correct or incorrect. What a helpful tool! If only we had an "answer key" for the really difficult questions in life!

We do! The Bible is our "answer key" (absolute truth and authority) for life! It is the standard by which we can measure the truth of any doctrine or teaching. We do not need to wonder whether a particular teaching is true or not, simply compare it to the answer key of God's inerrant Word, and we will be able to test everything as 1 Thessalonians instructs us to do.

The noble Bereans did this in the book of Acts. When they heard the preaching of Paul the Bereans, "received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

The attitude of the Bereans is ours as well: using God's Word as our standard for truth. In God's Law we see God's holy commands, which convict us of our sins. In the Gospel, we see the promised Savior who came to earth to save us from the consequences of sin. As the angel told Joseph, "You will call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

**Prayer:** For lo, the days have come to pass, by prophets seen of old, when down into the circling years, came Christ as was foretold. His word of peace shall to the earth, God's ancient promise bring, and all who take this gift will hear, the song the angels sing. (*It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, LSB 366:4).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Kurt Larson, pastor of Risen Christ Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## WEDNESDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 10, 2014

**Today's Reading:** 2 Peter 3:8-14

*"The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise."* – 2 Peter 3:9

It has been nearly two thousand years. Two thousand years since Jesus told us that He would be coming in glory to judge the living and the dead. Two *thousand* years since He promised us that He would be returning to redeem us from this present evil age!

It is embarrassing, really. For two thousand years the Church has been warning the sinful world around her to repent, for the end is drawing nigh. And where is this end of which we warn? It has been delayed year after year, century after century, millennium after millennium. The Christians of St. Paul's day believed their deliverance to be right around the corner. Luther was convinced that Jesus would come in his lifetime to destroy the kingdom of Antichrist. Walther firmly believed that he was living in the last years of this declining world. As we look around us and behold the wickedness that daily increases in our sinful age, it is difficult for us to imagine that Jesus' return could be that far off. But still He delays, and the world laughs at our foolish trust in a Savior who remains hidden.

But His delay has a purpose. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise," St. Peter tells us, "but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." Jesus has delayed His coming for your sake. If He had come when Luther expected Him, five centuries of Christians yet unborn would not have come to salvation. And His delay now is for the sake of those elect whom He has yet to draw to Himself. Yet we still pray Him to hasten His coming, which He will accomplish on that day and at that hour set by His Father. God grant us patience and endurance until that blessed event.

**Prayer:** O Jesus Christ, do not delay, But hasten our salvation; We often tremble on our way In fear and tribulation. O hear and grant our fervent plea: Come, mighty Judge, and set us free From death and ev'ry evil. (*The Day Is Surely Drawing Near*, LSB 508:7).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Christopher Neuendorf, pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## THURSDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 11, 2014

**Today's Reading:** 2 Peter 3:8–14

*"The day of the Lord will come like a thief." – 2 Peter 3:10*

The delay in our Lord's coming leads not only to the longing of our spirits, but also to the security of our flesh. It is tempting to look back over the last however many years of our lives and remember all those times when we entertained sinful thoughts and carried out sinful deeds; yet no divine judgment swept down from heaven upon us. It is tempting to think: "I transgressed God's Law and there were no bolts of lightning, no peals of thunder, no trumpet blasts announcing the coming of His Son to judgment. Surely it won't happen this time, either."

But there is no deadlier delusion of the devil. The Son of God is coming on clouds of glory to execute judgment, and that right swiftly! How will He find us when He does return? Will we be drunk with this world's allurements, living as if the promises of this life take precedence over the promises of the life to come? Or will He find us ready, waiting, prepared through faith in His Son to receive Him with joy on the day of His appearing?

He will come as a thief. Yes, we have the signs—signs that we have been witnessing for two thousand years, signs that have ever reminded us of the imminence of His judgment. But we are to live every moment of every day as if His coming could be at that instant. Because it could! And through faith in Christ, wrought by the Holy Spirit through constant immersion in His Word and holy Sacraments, we will be found prepared.

**Prayer:** The Bridegroom soon will call us, "Come to the wedding feast." May slumber not befall us Nor watchfulness decrease. May all our lamps be burning With oil enough and more That we, with Him returning, May find an open door! (*The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us*, LSB 514:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Christopher Neuendorf, pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## WEDNESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 17, 2014

**Today's Reading:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

*"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus." – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Many people are curious when it comes to the will of God. They want to know, "What is God's will for my life?" Usually, by that question, they mean: "What career path should I choose?" or "Where should I live?" The Bible describes the plain will of God for His children in 1 Thessalonians 5. God's will for you is to:

### **Rejoice Always**

The world rejoices only when things go well for them, when they have a good day at work or when their favorite football team wins. You can rejoice always because the source of your joy is not in your earthly circumstances, but the promises of salvation which belong to you in Christ.

### **Pray Without Ceasing**

The world prays only as a last resort, if at all. You, a baptized child of God, see prayer as more than just an emergency 911 call, but as a constant lifeline of communication with your Father in heaven. What a privilege to bring your needs and the needs of your neighbor before the Lord in prayer!

### **Give Thanks in All Circumstances**

Notice that word, "all." That's the difficult one isn't it? It's easy to give thanks when everything in your life is going well, but God's will is that you give thanks in *all* circumstances. Even in difficult times, you have a reason to give thanks: God sent His Son into this world so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life! This is more than reason enough to spend your life rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks to God!

**Prayer:** From heav'n above to earth I come, to bear good news to every home; glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will say and sing. (*From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*, LSB 358:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Kurt Larson, pastor of Risen Christ Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 16, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Isaiah 61:8-11

*"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation."* - Isaiah 61:10

Right now there are many children preparing for their Christmas programs at church or at one of our many gifted Lutheran schools. Those days of preparation and anticipation were always so exciting to me. I remember one year where I regularly put on my costume and practiced my lines just so that I felt like the star that I would be on that blessed night. I would shine with all the brightness of God's glory and bear witness to the traveling magi, the shepherds, and the angels as I narrated the Christmas story as the Star of Bethlehem. Oh, but what a greater glory and brighter star there is.

I still rejoice with this child-like excitement as I watch my children growing up and learning the joyous works of our Savior. In all the preparations of the season – the lights, the decorating, the meals, the parties, the programs, and the presents – it is easy to revel in the glow of all that excitement. In all the activities, it is easy to think that we are the star of the season and the central fixture of these days of anticipation and preparation.

I remember the dress rehearsal for that wonderful Christmas program so many years ago, but I especially remember the words of my pastor. While we had worked so hard to make the program great, it was not for our own glory, because the star of the season is really the child who comes to us in the manger. This is who I rejoice in throughout Advent. It is this Savior that I make preparations for because it is He who clothes me with garments of salvation! It is He who will come again with narration, "welcome home."

**Prayer:** Creator of the stars of night, Thy people's everlasting Light: O Christ, Redeemer, save us all And here Thy servants when they call. (*Creator of the Stars of Night*, LSB 351:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Steve Henderson, pastor at Risen Christ Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## FRIDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 12, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Mark 1:1-8

*"The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."* - Mark 1:1

Today, we find ourselves right in the middle of Advent. So, I have a question for you, how is your stress level today? We all know the stress that can come with this time of year. Our focus can be pulled so many different directions. Have I finished my Christmas shopping yet? Have I finished preparations for the Children's Christmas program, or my staff office party?

It is why I entreat you today to stop, take a deep breath, and focus on these words in Mark. They are the words Mark is inspired to write at the very beginning of his gospel that we might know the Gospel's clear focus. It is all about Jesus, the Son of God.

The same goes for Advent. We can get so stressed over all the traditions that come with Advent, yet to truly observe the intention of this season, only one thing is needed. That is to take some quiet time in worship, devotion, and prayer to Jesus. Let Him refocus you on what is most important this season: the good news of His coming. Also, that He is coming again for His bride the church, to take us to heaven where stress will be no more.

**Prayer:** *Once He came in blessing, All our sins redressing: Came in likeness lowly, Son of God most holy; Bore the cross to save us; Hope and freedom gave us. (Once He Came in Blessing, LSB 333:1).*

*This devotion was written by Reverend Christopher Lockie, pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## SATURDAY OF THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

December 13, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Mark 1:1-8

*"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins." – Mark 1:4-5*

Yesterday, you were asked about your stress level these days. Today, I ask you whether your stress has led to some sin. We all know how it can go. You get frustrated with the slowness of the store clerk because you are in a hurry. Then you think some unholy thoughts about them. You're tired and stressed so you bark at someone in the family or turn to some bad habits to help you cope.

It is where the cry of John the Baptist in Mark 1 still cries out to us today. It is the cry that called the people of John's day to repentance. John is calling the people to turn from their sin and guilt, confess their sins to God, and then offer them a place to receive forgiveness for their sins in baptism.

God works the same way today. When we sin, we have a place to go. By God's Grace we can go to Christ to confess our sins, asking for His forgiveness for all those times, and you can know they are forgiven as Christ says to you in the words of Holy Absolution: YOU ARE FORGIVEN!

**Prayer:** Arise, O Christian people! Prepare yourselves today; Prepare to greet the Savior, Who takes your sins away. To us by grace alone The truth and light were given; The promised Lord from heaven To all the world is shown. (*Arise, O Christian People*, LSB 354:1).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Christopher Lockie, pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*

## MONDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 15, 2014

**Today's Reading:** Isaiah 61:1-4

*"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me." - Isaiah 61:1*

In Advent, my prayers often turn toward remembrance. I will spend time looking back over the year and all that God has faithfully led me and my family through. What does your year look like in review? Do you see "The Spirit of the Lord God" upon you? Now if I shared with you the truth of my life, I would have to confess that I do not always see it. In fact, over the past year, I see something very different. I see people hurt, relationships battered, marriages severed, and lives ended. It is often bleak and cold, like many of our long Midwest winters. It leaves me in the ash heap of sorrow for my sins which bring about hurt and batter my relationships. It leaves me mourning over the deep cuts of selfishness that have slashed at my marriage, repeatedly, seeking to sever it.

Yet Isaiah tells not of how God's Spirit is upon me (though indeed it is), but he tells of the Anointed One who would come to restore hope in the midst of a bleak winter of sin. He speaks of the Messiah who would come to proclaim the Lord's favor, release the prisoners, announce freedom for captives, and bind up the brokenhearted! He tells of Jesus Christ who changes everything – even our recollections of hurt and sin – into an anointing through His Word with hope. This restores our gladness so that we sing His praises all the more.

Throughout Advent we see the hope that is ours in this Anointed one – this Messiah, this Jesus – who makes us stand amid the trials of this world as "oaks of righteousness." This righteousness is not from our actions but from the one whom God has sent to reveal His favor! This is why we can remember and enjoy His presence yesterday, today, and forever. This is why we know we have the hope of salvation, because "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me."

**Prayer:** Yet nights will bring their sadness and rob our hearts of peace, and sin in all its madness Around us may increase. But now one Star is beaming Whose rays have pierced the night: God comes for our redeeming From sin's oppressive might. (*The Night Will Soon Be Ending*, LSB 337:4).

*This devotion was written by Reverend Steve Henderson, pastor at Risen Christ Lutheran Church in Davenport, IA.*