

Preparing For His Coming

An Advent Devotional



By
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Preface

Who was Nils Jakob Laache? “He was a Norwegian revivalist, writer, and bishop. He was born in 1831 in Ullensaker, Norway. He received his theology degree in 1858 and became a priest in 1863. For the next 20 years, he served as pastor, revivalist preacher and local politician in Steinkjer, Eidanger, and Arendal. In 1883, he was appointed as the bishop of Trondhjems stift, a post which he held until his death in 1892. He was also the editor of the Christian magazine For Fattig og Riig. He was decorated Knight of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav in 1885.” Source: Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nils_Jacob_Laache)

This Devotional is taken from his book: *Book of Family Prayer, with Bible Lessons with Meditations for each Day, Arranged after the Church Year*. A copy of the original may be downloaded from:

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A new translation of the entire book was made by Mark DeGarmeaux (Translation Copyright © 2000 by Mark DeGarmeaux) and is available from:

Bethany Lutheran College http://bookstore.blc.edu/laache-39-s-book-of-family-prayer/product_info.php/products_id/697

May the Lord richly bless your Advent Devotions, is our prayer for you, as you absorb this historical Lutheran Devotional rich in Godly thought and sound Doctrine.

In Christ Jesus our Lord,
Pr. Robbie Osmundson

A Short Liturgy for Devotions

- In the Name of the Father, and the + Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen. (You may cross yourself in remembrance of your Baptism)
- Opening prayer (beginning of devotion) followed by prayer in one's own words.
- Reading of the Lesson
- Short prayer (given in the daily devotions) followed by prayer in one's own words, the Lord's Prayer
- Benediction: The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. (May use you instead of thee)
- Hymn (given in devotional – may be either sung or read)

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1. First Sunday in Advent (Morning)

God, be gracious unto us, bless us, and make thy face to shine upon us. Amen.

Gospel Lesson, Matthew 21:1-9 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying. Tell e the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting: upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest!

Jesus Christ is the king of the church. He governs it with meekness and justice, and defends it with divine omnipotence. Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, who took our sin upon himself, who died for us on the cross, and bought us with his blood; he is our king. What a wealth of joy and comfort there is in this truth! In the heart of every Christian is the prayer: Lord Jesus, rule thou over us. Thou, and none other, shall own my heart. Do thou protect us; thou alone art our sun and our shield, and we will have none other beside thee. Then the words which we hear today, "rejoice exceedingly, daughter of Zion; behold, thy King, the Lord Jesus, cometh unto thee," nothing more glorious could be said to us on the first day of the church year; it is the best possible answer to the prayer of the Christian heart. He is the king of the church. No enemy, then, however strong, shall prevail against it. No matter how threatening the outlook may seem, the church shall obtain the victory and be saved. With eternal fidelity he keeps watch over his bride, who has been bought with a price; and in his omnipotence he is able to defend her against the most terrific assaults on the part of all the hosts of hell. Beyond question the church will soon be called on to face great tribulation all manner of lying attacks by false spirits, and bitter persecution on the part of the world. Let all who belong to the army of the Lord put on the true armor of the Spirit ; but let none lose hope! Christ reigns in the very midst of his enemies, and his church is victorious even while the world rejoices over her destruction. He is the Lord of the church by reason of his rule in the hearts of his own; and they, only, whose hearts he governs are of his people. But he is, in very truth, the king of your heart, you poor sinner, who believe in him and put your trust in him alone. Truly, he is the king of your heart; you are his, and he is yours ; do not let the devil persuade you to the contrary. Have faith in the kingly name of Jesus, and trust in the power of his love. Give yourself wholly to him; you can do it by the grace which he bestows; and he will direct your mind and your conduct, protect you, and lead you in the path of righteousness. Serve him willingly, obey him always, praise his name, extend his kingdom. You are blessed, and shall be a blessing. All things in him, by him, and for him. In this church year you shall again, with all the saints, experience that he is the same faithful and mighty Savior that he always was. He shall keep you in the state of grace, strengthen your faith, increase your charity, purify your soul in tribulations, and give you victory over the flesh, the world, and the devil. Beware of trusting in your own, or of doubting his strength. You are

baptized unto Christ, you hear his voice, you eat his body and blood, you live and breathe in his saving grace and love; he knows you, and he has you in his eye and in his hand day and night. He is meek, and bears with our infirmity; just, and does away with our sin.

Praise be to thee. Lord Jesus, who didst make us thy people Give us grace to believe in thee with our whole heart, to serve thee in all that we do, and thus to work with all our might for the extension of thy kingdom on earth. Let this year be a blessed one for us, and for all who are thine. This is our most earnest prayer; thou wilt hear it, and thus fulfill thy promises. Amen.

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.
Let every creature rise and bring
Peculiar honors to our King;
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud Amen.

2. First Sunday in Advent. (Evening)

Lord Jesus, give us grace to hear the rousing call of thy word! Amen

Epistle Lesson, Romans 13:11-14 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

It is now high time to awake out of sleep; the Sun of righteousness is risen upon us; Christ is come to us with life out of death. None shall have occasion to say: "I must yet lie, yet sleep; night broods over us, the darkness will not permit me to rise." No; the glorious day of grace is come; the acceptable year of liberty is here. Christ wakes us, and lets the light of his countenance shine into our eyes. Through the words of the gospel he is in our very midst, lying in the manger, hanging on the cross; eternal mercy, justice, and life proceed from him. In our baptism he is present as the very same Savior that is being baptized in the Jordan, fulfils all righteousness, dies for us, rises for us, and lives for us. In the Holy Supper I receive his very self; he, who is the resurrection and the life, abides in me, and I in him. O ye Christians, will ye sleep, and thus turn this glorious day of life into an awful night of death? God forbid! However, there is here yet more which should wake us up. Our salvation is now nearer than when we believed. The hours are flying fast, and soon we shall be at the end. Now Christ comes in the means of grace; but soon he shall come in the clouds, in the glory of his Father. How will ye then stand before him, ye sleepy Christians? Awake, therefore, and be vigilant hereafter! Let this new church year become a new life. Cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light. Arm yourselves, for a fight is to be faced Enter into the

holiness and love of Jesus Christ, into the luster and purity of his being! Let the heart be wholly and entirely his! No lukewarm-ness and sloth, no cowardly shrinking from the fight! Self-denial and vigilance while the struggle continues; faithfulness to the end! Eyes fixed on the crown of life, and victory through him who loved us.

Wake us, faithful Lord Jesus. Wake them that are spiritually dead, that they may repent. Lord, wake them, that they may not dream themselves into everlasting death. Wake thy believers, and give us zeal, courage, and hopefulness in the fight. Let our sanctification increase, and our progress be manifest in all things. Give us faithfulness unto the end, and give us the crown of life. Amen.

Assist my soul, too apt to stray,
A stricter watch to keep;
And should I e'er forget thy way.
Restore thy wandering sheep.
Make me to walk in thy commands;
'Tis a delightful road;
Nor let my head, or heart, or hands.
Offend against my God.

3. Monday after First Sunday in Advent

Try me. O God. Examine my heart, and find whether or not I am of the truth. Amen

Psalm 24. *A Psalm of David.* The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein: For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up. ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.

David wrote this psalm for the occasion when the ark of the covenant was removed up on Zion, whereby the King of glory himself went up thither; for the ark and the mercy seat were the throne of the Lord in Israel. This king of glory is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who comes to us full of grace and truth, and enters into Zion, the Christian church, through his holy gospel. He is Lord of all the world; he has dominion over the mighty billows of the deep, and the hosts of heaven obey his commands. The prince of our salvation is the Lord Zebaoth. The gates of the world open themselves to him, and he marches onward with victory over death and hell. Who shall ascend into his hill? Who has communion with the Holy One? Answer: - The children of Jacob, the true believers, none others; not such as are Christians in name only, not mere Sunday saints, but only sincere, true, and honest souls. Is it possible that Jesus Christ could be a king for hypocrites and liars, for heartless, cold, unclean men, or for proud, self-satisfied, self-righteous minds? Can such as these be the people of the Holy One? O,

that ye would hear! Let none delude himself. But neither let any lose heart who sees his sin with sorrow and pain. The wretched who are willing to be saved receive righteousness from the king of glory himself, and are made pure. He who in sincerity confesses his sin and longs for holiness will in no wise be cast out. It is for such that God has built his Zion, and of such he fashions unto himself his holy and glorious people.

Try me. O God. and examine my heart, and find whether or not I am of the truth. Thou knowest how prone I am to delude myself. Preserve me from this danger, and give me an upright heart. Thou knowest that this is my sincere prayer. Let me in truth be of thy people. Amen.

To him shall endless prayer be made.
And endless praises crown his head:
His name, like sweet perfume, shall rise
With every morning sacrifice.
People and realms of even, - tongue
Dwell on his love with grateful song:
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on his name.

4. Tuesday after First Sunday in Advent

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Amen.

Ephesians 1:17-23. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

Our Lord Jesus is greater and more mighty than all the angelic hosts, together with all powers above and below. The spiritual and unseen forces, the hosts of heaven, and the powers of the deep, and the might of death, mock all the wisdom and power of the world; but our Lord Jesus is greater. He vanquished and disarmed, yea even destroyed, death, and seated himself at the right hand of God the Father, a Lord of all things and over all on high and in the deep. But this his kingly power he uses for our salvation, namely in creating and preserving faith in our hearts, and making us partakers of his life. The new birth and the sanctification of a man are effects of this exceeding great power of God in the resurrection of Christ. May his Spirit of wisdom reveal this to us, and open our eyes, that we may know the greatness and the certainty of our salvation. It is the eternal God with his sovereign power who dwells in the Christian church. The power which is greater than that of the creation ; the power which vanquished the prince

of death; the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, - this power it is which the Spirit of God has given within you, Christian believer; and thereby he has turned you from death to life, and preserves you therein. The Spirit and life of Christ is in you ; the church is his body, and he its head. "And he must protect, preserve, advance, bless, and glorify himself in his own. He continually relives his life, and reveals all the mysteries of his redemption, in his body, the church. He suffers in its persecuted, troubled, needy and sick members; as the meek, lowly, loving, and obedient one, he sighs and prays in them; in eternal and divine power he continually arises from the dead anew in his church. Blessed be the king, the bridegroom of the church, the prince of life! In him our salvation is not uncertain; he lives, and we shall live.

Lord Jesus, dost thou know me, also, as one of thine? Is my faith in thee a true and living faith? With all who are of my household I earnestly ask of thee this grace unspeakable. Praise be to the Lord; he has attended to the voice of my supplications. Amen.

The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now; A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow. The highest place that heaven affords
Is his by sovereign right: The King of kings and Lord of lords,
And heaven's eternal Light.

5. Wednesday after First Sunday in Advent

Lord, give us thy word in our hearts, for we are thine; and do thou save us. Amen.

Psalm 72:1-8. *A Psalm for Solomon.* Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear thee as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

Solomon is a type of Christ, and his kingdom of peace is a type of the Christian church. In this psalm God's people pray, that the kingdom of Christ may come; and they sing of the splendors of this kingdom, its extension and its eternal duration. Christ is the righteous king who secures justice to the poor and needy, but breaks in pieces the oppressor. Them that love sin and live in unrighteousness he rejects and condemns, but he saves those that submit themselves to the law of God and seek his help against sin. He will surely save the needy who cry to him, and the poor who have none to help them. Admit that God is true in his judgments; acknowledge the justice of the correction administered by his law; but, at the same time, credit him with speaking truth in his gospel, also, concerning the obedience and atonement of the Son of God for you; then are you righteous and enjoy the peace of grace. The Prince of peace acquits you of everything brought to your charge; and you shall live with him, and reign with him. Faith

is the one thing on which all depends. It is in faith that Christ is known. Exercise yourself in the faith; do not allow yourself to be led astray by your conceited reason, or by your own views and feelings. As God lives, the man who gives hearty assent to his word is just and accepted in his sight. The proud children of the world, who resist the purpose and righteousness of God, hope to destroy the dominion of this king; but his throne stands, and he shall sit thereon until the sun and moon are no more. The kingdoms of gold and silver and copper and iron shall pass away, but the kingdom of peace is without end. Neither shall any be able to prevent its extension. Our heavenly Solomon shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. How good and glorious a truth this is! With holy joy and fear we accept it, and see all kings fall down before him and all nations serve him.

Lord Jesus, give us humble and believing hearts, so that in all our trouble and strife on earth we may taste thy precious peace. God, give the king thy judgments and thy righteousness unto the king's son. Save thy people and bless thine inheritance; provide for them, and exalt them for evermore. Amen.

Dear Refuge of my weary soul, On thee, when sorrows rise,
On thee, when waves of trouble roll. My fainting hope relies.
To thee I tell each rising grief. For thou alone canst heal;
Thy Word can bring a sweet relief For every pain I feel.

6. Thursday after First Sunday in Advent.

Keep us, Lord, in thy tabernacle, hide us in thy pavilion. Amen.

Psalm 48. *A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah.* Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge. For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah. We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple. According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of earth; thy right hand is full of righteousness. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.

The earthly Jerusalem typifies, as it were, the church of Christ and this psalm recites the splendor of the church. The Lord is in his Zion; the great, eternal God is in the midst of his Christian people. He who is the first and the last and the living, who was dead and is alive for evermore, who has the keys of hell and death, he is in the midst of the seven candlesticks, in the midst of the church, with the sevenfold gifts of his Spirit. This is the glory of the church, that the Lord himself is in it, that it is the city of the Lord of hosts. For this reason are all its enemies put to shame, while its children are victorious over death and hell. We who are baptized and believe in Jesus dwell together on that Mount

Zion which is established forever; we abide within the walls of the city of God, where mercy and righteousness reign, where death and the devil are shut out, and with them all evil, so that bliss and life only are found therein. For our communion is with the Father and the Son in the Holy Ghost. We still have, to be sure, much sin and frailty, but we have full forgiveness of sin every day Satan throws the darts of temptation against us and often wounds us, but we are continually healed by the blood of Jesus, and we walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. Outside of God's church the devil rules, and all who dwell there are the children of death. Over us in Zion, in the community of true believers, Christ is king, and all his people are the children of life. Our removal from the church on earth to that in heaven shall in no wise harm us. For the same God is our God for evermore, and he will be our safe guide even unto death. This is truth. The word of God teaches it. We believe it and train ourselves always in this faith. We do not see it, neither do we feel it in such manner, that we make this feeling our reliance. But the word of God does not lie, in this word we trust. O, that we might have firm faith in the blessed truth of the word! Then shall we more and more know by experience, that all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ.

We remember thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple, and praise thee that thou so graciously dost save us. Keep us with thee and gather unto thyself the multitudes of thy redeemed from all the ends of the earth. Amen.

Ye nations round the earth, rejoice Before the Lord, your sovereign King;
Serve him with cheerful heart and voice. With all your tongues his glory sing.
The Lord is God, 'tis he alone Doth life and breath and being give;
We are his work, and not our own, The sheep that on his pastures live.

7. Friday after First Sunday in Advent.

Lord, let thy word enter into and quicken our hearts. Amen.

Romans 5:17-21. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

By the fall of Adam death became of force and should have ruled over us all, even though we had no further transgressed the law of God. The offence of one was the offence of all. But the like rule obtains also in regard to Christ and his righteousness; to accept this righteousness is to come into possession of the sovereign power of life. There one here one. - The offence of one, the offence of all; the righteousness of one, the righteousness of all. By his obedience alone, not by his and ours; by his life, his victory, his fulfillment of the law, without the aid of any work of ours, are we saved. He alone has bruised the serpent's head; the high-priest alone entered in with the sacrifice

for the sins of the world ; David alone slew Goliath; there was none with our Lord when he trod the wine-press of wrath. Furthermore, the obedience of one does not save from the one fall, only, in which we fell in Adam ; many other offences have been added to the offence of Adam, but no other saving obedience has been superadded to the one. The law works transgressions, and thereby offences have become many. But by the obedience of Christ alone atonement has been made for every offence, so that there is no room for any other atoning obedience in addition to this. Sin abounds in the world; hence the terrible rule of death; but in the kingdom of Christ we have the glorious reign of grace through his righteousness. The unbelievers are the slaves of sin, but all the people of Christ are free. They are not as yet sinless; they feel their guilt with pain, and they could not stand before the judgment of God's holy law; but in Christ they are under grace, not under the law. Than these words nothing can be more beautiful: "As sin has reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord." Blessed be Christ!

May this gospel be painted before our eyes throughout our whole life and in our last hour. Grant us this, thou Holy Spirit, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Blest is the man, forever blest, Whose guilt is pardoned by his God,
Whose sins with sorrow are confessed. And covered with his Savior's blood.
Blest is the man, to whom the Lord Imputes not his iniquities.
He pleads no merit of reward, And not on works, but grace relies.

8. Saturday after First Sunday in Advent.

Lord Jesus, let thy words of peace and grace force their way into our hearts. Amen.

Revelations 1:4-7. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Behold he Cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus himself has redeemed us with his own blood, so that Satan has no right to hold us captive in sin. The kingdom which Christ founded by his death and resurrection is the kingdom of grace and peace ; all who belong to it are kings and priests. The grace of the triune God rests upon them and reigns in them, and the Spirit sanctifies them by the blood of Jesus. In baptism right and access to this kingdom were granted us, and we have entered into it by faith. Therefore we dare to say with Saint Paul: "*Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is' he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*" We are, to be sure, weak in ourselves, but we are strong in him by faith; for we believe that we, baptized unto Christ, who died and arose from the dead

for us, are dead from sin by his death, and quickened with him by his resurrection; and while we believe this, it is ours in very truth, so that we live and reign with him and have free access to the Father. Sin continues still to oppress us, but we dare to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Christ and come before the very throne of God, and we receive forgiveness and strength to win the victory. Make use of your kingly power, dear Christian, and of your priestly privilege for the good of yourself and the brethren. Come forward into the light always ; confess your sin honestly before the Lord, and pray earnestly for mercy; then shall nothing condemn you, nothing rob you of your peace, and no sin rule over you. Even though you may, at times, feel so weak both in faith and life that you seem certain to succumb at last; yet, for the sake of the blood of Jesus, this shall not come to pass.

Let thy Spirit, O God, the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, keep us vigilant and pure. Amen.

O for a faith that will not shrink, Though pressed by every foe;
That will not tremble on the brink Of any earthly woe!
That will not murmur nor complain Beneath the chastening rod;
But, in the hour of grief or pain, Will lean upon its God.

9. Second Sunday in Advent (Morning)

Lord, let thy word rouse us and keep us awake. Amen.

Gospel Lesson, Luke 21:25-36. And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

Many forget entirely that a judgment day is coming, and none remembers it with such vividness of thought and feeling as the gravity of the subject demands. Time flies, and every second brings us nearer to the judgment. Beware lest you forget this. Even though the many who are of the earth forget it, do not you forget it, Christian believer! Indeed, in your innermost heart you long for the second coming of the Lord. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." The children of the world refuse to believe this, but the event will put their wisdom to shame. They dream that there is no day of doom, the while they sail straight toward the judgment seat of the

Lord and stand in the midst of death, the entrance gate to the place of judgment. Yes, the Lord, has said that he will come again, and he will keep his promise. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away. Rejoice, ye Christians, for soon shall the Son of Man be revealed, the Glorious One, who loves you and whom ye love. Begin now to lift up your heads, for your redemption draws nigh. No terrible judge is he who cites you to appear before him; he is the Son of Man with the stripes and scars in his transfigured body. When you see the sign of the cross you shall know him and be of good cheer, while the proud and valiant men of the world shake with fear, and their hearts fail them in despair. Himself has said that whosoever believes in him shall not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life. Watch, however; watch! It is but a little while. Away with the cares of the world; away with the lusts of the flesh; away with all sleepiness and sloth! Watch, stand steadfast in the Lord, be manly, be strong. Do not let the mists of unbelief confuse you. Do not let the countless lusts of the flesh master you. Stand with loins girt about and with lights burning. Watch, for Jesus' sake; watch!

Lord Jesus, do thou help us always to watch and pray. Faithful Savior, preserve my soul and man me with firm resolve to abide in thee, in order that I may be found watching when thou comest, and that with the elect I may be a guest at thy wedding feast. Amen.

That day of wrath, that dreadful day. When heaven and earth shall pass away,
What power shall be the sinner's stay? How shall he meet that dreadful day?
When, shriveling like a parched scroll, The flaming heavens together roll,
When louder yet, and yet more dread, Resounds the trump that wakes the dead:
Oh! on that day, that wrathful day, When man to judgment wakes from clay,
Be thou, O Christ, the sinner's stay. Though heaven and earth shall pass away.

10. Second Sunday in Advent. (Evening)

Lord, give us devout hearts. Amen.

Epistle Lesson, Romans 15:4-9. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written. For this cause will I confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

The human family has been torn asunder, hearts have been divided, and the world is full of strife. From Babel the peoples go their several ways; and since the time of the patriarchs the people of Israel have kept their independent course like a current through the sea, without assimilating with the others. But that which sin separated and which the wisdom of God long kept asunder, his mercy has again united. Jesus is become the Savior of all peoples. He has fulfilled the law, and he became the suffering servant whom the scriptures promise to the Jews as a redeemer. But he died for us gentiles also, so that the prophecies of the prophets concerning salvation by the mercy of God are fulfilled in him. Satan, the spirit of discord, the prince of death, shall rule no more. As yet we see, to be sure, only the beginning of the union of Jews and gentiles in one fold;

there is yet much division in the Christian church; we still suffer sorely by reason of the cunning and power of the enemy. O, if Israel would but know its Savior, how much of added life and power would not be given to the Lord's people! How strong would the church be, were there not, alas, so many parties among the believing children of God ! It would capture the world and would soon attain to the perfect estate of glory. Nevertheless, we shall surely conquer through patience and comfort of the scriptures. The Lord, who bears Jews and gentiles in one heart and has redeemed both with one blood, will continue to unite the believing Jews and gentiles into one people. Or, shall not the prophecies be fulfilled which, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, promise a blessed unity of all who are saved? If the promise concerning the service to be rendered by the Son of God for both Jew and gentile has been fulfilled, shall not the promise concerning their union as one blessed people be fulfilled also? The word of God must come true. Our own hearts, also, tell us that we have communion with all the saints of all peoples ; even now we live the life of love together in spite of all that divides us; we pray together before the throne; we sing the same song of praise; we labor in the same spirit; we are joined together by one life; - all of which points to the same glorious end as do the words of the Lord wherein he promises to gather all his own where there shall be one fold and one shepherd.

Lord Jesus, bless this church year; unite thy believers; give the Jews repentance; gather unto thyself the fullness of the gentiles; let thy love constrain us, that we receive one another, even as thou hast received us to the glory of God. Amen.

Sing praise to God who reigns above, The God of all creation,
The God of power, the God of love. The God of our salvation.
With healing balm my soul he fills. And every pain and sorrow stills:
To God all praise and glory! The angel host, O King of kings,
Thy praise forever telling. In earth and sky all living things
Beneath thy shadow dwelling. Adore the wisdom which could span,
And power which formed creation's plan: To God all praise and glory!

11. Monday after Second Sunday in Advent.

Lord, stir our hearts to hear thy word. Amen.

Isaiah 13:9-13. Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it. For the stars of heaven, and the constellations thereof, shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.

It is the doom of Babylon which is described by the prophet in these appalling words; but such judgments on particular peoples are earnest of the judgment on the world, and hence this is also a description of the last day. The day of the Lord will be a glorious one for God's people, but terrible for his enemies. The brave shall then become

cowards. Now they hold the head high, but then they shall cringe with fear. You shall find no man among them on that day, though you offer gold in exchange for him. The sun disappears, the stars are blotted out; travail lays hold of the hearts of men, so that their faces are now flushed with shame, now blanched with fear. See, how the eyes of the proud are cast down, how they stand confounded, with what despair they gaze at one another! They mocked at pain and boasted of their courage; now they groan like a woman in labor, and call to the mountains, "fall on us," and to the hills, "hide us from the anger of the Lamb." The unbelievers mock, saying: "What is become of his advent? We have heard of it so long, but it is no nearer than before." Thus spoke also the men of the time of Noah, until the flood came and swept them all away. In like manner also the people of Sodom, until fire and brimstone rained from heaven; and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, until the flames rolled and their own blood ran in torrents through their city. You, then, who are the Lord's believers and know that all things shall pass away, what should your attitude be? In holy living and godliness, you should look for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Heaven and earth, as they now are, shall dissolve and pass away but, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, be diligent that ye may be found in peace, without spot, and blameless in his sight; account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; for he wants the number of his saints to be full.

God, give us the spirit of thy fear and keep us awake, so that we may meet thee with joy. Let that day become for us a day of glorious redemption. Amen.

My soul, be on thy guard; Ten thousand foes arise;
And hosts of sin are pressing hard To draw thee from the skies.
O watch, and fight, and pray! The battle ne'er give o'er;
Renew it boldly every day, And help divine implore.

12. Tuesday after Second Sunday in Advent.

Lord Jesus, grant that we may hear thy word and live. Amen.

Matthew 25:1-13. Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made. Behold, the bridegroom Cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise. Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying. Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying. Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

What shall it profit us to be called believers, if we be not such in fact? Or what gain is there in our having, at one time, been living Christians, if we do not remain steadfast to the end? What good purpose is served by having lamps, if we have no oil in the vessel? External works that give us the appearance of being true believers, so that we may mix with these and regard ourselves and be regarded by others as good Christians; this sort of godliness which is not in truth the life of the Spirit in the heart, will, alas, prove a sad delusion at the last. By the oil in the vessel is meant the Spirit and life in the heart, the true life of faith and love; out of this proceeds the true light in deeds and conversation. Take heed that your fear of God be not an empty lamp. Do you in fact have the life of grace in your soul? Is it out of this, from within, that your deeds of piety proceed? Do you live in the Lord, and is his love in you? Does your heart beat with such tenderness for him, that you hasten to meet him with longing and joy when the cry is made: "*Behold, the bridegroom cometh*"? Is this your innermost thought: Lord Jesus, come quickly; thou, thou art he for whom I am looking and longing; my whole heart is thine in life and death; thou art my only own now and for evermore? Even the wise virgins are affected in some measure by the drowsy breath of the times, and they slumber; but they are known herein, that, when their rest is disturbed, their hearts are with Jesus. He is their life, and his love is in truth the soul in all their deeds.

Lord Jesus, we earnestly beseech thee, that we may be among the wise virgins; suffer us never to fall into that sleep which is spiritual death. Make us whole and true in the faith; let it burn in our heart and be the light of our life until the end. Amen.

Rise, my soul, to watch and pray, From thy sleep awake thee,
Lest at last the evil day Suddenly o'ertake thee:
For the foe, well we know, Oft his harvest reapeth.
While the Christian sleepeth.

13. Wednesday after Second Sunday in Advent.

Lord, teach us thy word, and lift us to zeal; in the light which it gives. Amen.

Matthew 25:31-46. When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them. Verily I say unto you. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying. Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or a thirst, or a

stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying. Verily I say unto you. Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Christ and his judgment seat separate us into two divisions. That which decides the eternal fate of each individual is the relation in which he has placed himself to Christ in this life. All who with humble hearts and true faith live in him and do good, shall stand acquitted over yonder and enter into the joy of their Lord. But those who have led a worldly life without Christ, whether it be in outward piety or in open wickedness, must depart into everlasting fire. Those who are saved inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world; they inherit it as the children of God in Christ; they have not themselves earned it by their works; they pretend to no merit of their own. When have we done any good to thee, our Lord? They served him unceasingly, but their left hand knew not what their right hand did. The fact, that they were able to do good, was pure grace; how, then, can it be their merit? And rewards them. It is he who does good in us, yet regards it as though we had done it of ourselves. The saints depend on his grace alone; there is, indeed, nothing else which has saved and does save them. They are imperfect in all their works, and deserve nothing but punishment ; but the Lord disregards their imperfection, and he finds in them only glorious deeds. He sees, that what they have done, down to the most insignificant act, has been done for him, and he permits nothing thereof to lose its reward. On the other hand we hear the blind, self-righteous spirit ask: When have we seen thee and not served thee? This is an impious question. Woe be to us, if we are so blind that, knowing neither ourselves nor the grace of God, we pride ourselves on having done well before the Lord! Woe be to us, if he alone is not our righteousness and our life, so that we serve him by doing good to his needy members on earth. O, that these words might cut through our very marrow and bones: "*These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*"

Holy and righteous God, who of thy mercy didst become the Son of Man, in order that we might have in thee a merciful judge grant that we may live our life here on earth in true faith and charity, and that we may stand with all who are thine at thy right hand on the day of thy glory. Amen.

Great God, what do I see and hear! The end of things created!
The Judge of mankind doth appear, On clouds of glory seated;
The trumpet sounds; the graves restore The dead which they contained before;
Prepare, my soul, to meet him. The dead in Christ shall first arise,
At the last trumpet's sounding. Caught up to meet him in the skies.
With joy their Lord surrounding; No gloomy fears their souls dismay;
His presence sheds eternal day On those prepared to meet him.

14. Thursday after Second Sunday in Advent.

Lord, give us grace to keep thy word in our hearts. Amen.

Revelations 3:7-13. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth;

and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

It behooves the church of God to be patient and remain steadfast through poverty and tribulation a little while, then shall it receive the crown. The church must keep the word of Christ's patience; that is, it must practice patience and conquer by his word. It must submit to contempt, scorn, and oppression on the part of the wise and mighty of the world, it must suffer without complaining, bear anguish and sorrow, and find support in the word which teaches us, that such is to be the portion of God's people here on earth, especially in these latter days. Though we have but little strength, the power of the Word is great ; the faithfulness of the Lord will enable us to keep the truth and thereby vanquish all its opponents. "*Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.*" Through the trials of the latter days the church shall be made worthy of the crown of victory. The cross is the Christians' coat-of-arms; the effeminate shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Man thy soul with courage, Zion; be undaunted in the strife ; be undaunted always, looking forward to the crown of life. Though the enemy be mighty, life is but a fleeting breath; let thy heart be stout, O Zion, and be faithful unto death.

Faithful Lord Jesus, thou knowest that we can do nothing of ourselves; give us grace that we may confess thee and be willing to suffer for thy name's sake. Grant us patience; keep our eyes directed toward the crown, so that we never may grow faint of heart, but thank and bless thee in our tribulations while life endures. Amen.

Who will but let himself be guided
Of God alone, in all his ways.
Shall strength receive, be well provided. And safely led through evil days;
Who trusts in God's unchanging love. Builds on the Rock that naught can move.
Think not, when in the stress of trial, That God hath cast thee off unheard.
That he whose hopes meet no denial Must surely be of God preferred;
God never will forsake in need The heart that trusts in him indeed.

15. Friday after Second Sunday in Advent.

Lord, help us in the time of our adversity by the power of thy word. Amen.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; so that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure; which is a manifest token of

the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled, rest with us; when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall he punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The saints of God are purified through much suffering. The dross of sin in them is purged away by fire, the flesh is mortified, the lusts die, the soul is drawn toward heaven, their love is increased, their patience is trained. Then they learn to thank God for his grace in all things and to sing heavenly songs of praise to him in the midst of the dark prison. Such glory cannot be attained without suffering. Accept as the cross of the Lord all trouble that may befall you; then it also is, in truth, the cross of Christ. In other words, suffer as a Christian, bow to the will of God, accept chastisement from the Most High ; then shall selfishness, stubbornness, the cares and the lusts, die. Then will God make you worthy of his call, and perfect his image in you. Thus is his name glorified in us, and thus are we glorified in him, even in this world. How full of grace is the path of suffering! Yet we shun it instead of loving it Especially, however, do our sufferings prepare us for the blessed estate in the future life, and to meet him when he comes with his mighty angels on that great day. Then it shall be seen, that our tribulations have not harmed us, but that they have, on the contrary, sanctified, purified and transfigured us. When the ungodly are consumed by the advent of Christ, then shall our glory shine in full luster. The angels shall marvel and adore the Lord; new depths of Ins wisdom are opened to them and to us. We, who had fallen so low and were in such wretched case, are become so unspeakably glorious. Thereby the Lord receives his new name; forever new it is reflected from us; in this wise we have it written in our foreheads. His name Jesus shines with a splendor forever new throughout all eternity. Every knee bows to him, and all the saints praise him with new tongues. Then is our time of tribulation gone by, and the eternal wedding days are come.

We are willing to suffer. Lord Jesus; but still, do thou help us thereto. Give us grace so to bear our sufferings, that thy name may be honored here and yonder. Amen.

Nearer, my God, to thee. Nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee, Nearer to thee.

16. Saturday after Second Sunday in Advent.

Lord, wake us and keep us alive by thy Spirit and word. Amen.

Malachi 4:1-6. For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, said the Lord of hosts. Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Should not the word concerning the day of the Lord wake us, make us humble, yea, even crush us and make us sincerely contrite of heart? When the Lord through Jonah spoke of doom and destruction to the people of Nineveh, it caused them to put on sackcloth and ashes, for they received the word. Whosoever believes the word of God concerning the return of the Lord, bows the head in acknowledgment of sin, and is afear'd and seeks grace. The ungodly despise the word; therefore they feel so secure, and haste without fear toward destruction. There is no tack of warning from the merciful God. Even as he sent Elijah to the apostate Israelites and chastised them with the fiery tongue of the prophet and with hunger and the sword ; and as he sent the Baptist to the Israelites of a later day and by his powerful exhortation to repentance shook Jerusalem and all Judæa; in like manner he continues to send new witnesses who cry out, calling people to repentance, and start spiritual movements in this place and that ; while unbelief is compelled to show its poverty, as was the case with the Baal-cult in the time of Ahab. And during the time yet to come he shall give his witnesses great power before the peoples and the tribes, (Rev. 11). All in vain! The many will continue in fancied security in their sins and will not repent. Therefore the day of doom must become a burning oven and burn them up, leaving them neither root nor branch. For they alone who have been born again and are holy can stand before him that cometh. Christian soul; live in repentance day by day unto the last. Never feel too secure, be not puffed up, but walk in holy fear, and with David become all the time less worthy in your own eyes. You have learned to lay all your sins on Jesus and have found healing under his wings; never desert your first love. By the light of the Spirit you shall see yourself more and more clearly and feel more deeply your need of grace; neither shall there be any want of the trials necessary to your daily revival and your humiliation; you also shall be led with the Lord from the judgment hall along the path of pain to Calvary still, push your way deeper into the fellowship of his suffering and deeper into the salvation of grace. The way leads to the Ascension hill, and soon you shall with unclouded eye see that sun which gladdens all the saints with eternal gladness, but sends the horrors of death through all who are puffed up.

Lord Jesus, give us god-fearing and humble hearts, and prepare our souls by thy grace, that we may await with joy the coming of thy day and be accepted of thee. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, do not delay, O hasten our salvation!

We often tremble on our way In fear and tribulation.
Then hear us when we cry to thee; Come, mighty Judge, come,
make us free From every evil. Amen!

17. Third Sunday in Advent. (Morning)

Lord, give us grace, that we may understand thy word and believe in thee. Amen.

Gospel Lesson. Matthew 11:2-10. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. And, as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written. Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

Jesus, the son of God and of Mary, who was born in Bethlehem, is in truth the Christ, and there in no other king and redeemer of our souls. Neither do we want any other; we need none other, for he is that perfect savior who helps us out of every trouble. In him the prophecies of the prophets concerning the Messiah have been fulfilled to the letter. He is become the least, and is the greatest; the poorest, and the richest; the most despised, but the most glorious. He enters into our nature, but transfigures it into godlike glory; he dies, but death has no part in him; he is the living one in all eternity. Here is Abel and his innocent blood, shed by a brother's hand; here are the wisdom, sale, imprisonment, and the royal splendor of Joseph here are the high-priest, the lamb, and the blood which is carried into the sanctuary; here is Samuel with his triple office; here is David in his humiliation and then in his glory ; here is Solomon, the prince of peace, who builds the temple of the Lord, here is the son of the virgin, of whom Isaiah spake, the child which is the eternal wonderful God; here is the suffering and dying, but again living servant of the Lord, written of in the 53rd chapter of that prophet; the hunted hart of the 22nd psalm of David; here are all the Scriptures. The eyes of the blind are opened and the ears of the deaf are unstopped; the lame man leaps as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sings with joy. The year of jubilee is come, the prisoners of death are set free. John, whom prophecy calls Elijah, goes before and prepares the way the greatest of all the prophets is the herald of him who became the least of all. We also experience on ourselves that Jesus is the true Savior. He has opened our eyes, so that we see our sin and know his merit, which takes it away. We see the death in ourselves, but know the life which vanquishes death, and feel the victory of love in our hearts. We hear the music of heaven in the gospel, and the spirit within us answers amen. We feel the cleansing grace of the blood of Jesus and the victorious power of his life in our hearts, so that we taste the peace of God, love our enemies, bear our sufferings, and give thanks for the daily cross. Will you say that this is not the work of the true Savior? We, who of ourselves can only be offended because of his suffering, still love this crucified form with love unspeakable, a thousand times more than all else in the world.

We are tempted, and we sin; but we fly to him, and we find in his wounds our city of refuge; we are victorious over sin and death; they can not touch us at the horns of the altar.

Blessed be the Lord Jesus, who came to the world and became our Savior; who comes to us and saves us; who shall come and set us free. Dear Lord, man us with firm faith when we fight our last battle with the devil in the agony of death. Amen.

Let the earth now praise the Lord, Who hath truly kept his word, And
the sinner's help and friend Now at last to us doth send.
What the fathers most desired. What the prophet's heart inspired. What
they longed for many a year, Stands fulfilled in glory here.

18. Third Sunday in Advent. (Evening)

Lord, make us thy faithful servants. Amen.

Epistle Lesson, 1Corinthians 4:1-5. Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

John the Baptist was the servant and steward of Christ, and so are also all the legitimate and true preachers of the word of God; they are appointed of the Lord to administer his mysteries of the gospel. All who have been properly called to the office of the ministry are to be accounted servants of Christ, who have received the office from him and administer it in his stead. In themselves the ministers of the Word are only erring men, but their office exalts them, and the Lord makes them strong in their testimony concerning the truth. A servant of the Lord must go through many a conflict; the flesh is all the time weak and would like to be clothed in soft raiment. If he is a man of talent and has marked success in his work, he is tempted to fall into the sin of pride and vanity; if he is less richly endowed, or if his labor seems to have no visible results, he is prone to lose heart and sink into apathy. The Baptist calls himself the voice of Christ, and Paul says concerning himself: "I am nothing." This is the spirit which is necessary, in order that a man may remain faithful. Faithfulness is the one important requirement. The judgment of the Lord concerning us is of moment, but the judgment of men is not. The eye of God is true, while the eye of man is often deceived by mere outward appearances. On that day, when every man's work shall be revealed by fire, much of what is regarded as gold will prove to be nothing but gilded hay and stubble. The Lord demands of us faithfulness, not brilliant exploits; diligence in the use of the talent entrusted to us, not splendid proofs of genius or of great talents. How beautiful are not those little flowers in the garden of God, which, instead of boastfully showing forth their loveliness, hide themselves beneath the others, but which can neither escape the eye of Heaven nor keep back their wealth of strong and sweet odors. Many an

obscure country pastor and lowly teacher shall shine more brightly over yonder than famous bishops and scholars. Sincere love and genuine faithfulness count for more, than do any and all great talents.

Assist us by your prayers for us, ye believers, and by obedience to the word which we bring you from the Lord; in order that we may give account of our stewardship with joy, and not with grief. And do thou, Lord Jesus, help us by the light and power of thy Holy Spirit; give to us thy love, that we may serve thee with gladness and be in truth faithful stewards of the wonderful riches of thy house. Amen.

O pour thy Spirit from on high! Lord, thine appointed servants bless;
Thy promised power to each supply. And clothe thy priests with righteousness.
And, when their work is finished here. Let them in hope their charge
resign; Before the throne with joy appear, And there with endless glory shine.

19. Monday after Third Sunday in Advent.

Lord, may our soul preserve thy glorious testimony. Amen.

Isaiah 35. The wilderness, and the solitary place, shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing; the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons where each lay, shall be grass, with reeds and rushes. And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there: but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

What this beautiful chapter prophesies concerning the glory of the church of Christ and the riches of God's grace to believers began to be fulfilled by the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. How many faint hearts have not become courageous, how many thirsty souls have not drunk of the water of life in the Word and the sacraments! How many blind, deaf, lame, and dumb have not been healed by Jesus! How many simple Christians have not heard the warning, "this is the way which thou shalt go," when they were on the point of going astray to the right or to- the left; and who shall number the redeemed who have already come home to the eternal dwelling places of joy in Zion? The words of Isaiah do not sound as though spoken concerning things to come, but as though he saw them already fulfilled ; and such prophecies add strength to our faith. O, how true and how strong and safe to lean upon is the word of God. However, these sublime words have not as yet been completely fulfilled. Time shall be,

when the parched people of God shall blossom, rejoice unspeakably, and possess the glory of the Lord, the excellency of our God without measure and limit; when the first heaven and earth have passed away and the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. Here our hearts easily grow faint and our hands weak, here there is yet evil every day and hour; but these things shall be done away with forever, when God himself shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more sin, nor sorrow, nor death. Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then we shall see face to face. We shall hear the heavenly harps, we shall sing a new song, and we shall drink without hindrance of the river of water proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. We are yet in danger. Brethren, here it is needful always to watch and pray that we fall not into temptation. But then, there is no more danger; everlasting joy shall be upon our heads; yea, we shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away from us. These sayings are faithful and true; the Lord hath spoken them.

Thou comest to us in our misery. Lord Jesus, for the purpose of bringing us into glory; blessed be thy name. Do thou lead us through the wilderness; thou art the fount of life and makest the desert become for us a meadow full of springs of water. Anoint our eyes that we may see thee, open our ears that we may hear thy voice, precious Savior. Do thou speak into our souls: Be strong and fear not. Hold us fast to thee and do not release thy hold on us, thou strong, faithful God. Amen.

Awake, my soul, in joyful lays, And sing thy great Redeemer's praise;
He justly claims a song from me, His loving-kindness, oh, how free!
He saw me ruined in the fall. Yet loved me notwithstanding all; He saved
me from my lost estate. His loving-kindness, oh, how great!

20. Tuesday after Third Sunday in Advent.

Lord, let thy tender mercies come unto us, thy salvation according to thy word. Amen.

Isaiah 61:1-3. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

In the 25th chapter of Leviticus the Lord ordains that every fiftieth year in Israel was to be a year of jubilee. Then all debts were to be cancelled, every man was to have his possessions returned to him, and all bondmen who were of the children of Israel were to become free. In the kingdom of Christ all our sins are forgiven us, so that no one in this kingdom has guilt and doom hanging over his head. No bondmen are there; all are freeborn, born of God. They are no longer in the prison of the fear of death; neither are they the slaves of Satan, compelled to do his will and walk in sin; for by baptism they have entered into the covenant of a good conscience toward God by the resurrection of

Jesus Christ. This is the glorious message of the gospel which Christ has brought us, and which he announces to the world through his servants. Hear this, all ye mourners in Zion: in the church of Christ, of which you became a member by your baptism, to which you earnestly desire to belong, and to which you thus do, in fact, belong, in the church of Christ, in which you live, the Lord has established the law, that sin is forgiven, so that nothing can condemn you. This is the covenant of God with us: I will forgive your iniquity, and I will remember your sin no more (Jer. 31, 34). Jesus has taken your sin upon himself and paid its wages. Will you not give him at least this reward, that you believe his message of pardon, and rejoice? He asks no more; do not, then, let this much be denied him. He came and established this kingdom and instituted this gospel by his blood. He appointed unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. He will ground you in his righteousness, that you may have your root in the perfect obedience of the Son of God and be able to stand against all the storms of Satan. In yourself you are utterly lost, sold under sin and made the prisoner of death; but in Christ you have liberty and life, righteousness and salvation. This is no dream, no idle words, but truth as certain and sure as God himself. All heavens answer: Amen.

Lord Jesus, we can hardly believe thy glad tidings, but do thou help us. It is a good thing for us that thou dost not break the bruised reed and dost not quench the smoking flax. We thank thee for thy great mercy ; do thou help us to believe. Give us the light of the Spirit and grace to believe in thee. Amen.

Enter his gates with songs of joy, With praises to his courts repair; And
make it your 'divine employ To pay your thanks and honors there.
The Lord is good, the Lord is kind; Great is his grace, his mercy sure;
And all the race of man shall find His truth from age to age endure.

21. Wednesday after Third Sunday in Advent.

Lord, establish our ways in thy word. Amen.

2 Timothy 1:6-12. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us. and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Even as John the Baptist saw the near approach of death, when, from the prison, he sent his disciples to Jesus, so did Paul know that his dissolution was at hand when he wrote this epistle to Timothy but he meets death with triumphant confidence. Christ has

brought us great things, and how happy are we who live in his church! O, that the Spirit might, in this church year, stir up anew the gift of God which is given us! Let our faith become healthy and strong, let our love become ardent, and let us willingly and gladly endure hardship with God's people. Boldly confess your Savior; himself will give you the necessary spirit and grace. Indeed, he has given you them already in your baptism; the spirit of power and love is yours, if you will but make use of it; and if you do this, the fire in your soul will be fanned into flame. The secret is this, that you are not a servant, but a child in God's household. Do good without ceasing, the fountain of love and power will not run dry; your heavenly father has riches without limit. Or are not we also saved and called with an holy calling? Did not Christ die, and does he not live for us? Are we not baptized unto him, do we not hear his gospel and partake of his Holy Supper? Shall we save ourselves anew by our own works, though we are saved already by the grace of God in Christ? Let us not by unbelief abolish what God has done, deny what God has said, and despise our heavenly calling. The death in our flesh, which treatens to palsy us, has been vanquished by our baptism unto the death and resurrection of Christ for we are united with him in his death and in his victory over death we are members of the Savior who died and is alive for evermore. Therefore the devil has no power over us and must not be permitted to subdue our courage. Hear how Paul speaks: "*Christ hath abolished death, abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*" But what Paul has that we also have, in the measure which we need in order to conquer the flesh and defy the devil when he tries to make us fearful and faint-hearted. You, also, Christian brother, know whom you have believed, and know that it is safe to build on him. Have you not entrusted yourself to him with your heart, your life, your all? Have you not placed your soul and salvation in his hand? I know that my Redeemer liveth; I know that it was not I, but he, who chose me, saved me, and called me; and that it is not I, but he, who keeps me; and I know of a certainty that nor devil nor death owns me, but that he owns me and dwells in me. Verily, he shall hold me fast and keep me in faith and love, through whatever of suffering it may please him to lead me, and though it may cost me all that I hold dear in this world.

Teach us, Lord, to immerse our soul in thy everlasting grace. Give us grace to live the life of love, to confess thee with ardent heart, and to win disciples for thee round about. Above all else, dear Lord God, let our faith be true and living, that it may prove itself in charity and in victory over our natural faint-heartedness and over all the power of sin. Amen.

O that the Lord would guide my ways. To keep his statutes still! O
that my God would grant me grace To know and do his will
Order my footsteps by thy Word, And make my heart sincere; Let sin
have no dominion, Lord, But keep my conscience clear.

22. Thursday after Third Sunday in Advent.

Lord, lead us into the sanctuary of thy word, and let us abide there alway. Amen.

Isaiah 42:5-10. Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the

people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein; I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the Lord; that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof.

Ye who know the Lord and his grace shall bless him and sing praises to his name. We were blind and walked in the darkness of death; our heart served strange gods, loved the creature rather than the creator, was without peace, and yet knew not its own unhappy state. Jesus came, however, and opened our eyes; we, who were blind, now see. He led us out into the clear daylight of grace, set us free from the fetters of idolatry, and taught us to know the only true God. Now we love him, and he gives our heart peace. Our joy is great; things more glorious still await us : "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places ; yea, I have a goodly heritage." Therefore, sing unto the Lord a new song; that is, give him sincere thanks for a new revelation of his glory, for a new, ever new look into the depths of his grace. For he ever leads us into new regions of his kingdom, into new mansions of his house; more and more we become able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. At times it may seem to us that our knowledge becomes less, instead of more, clear; but every Christian who lives in daily repentance is ever advancing in the wisdom of God, even when he does not, himself, notice it. Praise God, all his believers ; praise him without ceasing; tell his wonders ! Satan has no tongue with which to bless and praise God he wants to tie our tongues also, but his bands are broken asunder, and our tongue loosened. Sing unto the Lord, ye who dwell on the rock of faith; who shall do it, if ye will not? Give God honor with humble heart; sound his praises, that it may be heard over all the earth. Over all the earth, I say. Your song of praise reaches farther, much farther, than the tones of the greatest musical artists. The thanksgiving of God's people is not heard over all the earth only, but it reaches heaven and is precious to the heart of the Lord our God.

Help us to know thee. Lord, and to praise thee with a song ever new, here and for evermore. Give us this grace for Jesus' sake. Amen.

I know that my Redeemer lives; What comfort this sweet sentence gives!
He lives, he lives, who once was dead, He lives, my ever-living Head.
He lives to bless me with his love, He lives to plead for me above, He lives
my hungry soul to feed. He lives to help in time of need.

23. Friday after Third Sunday in Advent.

Lord, keep us alive by thy word. Amen.

Psalm 13. To the chief Musician, a Psalm of David. How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me. When your soul asks, how long, O Lord? and again, how long, how long? when your heart is like a turbulent sea; when all manner of distracting thoughts and devices perplex you; when you search in vain on every hand for an escape out of your difficulties; when you cry and the Lord does not hear, but hides his face, so that it seems to you to be almost certain, that for you the light has been put out forever; then you become like the other saints in the imitation of the Son of God, and taste something of the Long Friday. But still, the true Christians hope and wait for the Lord's salvation. How many of the groanings which can not be uttered do not then rise up from the depths of the soul: "O my God, hear my cry; let me again see thy face. Remember not my sins, but according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake. I am thy own, bought with a price; thou must not reject me for evermore. Save me, save me, for Jesus' sake!" We feel our sin, and acknowledge that the Lord would be just, if he should condemn us; but how dreadful it would be! And what a sad and bitter thought it is, that the enemies of the church of God will rejoice, while the name of God will be mocked for my sake, if I fall into despair and become the prey of Satan. The cry comes, therefore, from the depths of my being: "Lord, surely thou must not, thou canst not give me up. Mine enemy shall not be exalted over me. Thou art the God of forgiveness; all my great sin is but a spark as compared with the bottomless sea of thy grace, and all my wretchedness is as nothing in comparison with thy power to deliver me." The day dawns; the night disappears; the morning comes; a new flood of light is shed on the glory of the grace of God; the name of Jesus becomes tenfold more beautiful; and the gospel of life and salvation in the blood of the Lamb has created a sounding-board in the heart which delight's God and his angels. My adversary is thy adversary he shall not triumph; "but I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me."

Lead thou us, Lord Jesus, into the fellowship of thy sufferings, and clothe us with the power of thy resurrection. Amen.

When sorrows rise, My refuge lies In thy compassion tender; Within
thine arm Can naught alarm; Keep me from harm, Be thou my strong defender.
I have thy word, Christ Jesus, Lord, Thou never wilt forsake me; This
will I plead In time of need; O, help with speed, When troubles overtake me!

24. Saturday after Third Sunday in Advent.

Lord, purify our hearts by thy word and by faith. Amen.

Malachi 3:1-6. Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeared? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' sope: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts. For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

The messenger of the covenant, whose coming was expected by Israel in the Old Testament, is the Lord Jesus Christ; he establishes a covenant between God and us. This is a covenant in holiness and righteousness, a covenant which unites a holy God and a holy people of God. But, alas, like the Jews, we, also, are reluctant to hear this, and many close their ears entirely to this truth. They are willing to be saved by Christ, but not to be cleansed from sin; they are willing to reign with the Lord, but not to suffer with him; not to crucify the flesh and forego the pleasures of sin. They wish to avoid the pain of repentance and sanctification. But the Lord comes to make us holy; he saves from sin and purifies unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. He refines them as silver and purges them as gold. If you are a true Israelite, you shall not escape the fire of Christ's sufferings. Jesus is himself a refining fire, and our purification is from him. His life in abasement was unbroken suffering, for throughout his whole life here below he bare our sins and was the sacrificed lamb under the wrath of God. In obedience to the will of the Father he was always victorious, but the fire in the sacrifice of the altar was never quenched until he was able to cry: "It is finished!" This propitiatory suffering is ended, but the fire of purification burns; the sufferings of Christ continue in his body, which is the church (Colossians 1:24), until the last Christian is perfected in holiness. This refining fire consists especially of internal tribulations of many kinds: Fear and dread of death; sad and heavy thoughts; the darts and buffetings of the devil; bitter pain by reason of the evil lusts of the flesh; cares and sorrows; remorse and sadness on account of old and new sins, a remorse in which "hope despairs and despair hopes;" and the only support of the soul is the Spirit which makes "intercession for us with groanings which can not be uttered." Dear Christian friend, do not allow yourself to be led astray by the circumstances, that you may, perchance, never have felt this very strongly. God adjusts the burden according to the ability of each to carry it. Continue to walk in the light and confess the Lord, and in his own good time he will purge you in the furnace of suffering. The metaphor concerning the purification of gold and silver in fire is appropriately supplemented by the other figure: "He is like fullers' sope." Out of the heart issues the life; a clean heart means clean hands. The offering of pure hearts and hands is pleasant unto the Lord. God grant that the messenger who goes before with his call to repentance may prepare the way for him to many hearts. Blessed are they which enter into the covenant of the people of sorrow with the Man of sorrows; for they

shall also partake of the joy of holiness with the perfectly purged congregation, if they remain faithful unto the end.

Lord Jesus, thou knowest that our flesh shrinks from suffering. Teach us to know the blessedness of bearing thy cross. We feel that there is yet so much of uncleanness in us ; cleanse us, faithful Savior refine us, and purify us, and mold us to be like thee. Amen.

My hope, my all, my Savior thou! To thee, O Lord, my soul I bow;
I seek the bliss thy wounds impart, I long to find thee in my heart.
Be thou my strength, be thou my way, Protect me through my life's short
day; In all my acts let Wisdom guide, And keep me, Savior, near thy side.

25. Fourth Sunday in Advent. (Morning)

Lord Jesus, give us thy Spirit in our hearts, thy truth and thy humility. Amen.

Gospel Lesson, John 1:19-28. And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him. Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him. What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered. No. Then said they unto him. Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him. Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

If we allow John the Baptist to teach us truth and humility, he prepares the way for the Savior, and we receive true Christmas joy. It would not have been at all surprising, if the brilliant troop of priests and Levites, which were sent to John, had turned his head and there was still more of a snare in their questions, which gave him honor as the Christ and might well have tempted him to represent himself as being the Messiah. But John confesses the truth here, as he did later before Herod, and does not deny his Lord and Savior. "I am not the Christ," says he; "I am his voice," neither more nor less. I myself am nothing, but Christ makes use of me as his voice. Do not ask concerning me, concerning my person, but ask concerning him. Why will ye not know him who stands among you? He is the eternal God, who alone gives power to my words and my baptism; I am an humble servant, not worthy to unloose the latchet of his shoe. Everybody who has some little knowledge of himself, knows how prone a man is to seek honor, and he must extol the humility of John as a miracle of grace. John is, indeed, truly great in his love of truth and in his lowliness. He, of all who lived before the Pentecost, sees Jesus with the greatest clearness of vision. And it is because of the fact that the glory and grace of Christ shine so brightly in his soul, that he is so humble. Again, because the Spirit of God teaches him to know himself so well and makes him so humble, therefore he sees the Lord so clearly, while the others do not know him. And you, my reader ; who are you? When you are to confess, and deny not, but confess the

truth and say who you are; then, what is your name? What are you? What should you be? You, also, are destined to greatness, but are become of the smallest. It is only by knowing this, that you again achieve greatness and glory. Have you learned to know yourself? And do you know the One, unknown of the world, who stands among us? Has your eye followed the finger of John, as it points to the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world? O, that we might obey the Spirit of God, which guides us into all truth, and become lowly of heart; then would we also become great before the Lord. In this wise the soul comes to love the unspeakable gift of the eternal Father.

Merciful God, who gave John such deep knowledge of self, such truth and humility in his heart; we earnestly ask of thee this same grace. Give us this grace and teach us to receive our Savior aright, that we may have true joy and peace in him. Amen.

Give deep humility; the sense Of godly sorrow give;
A strong desire, with confidence, To hear thy voice and live;
Faith in the only sacrifice That can for sin atone,
To cast our hopes, to fix our eyes, On Christ, on Christ alone.

26. Fourth Sunday in Advent. (Evening)

Lord, satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Amen.

Epistle, Philippians 4:4-7. Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

How can Paul say that the believers shall rejoice in the Lord always! He, himself, had "continual sorrow in his heart" and suffered so much from the buffetings of the devil, that he complains: "O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" We have his own answer: "We approve ourselves in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses; we are as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." But how can this be? Yes, "the Lord is at hand." For this reason the overmuch sadness of believers is turned to joy, their sorrows are dissolved in prayer, their fight ends in that peace of God which passes all understanding. The Lord is at hand at hand in the word, at hand in death, at hand in the judgment. In every respect this concerns you. In whatever sense you may take these words, "The Lord is at hand," they will tend to open your ears to the apostolic admonition that here precedes and follows them. A little while, and you shall never shed another tear, never heave another sigh; you shall enjoy eternal peace. Have you not reason to rejoice? Be comforted, believing Christian, and be joyful in the midst of your sorrow; joyful today, and joyful tomorrow; joyful in the time of gladness, and joyful in the year of affliction. You have reason to rejoice. God loves us and has given us his Son, who is with us always. In him you are a child of God and heir to salvation. Your present estate is humiliation, but this is the way to glory; you now have many troubles which are hard to bear, but all things shall work together for your

good. "Be careful for nothing," for nothing whatever! There is no wrong for which Jesus has no remedy. The harder the struggle, the greater the victory; the fight itself will strengthen your arm. "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Speak to God about all your concerns; whatever your trouble may be, take it to the Lord in prayer then it is yours no longer, for the Lord has made it his own. Give him thanks for his goodness in taking your troubles upon himself. Do exactly what Paul here says; it is God himself who speaks through him and offers us this joy. Pray and give thanks; do not fail to let thanksgiving follow prayer. Submit to this commandment of God; grace to do this has already been given you. Do what God commands, then shall his peace be victorious in you. At all times and everywhere take your every need and care to the Lord your God in prayer. Even if he does not at once take away your outward tribulations or the sorrow and suffering of your heart, he still gives victory in your soul, so that you are able to thank God for your afflictions. Therefore: Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice! Let your moderation be known unto all men! The Lord is at hand.

How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God; therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light. To this end give us thy Holy Spirit for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Jesus! Thou joy of loving hearts! Thou fount of life! Thou light of men! From the best bliss that earth imparts We turn unfilled to thee again.
Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood; Thou savest those that on thee call; To them that seek thee, thou art good. To them that find thee, all in all.

27. Monday after Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Lord, open our ears, that we may hear the admonition and comfort of thy word. Amen.

Isaiah 40:1-5. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

Thy God, O Israel, is great in mercy. By your sins you deserve his wrath, and he gives you his only begotten Son; double grace for all your sins. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," saith he; it has received enough of chastisement and buffetings. Speak ye lovingly to Jerusalem; speak words of comfort deep, deep, into their hearts let them hear, that for their abounding sin my grace is still more abounding, so that, as sin hath reigned unto death, even so shall grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. It is only in order that you may accept this glorious grace, that the Lord afflicts you and chastises you in sharp words by the voice crying in the wilderness

and calling to repentance. "Every valley shall be exalted;" that is, the heart which is mired in worldliness and soulless degradation, the soul which is abased in ignorance, or is held captive in doubt and fear, shall be lifted up and learn to see and desire that which is true and eternal. "Every mountain shall be made low;" that is, the haughty and those of high degree shall be brought low, the great become small and humble in themselves. The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain; truth and uprightness shall supplant falsehood, hypocrisy and self-righteousness. In other words, "repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Wake up and know your wretchedness, confess your sins with remorse and pain, and humble yourselves before the Lord. He who hears the voice of the first John, the preacher in the wilderness, calling to repentance, shall hear the second John, also, the son of thunder, with his still more mighty preaching of the gospel of grace, in this wise : "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as' of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Blessed preaching of repentance, which opens our ears to this gospel of life! Now I can and will keep these words in the depth of my heart: "Thine iniquity is pardoned, and thou hast received .of the Lord's hand double for all thy sins."

Give us, O Lord, humble, simple, believing hearts. Give us grace to hear thy word of chastisement and of comfort. May we feel the power of that which thy mouth speaketh. Amen.

Eternal Spirit, by whose breath The soul is raised from sin and death,
Before thy throne we sinners bend; To us thy quickening power extend.
Jehovah! Father, Spirit, Son! Mysterious Godhead! Three in One!
Before thy throne we sinners bend; Grace, pardon, life, to us extend!

28. Tuesday after Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Lord, let thy work wake us and enlighten us, that we may believe on thee in spirit and in truth. Amen.

John 3:27-36. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

John the Baptist is extremely lovable in his sincerity and humility. Here we again see how he makes himself of no reputation; he desires no honor for himself, and will not

draw away the disciples after himself. He confesses that he is of the earth, but that Jesus is of heaven he rejoices because the bridegroom has the bride, and he turns all men away from himself and directs them to Jesus. Truly, the Baptist is a man to be much beloved; but we would be acting quite contrary to his spirit if we were to rest satisfied and stop with him and become enamored of his beauty. Not John, but Jesus! John can not give us life, but Jesus is come from heaven with life for us children of death. No man would have risen out of sin and death, if God had not shown mercy and let his Son become man. Before we had any knowledge of it, he had resolved to give us his only begotten Son as a savior. Who could have brought him down from heaven, if he had not come of his own accord? Now he is here, thank God, and has won the human race, the daughter of Adam, as his bride. For with his blood he has redeemed us all from the power of the prince of death, the devil; life has overcome death and is now present in the gospel offering itself to each and all. He that believes the gospel has this life in his heart. By this means there is already a new generation of the sons of Adam, a new "and true humanity, the Christian church. And, through the means of grace in the church, God is ever adding to the number of them which believe. No man can believe by his own strength, but the Son gives us -the Holy Spirit in the word and sacraments of the church, and creates faith in all who do not stubbornly resist him. You can no more believe or receive the Spirit by your own strength, than you could have brought Christ down from heaven. But as the Son came, sent by the Father, even so the Spirit came, sent by the Father and the Son. Therefore none can say: "I would believe, but I can not." Of yourself, you can not, but the Holy Ghost calls you by the gospel and enlightens you with his gifts; and by his grace you can believe in Christ with the true and living faith of a contrite heart. Be affrighted, then, at your unbelief, but ask God to give you faith. He that in sincerity and truth prays God to give him grace to believe has already begun to believe, and has received a portion in the kingdom of grace of Jesus Christ. There heavenly gifts are bestowed upon you; righteousness, peace, joy, life and salvation all in Jesus Christ, who is himself the life of the believing soul, and is infinitely more precious than all other gifts.

O God, we fervently pray thee, give us faith, the true, living faith in our hearts, that we may belong to the church of thy Son and have life in his name. Amen.

Faith is a living power from heaven. That grasps the promise God hath given, A confidence in Christ alone, Whose grace can not be overthrown.
Faith in the conscience worketh peace. And bids the mourner's weeping cease; By faith the children's place we claim, And give all honor to One Name.

29. Wednesday after Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Let thy word, O God, lighten our eyes and shine upon our path. Amen.

Daniel 9:15-19. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at his day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from the city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are

about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. ' O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken, and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God; for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.

There was a deep sense of sin and guilt in the holy man of God, Daniel. With all his heart he recognized that God had done all things well, but that he and his people had done evil. Daniel was a man of great piety, and he had feared God of a pure heart from his childhood, so that the scriptures do not even make mention of any infirmity in him. But he feels himself most intensely as a unit with his people, so that their sins are his and his sins theirs. We, we have sinned, says he. In humble contrition he bows to the judgments of the Lord his whole soul confesses, that they are righteous. This is the true conversion to God; such hearts receive joy in the Lord. Let us, also, view our lives in the light of God's countenance. Has he not gotten himself renown over us? Could he have shown us greater love than this, that he gave his only begotten Son? Did he not adopt us as his children in holy baptism, and has he not since that time with unspeakably great patience sought us and borne with us? Try to place before your eyes in one heap, as it were, all the gifts which you have received from him, all the spiritual and bodily blessings which he has conferred on you, and then consider in what manner you have thanked and rewarded him; and you will be terrified because of your sin, and wonder at his grace and goodness. Every act of his providence in your life was love; even all his righteous judgments were the servants of his mercy; it was his purpose to enable you to recover yourself out of the snare of the devil, and to give you the peace and happiness of a new heart. For this reason he chastised you and let you taste the bitter fruit of your own sins and those of your fathers. But you did not understand it. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." O, let the truth control your thoughts now! Do not think contrary to the word of God, but let God the Holy Ghost shape your thought after the word. Then will you have the disposition of Daniel and he that prays as Daniel did is ready to hear the Christmas gospel.

Grant us this grace, merciful God. Let thy Spirit show us our sins and lead us to the fountain of grace. Amen.

Show pity, Lord! O Lord, forgive! Let a repenting rebel live. Are
not thy mercies large and free? May not a sinner trust in thee?
Great God, thy nature hath no bound, So let thy pardoning love be found.
O wash my soul from every sin. And make my guilty conscience clean!

30. Thursday after Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Lord, let our faith have its foundation in thy word. Amen.

Micah 5, 2-5. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that

she which travaileth hath brought forth; then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide; for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land; and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men.

He is born in Bethlehem, but is from everlasting. The prophet here teaches, what the church confesses, that- Jesus Christ is God and man in one person. Concerning this, the greatest of all wonders in heaven and on earth, the scriptures testify with clearness and emphasis. He who lies in the manger, this poor, little child, is the eternal God, who owns all things and upholds all things by the word of his power. He is wisdom itself, which gives to all angels and men all that they have of thought and understanding; yet he is become a child in swaddling clothes; his mind, like that of all other children, grows and develops from the dormant state to conscious knowledge. He is the Living One for evermore, but dies on the cross and is laid in the grave. In truth, his name is "Wonderful" and transcends all our wisdom. But such a Lord and Savior we were to have according to the gracious will and counsel of God. He was to be a man; for man had sinned, and the blood of man must of necessity be sacrificed in death for our atonement. He was to be true God, in order that the redeeming power of his death and blood might be without limit. The shepherd king David came out of Bethlehem; and in Bethlehem is to be born the shepherd of the soul and the true king of Israel, he who is David and Solomon and Melchizedek and Aaron, all in one person. The name Bethlehem means the house of bread. Out of it comes our Joseph with the bread of eternal life, which he gives to his brethren without price, he who is degraded to the meanest prison, but also exalted to the right hand of the King, and is great unto the ends of the earth. Truly, out of Bethlehem comes the Shepherd who feeds his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. The scriptures call him "everlasting God," "the only begotten Son of the Father," "God over all, blessed for ever," "the true God and eternal life;" they declare that he is eternal and almighty and omniscient and holy; they inform us that all things were made by him and subsist by him. They call him the Lord over all things, to whom we shall pray and in whom we shall believe. Himself says: "I and my Father are one," "to me is given all power in heaven and on earth," "I am that Son of God." He died as the only begotten Son of God; he rose again and reigns as the only begotten Son of God. Verily, the Second Article of our creed is certain and sure; he that does not see this is blinded by sin and falsehood.

Give me. Lord Jesus, a heart that is obedient to the truth, so that I may believe on thee alway and rejoice in thy glory and grace. Amen.

From highest heaven 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:
To you this night is born a Child
Of Mary, chosen virgin mild;
This little child of lowly birth
Shall be the joy of all the earth.
'Tis Christ, our God and Lord, is born.
To comfort those who weep and
mourn; He will himself your Savior be.
From all your sins will set you free.

31. Friday after Fourth Sunday in Advent.

Lord, let thy word enlighten us and lead us on the right path. Amen

Matthew 1:20-23. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel; which being interpreted is, God with us.

In holy modesty and sincere humility Mary had hid from Joseph the announcement which had been made to her by the angel. Therefore, when Joseph became aware of her condition, he naturally thought that she had been unfaithful to him. The saints of God have many gloomy thoughts. Now he might, according to the law, have dragged her before a public court of justice and put her to shame. But he could also give her a bill of divorce, as one who no longer found favor in his eyes; then it would appear as if she were innocent and he faithless. And the piety of Joseph is so great, that he is willing to be regarded as the criminal, though he is innocent, rather than bring disgrace on her, whom he must believe to be guilty. But the Lord solves all difficulties for his own. Joseph is informed of the blessed mystery, and he hears from the mouth of the angel that name which is above every name. Joseph is called "a just man;" that is, a godly, believing, good and pious Israelite; it was necessary and proper that this should be the character of the man who was to become the foster-father of Jesus. However, he is only his foster-father. Our Bible lesson for today shows us again most plainly that Jesus is the Son of God: "That which is conceived in Mary is of the Holy Ghost;" she is espoused to Joseph, but it still a "virgin;" the son whom she shall bring forth is "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." What beautiful concord is there not among the evangelists on this point, that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God, conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary! What an exact agreement between the prophets of the Old and the evangelists of the New Testament on this point! If Jesus is not the only begotten Son of God, true God and true man, then there is not a word of truth in the Bible; for this is the central doctrine in all the scriptures, the one in which everything from Genesis to Revelations has its root. In the Old Testament this heavenly truth becomes more and more clear, while in the New it beams like the resplendent sun that floods everything with light. The creed of the church is most firmly established in God's own word; the deeper I penetrate into the scriptures, the more thoroughly am I convinced of the truth of our creed. I there find myself in a sanctuary in which Jesus Christ, the eternal God and precious Savior, fills everything with his glory and his grace. God help us to be right-minded and just, as Joseph was, and obedient to the truth, however much it may conflict with our own will and our way of thinking. Then shall we experience, with Joseph, that a righteous man is not shamed, but learns to solve the enigmas and is taught the mystery of godliness. For the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. This is, indeed, Christmas joy.

Lord our God. give us this grace by the Holy Ghost for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Come, thou Savior of our race, Choicest gift of heavenly grace! O thou

blessed Virgin's Son, Be thy race on earth begun.
Not of mortal blood or birth, He descends from heaven to earth: By the
Holy Ghost conceived, Truly man to be believed.
Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child! Of the Virgin undefiled! Though
by all the world disowned, Still to be in heaven enthroned.

32. Christmas Eve.

O dearest Jesus, holy Child, make thee a bed, soft, undefiled, within my heart! Amen

Isaiah 9:6-7. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Now we will rejoice with exceeding great joy before the Lord, according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the Lord has broken the yoke and the rod and the staff as in the day of Midian. Gideon has thrown down the altars of the idols, routed the enemy and made us free. This child is our brother, but also the only begotten Son of God; one of us, but, at the same time, the everlasting God. The Father has given us his Son; he is ours, he that is prince and lord over all, over heaven and earth, over law and sin, over death and devil; he is born unto us. He is righteous and fulfils all righteousness for us; he is the Life, and he bruises the head of the prince of death; he takes our every concern upon himself, for this purpose he is given us; alone he treads the winepress of wrath he alone slays Goliath, and he destroys Baal and his prophets. God has not consigned us to our wretchedness, but he has had mercy on us and has given us his Son for our Savior, Counselor, Father, Prince of Peace. We were lost; we were, but are lost no longer; we are saved and blessed. We were in prison, but are free. We were doomed to death, but now eternal life is ours. He has atoned for everything and has brought us righteousness, love, peace and salvation. O my Jesus, how shall I thank thee? My heavenly Father, how shall I thank thee? "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." Note well the expression, that he is horn unto us and given unto us; it is wholly grace, and none shall be without help by reason of unworthiness. It is grace alone, purely and solely, so that every idea of merit or worthiness is excluded. It has come to pass; he is given unto us, unto its who were lost and damned; unto us the child is born, unto us the son is given. This is in very truth joy and salvation. Truly, God has bestowed on us a great gift. God has done it and the devil can not defeat it. He shall not succeed in defeating it; neither by the apostles of infidelity about us, nor by the suggestions of infidelity in us. We are saved; the devil is powerless to take away the work which our God has already accomplished. O, how I rejoice in writing this down before the very eyes of the enemy, to the honor and glory of my God! And you, my brother; rejoice when you read these words of God! Midian is defeated, though he deny it never so vehemently; all heavens and all the heavenly host assert it, and I declare it with a heart full of joy unspeakable. Now, let Christmas, the children's happy festival, make us childlike; then shall we surely have great joy. If you rightly

believed this thing which God has done for you, you would leap up and stand, and walk, and enter into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. For verily, all your misery is turned to happiness; all your distress, to glory; all your sin, to righteousness; and death now is nothing but life. This is most certainly true; but God hides it from your senses, because he wants you to have faith. I, also, hide the beautiful Bible which my child received as a baptismal present, until he becomes old enough to use it. I have told him that it lies hid in my locker, and he does not doubt it, though he has never seen the book. Yes, blessed are you, if you believe. And now, may you have a most blessed and happy Christmas!

Heavenly Father, who gavest us thy Son; give us the light and grace of thy Holy Spirit, that we may believe; give us grace to believe and to accept the salvation of grace in Christ. Blessed be God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost for evermore! Amen.

Thy little ones, dear Lord, are we, And come thy lowly bed to see; Enlighten
every soul and mind, That we the way to thee may find.
With songs we hasten thee to greet, And kiss the dust before thy feet.
O blessed hour, O sweetest night, That gave thee birth, our Soul's Delight!
O draw us wholly to thee, Lord, Thou dearest friend, "to us accord Thy
grace; Thy faith to us impart, That we may hold Thee in our heart.

33. Christmas Day (Morning)

Lord, let thy tidings of joy permeate our heart. Amen.

Luke 2:1-14. And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, (because he was of the house and lineage of David,) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

The blessed angelic hosts praise God for that which he has done for his mortals. It is our joy with which the angels of heaven rejoice, our song of praise in which they join, our thank-offering which they bring before the throne. Therefore it is that they have come down to the earth and make it their temple. For God has given his Son to

us; he is become our brother, our Lord and Savior; he is born on earth, he is become a man. That which was ordained in the eternal decree of the Trinity; that for which preparation was made through thousands of years, and which was promised throughout the whole time of the Old Testament, has today come to pass: The Son of God is born of a woman. We have allowed ourselves to be deceived, sold ourselves to the devil, and should of right have been eternally lost; but now we are redeemed and shall inherit eternal life. God himself has become our Savior. The earth shall no more be the kingdom of the devil, wherein anger, falsehood, and murder from hell are supreme; but shall be the home of saints, where God is worshiped in spirit and truth, and where love, peace, and God's good will abound. For here is he who releases our conscience from the bondage of fear, opens our eyes to the truth, cleanses our heart, pours into it the love of the Lord, and unites us with the holy and blessed God. When we believe the love wherewith God loves us, it comes into our soul; we love him because he loved us first. In this way he makes for himself a dwelling-place in our heart. The Son of God becomes a man for all men; he is born of a woman in order that he may give his life for all. Hear this, all men of whatever sort: The Son of God came for you, he wants to save you. Turn to him; seek him in the manger of the stable; that is, in the word and sacraments of the church. Seek him earnestly, in order to be saved from sin; then shall you find him and he shall save you. Ye, needy sinners, who grieve on account of your sins, earnestly long for grace and follow after purity; fear not, but rejoice with great joy. You are of the people to whom the angel's sermon is directed ; the blessed joy that fills the heavenly host is in the strictest sense yours. For all who humble themselves and confess their sins and earnestly desire to be saved, are now saved; all the wretched and poor that hope in the Lord are his people, and they possess this "great joy." None can describe your happiness, and none can rob you of your bliss. Love, the eternal and heavenly love, is yours ; and as it is given you by him that has power to give it, so it is preserved in you by the same power and faithfulness. You have a glory which is greater than that of all angels. We speak of this in reverential fear; for Michael and Gabriel and the seraphim before the throne are so glorious and exalted, that we sinners can not see them without terror. But God himself, before whom they hide their face, is our brother, and it is their greatest delight to look into the counsel of God for our salvation. These pure radiant, heavenly spirits, which stand before God, delight in our delight, join in the joy that is given us according to the eternal good pleasure of God; and their blissful duty is to serve herein, to act as messengers between heaven and earth, and with us to praise the Lord. Are our glory and honor not great? They are stupendously great, and fill the heart with a blessed feeling of humility, and of elevation, and of rapture. For God so loved me from eternity and so loves me now and for evermore, that he gives me his only begotten Son; therefore I love him in return and shall love him forever in this heavenly love.

God is my God, and my heart is his for evermore. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! Amen.

The happy Christmas comes once more. The heavenly guest is at the door, The blessed words the shepherds thrill, The joyous tidings: Peace, Good-will.

O wake our hearts, in gladness sing, And keep your Christmas with your King, Till living song, from loving souls, Like sound of mighty waters rolls.

Come, Jesus, glorious heavenly guest. Keep thine own Christmas in our breast, Then David's harp-strings, hushed so long, Shall swell our jubilee of song.

34. Christmas Day (Evening)

Lord, give us grace to keep thy words in our heart. Amen.

Luke 2:15-20. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another. Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

These shepherds believed what they had heard; therefore they went into Bethlehem and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe. Here the Spirit of God teaches us how we are to receive the Christmas gift and praise God for it. When we hear the gospel we must not wave it aside and forget it ; neither shall we say: "No, it is not possible for me to believe this." But we must ponder it, and speak one to another about it; then will the Spirit of God, which is in the word, help us to believe it. And when the life of faith begins to stir in us, we must encourage one another, search the scriptures, and seek communion with other believers who are farther advanced in their faith. For Mary and Joseph have the babe between them. Jesus is in his church on earth, and the saints have him in their midst. They have the word and baptism and the Lord's supper, and through these he is with them. Do you think, that the believers can be gathered together without their having the word of God among them? But as surely as they have the word of God, just as surely do they have Jesus among them. He is the very one about whom they gather. There, in the means of grace in the church, you find the Lord. Say not in your heart How shall I be able to lift myself up to heaven and reach Jesus? Or To what place shall I make a pilgrimage in order to find him? Or What works shall I do in order that he may come and reveal himself to me? In truth, he is much nearer to you than you think: he is in the Word. However, you must not expect to see the Glorious One with your eyes. But admit, that the truth is the truth; believe the Word, then shall you experience in conscience and heart, that he, in very truth, is there. For all things appertaining to the Lord are little to be regarded by the bodily eye and the natural understanding. What, indeed, did the shepherds see? They saw that which was told them: a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. But does it stand to reason, that this babe is the Savior of all people, God's anointed, and the joy of the angels? The shepherds believed; therefore they found that which the Lord had made known to them, and this was enough for them. They did not doubt, that this babe was the promised Savior of Jews and gentiles. You, also, find in the church of God that which himself has said; namely, the tidings concerning him, going out into all the world; the sacrament of baptism in the name of the triune God; the sacrament of the altar, under the bread and wine, which he instituted the same night in which he was betrayed.

You shall not ask to see more than what himself has said. The announcement made to the shepherds was this : "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." They believed the word, found it true, and praised God. To us the Son of God has said: I died for you, and rose again, and am with you alway; and this is the sign: The gospel shall be preached, and the sacraments of baptism and the altar shall be administered. Do you not find it true? Have faith, then, and make known to others the presence and love and grace of Jesus; and when others speak to you of these things, then follow the example of Mary, who "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Then, again; praise God in word and deed. Begin in earnest, dear Christian, to bless and thank the Lord during this Christmastide, and continue doing it all your life. Do you not owe God this much? He has given you his Son ; and you do not thank him for it! Away with this baneful unbelief, with sloth, with the tormenting bondage under the law, and with the whimpering and whining of the perverted and sick heart By the grace of God's Spirit you can believe with that simple and childlike faith which enables you to bless and praise the Lord in the midst of the griefs of this life. I know well enough, that you must feel sin and sorrow, but I also know, that the joy of the Lord shall prevail over all our sin and sorrow. For God loves you and has made you his child. Obey his Spirit, and he shall answer in your heart: Saved, saved and blest. Glory be to God! Say we with one another: God be praised for his unspeakable gift To David's city let us fly, Where angels sing beneath the sky; Through plain and village pressing near, And news from God with shepherds hear.

*Glory be to God ! Say we with one another: God be praised for his unspeakable gift!
Amen.*

The lowly Savior meekly lies, Laid off the splendor of the skies; No
crown bedecks his forehead fair, No pearl, nor gem, nor silk is there.
O holy Child. Thy manger streams, Till earth and heaven glow with its
beams, Till midnight noon's bright light has won, And Jacob's Star outshines
the sun.