

... that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
and that believing you may have life in His Name - John 20:31

Good News for the Diaspora



Search the Scriptures

A Daily Devotional

on the Life of

Jesus the Christ

for

Advent

to

Christmas Day

This Advent devotional contains twenty-eight daily devotions which comprise the first four weeks of devotions from the larger work titled *Search the Scriptures - A Daily Devotional on the Life of Jesus the Christ*. The 800-page, first volume of that work is a hardcover book with 365 devotions. The second volume also has a devotion for every day of the year. The third volume is a work in progress. For more information on these first two volumes please go to the scholia.net or stores.lulu.com/scholia website.

All Scripture quotations were translated from the original languages.

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The Week of Advent 1

Sunday - The Advent of the Eternal King.

Lift up your heads, oh you gates, and be lifted up you ancient doors, and the King of Glory shall enter! Who is this King of Glory? The LORD of Hosts - He is the King of Glory! — Psalm 24:9-10.

Dear Redeemed,

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David, a temporal king of a small nation in this world, composed this psalm about the eternal, reigning King of Glory. David likens the coming or the advent of this King to an earthly king approaching the entrance of a walled city. The cry is, “Crank open the gates and lift high the doors! The king is drawing near and he is going to enter. Be ready!”

Who is this King of Glory? This is no common king; this is the LORD of Hosts. This is Jehovah - Yahweh - the LORD God Almighty. Specifically, this King of Glory is the eternal Son of God - the Christ - the Messiah - the eternal Word of God. The psalmist writes that Christ the King is drawing near and His entry would soon take place.

Why is the King of Glory coming? Listen, dearly beloved. He does not come to be a judge or to condemn those who have not kept His Word perfectly. No one has done that. Rather, the Christ is coming to rescue us from sin, death and the devil. He will do that by dying for us and granting us the forgiveness of all our sins.

Behold, the King of Glory enters into time from eternity! The Creator of space and time is preparing to enter His creation at a very specific place and in the fullness of time. The Son of God will be conceived by the Holy Ghost within the womb of a Jewish maiden named Mary. The unborn Son of God will reside within her for nine months. Then the King of Glory will be born in the City of David. Angels will tell the shepherds of the Birth of the Savior, which is Christ the Lord, in the little town of Bethlehem. He Who will be named *Jesus*, which means “Savior,” will be born for all the people, and therefore, He is your Jesus, your Savior, - no matter who you are - no matter where you are. No matter what - He is the King of Glory - He is your King of Glory!

PRAYER — O LORD God, Creator of the universe and my Creator, from eternity You have thought of me and have desired only what is best for me. I confess that I am not worthy of the least of Your mercies and grace. Rather, because of my sinfulness and my sins of thought, word and deed, I have deserved nothing but eternal condemnation. Yet, You - King of Glory - have entered this creation to be the Savior of all people. Please, O Lord, continue to enter my soul and abide in me. May it be so, according to Your Word. Amen.

Hymn 137, 1-3 & 6.

THE Advent of our God
Our prayers must now employ,
And we must meet Him on His road
with hymns of holy joy.

The everlasting Son
Incarnate deigns to be:
Himself a servant’s form puts on,
To set His people free.

Daughter of Zion, rise
And greet thy lowly King,
And do not wickedly despise
The mercies He will bring.

Praise to the Savior Son
From the created host:
Like praise be to the Father done,
And to the Holy Ghost.

Monday - The Humble Advent of the Savior.

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you. He is just and having salvation; humble and riding upon a donkey - on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
— Zechariah 9:9.

Dear Redeemed,

Through the Old Testament prophet, the Holy Spirit revealed the promise of the King of Glory’s Advent. This is Good News for the

Daughter of Zion, which is the Church. This is part of the Gospel for the Daughter of Jerusalem, which is also the Church. The Son of God, Who is most certainly just and righteous, will be the Savior of the world. Jesus is just, keeping His own Law perfectly and Jesus is righteous for He is the LORD God.

Notice how the prophet describes the Almighty God's Advent as Savior. Humble. On a donkey. On a colt. The Christ will not come making demands, issuing orders and driving people into heaven. Rather, the Messiah will arrive in lowly circumstances, being born in the little town of Bethlehem, sleeping His first night on earth in a lowly manger, owning no property. Then, years later, He will ride a borrowed donkey into Jerusalem, be condemned like a common criminal, die on a brutal cross and be placed in a cold tomb. That's how He comes.

What is His reason for coming? Salvation. The Messiah will come for the salvation of the Old Testament people and the Christ's advent is for the salvation of the New Testament people. The Son of God has come to be the Ransom for all - and what He has done for all, He has done for you. Jesus, the Son of David, took on your death in order to give you His Life. The King of Glory bore your sin that you might be given His perfection. The Christ endured and conquered hell in order that you would be an heir of heaven.

The eternal King, crucified and risen, has a kingdom ruled by grace. For salvation is by the grace of God, not because of works or merits on your part. Rather, it is by grace through faith in Jesus - trust in Who He is and belief in what He has done. You believe this. You are His and belong to His Church. You are a member of the Israel of God. You are the Daughter of Zion and the Daughter of Jerusalem. Therefore, *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, O Daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you!*

PRAYER — Unto You, dear Lord, do my prayers ascend. I thank You for coming into this world and for fulfilling Your Word of grace and salvation. You bestow salvation as a gift. Grant me repentance when I begin to trust in my works, words or intentions. Remind me that I am forgiven because of what You have done, said and thought. O Lord Jesus, Redeemer King, grant me steadfast faith in You, being my king in life and being my king in death. May my soul rejoice greatly with all Your people of all times, and may my mouth join with all others who shout "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israel!" Amen.

Hymn 135.

COME, Thou precious Ransom, come!
Only Hope for sinful mortals!
Come, O Savior of the world!
Open are to Thee all portals;
Come in wonted suavity,
Anxiously we wait for Thee.

O great King of glory, come!
Let me be Thy living temple;
Enter Thou into my heart;
Though I am but poor and simple,
Yet my riches then shall be,
That Thou reignest, Lord, in me.

My hosannas and my palms
Graciously receive, I pray Thee;
Evermore, as best I can,
Savior, I will homage pay Thee,
And in faith I will embrace,
Lord, Thy merit through Thy grace.

Hail! Hosanna! David's Son,
Help, Lord, hear our supplication!
Let Thy kingdom, scepter, crown
Bring us blessing and salvation,
That forever we may sing:
Hail! Hosanna to our King.

Tuesday - The Advent of the All-Knowing God.

And the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" — Genesis 3:9.

Dear Redeemed,

Adam had sinned and he was condemned. He knew that he had disobeyed the Word of God. His conscience accused him. His reason was now in charge and it was faulty. He attempted to cover his shame

with leaves, but this did not work. He fled the Presence of the LORD, leading his wife deep into the Garden of Eden.

How foolish! In Sunday's devotion we heard that God, Who would be coming into this fallen world as its Savior, is eternal. Today we focus on the omniscience of God - that is, He knows everything. So, when our text records the fact that God sought to find Adam and said, *Where are you?*, it's not because God didn't know where he was. The Lord knew exactly what had happened and where Adam was and what he was doing.

It is also important to note that Adam did not come to God. Rather, the Word of the Lord - the Son came to Adam. Thousands of years later, Jesus would say, *No one is able to come to Me, unless the Father, Who sent Me, draws (or drags!) him; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).*

God knew exactly what word to say to Adam. First, the fallen man needed to hear the accusing and condemning Law. Thus the Lord said, *Where are you?* How this Word must have pierced Adam's soul! Still the man tried to wiggle free of any guilt. He played the blame game, claiming that both the woman and God Himself were to blame. But God knew everything, including Adam's thoughts and Adam and his wife stood condemned.

That was true for them and that is true for you and for me. The LORD God knows completely who you are, precisely where you are, and exactly what you've done and are going through. You can't hide from Him, so don't attempt to deny Him or spoof Him. Apart from Christ you stand condemned.

Thanks be to God that is not the final Word from Him. God does not come to Adam to send him to hell. Rather, in His mercy, God does not give the man, his wife and all their descendants (which includes you) what they (you) deserve. In addition, in His grace, God gives Adam, Eve and you what is not deserved; namely, forgiveness, eternal life, salvation and peace with God.

From eternity God knew you and knew that this is exactly what you needed. This is precisely what the Son of God accomplished when He came into this world, fulfilled the Law perfectly in your place, paid the price for all your sins, died in your stead, rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven as He was before. Belief in this Good News bestows all these blessings in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER — Dearest Jesus, You, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, know all things. You know me and such knowledge is

frightening to me. Through Your Word, the Holy Ghost comes to me that I may confess my sins and look to You for the forgiveness that I need at all times. With such a quieted conscience, I am comforted by the truth that you know me, that you know where I am, and that you know exactly what I'm going through. Remind me of this in the light of day and in the heaviness of the night. Amen.

Hymn 133, 1, 2 & 3.

HARK! A thrilling voice is sounding:
"Christ is nigh!" it seems to say;
"Cast away the dreams of darkness,
O ye children of the day!"

Startled at the solemn warning,
Let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her Sun, all sloth dispelling,
Shines upon the morning skies.

Lo, the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven,
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all, to be forgiven.

Wednesday - The LORD is with His Church.

For God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth — Psalm 74:12.

Dear Redeemed,

The Son of God, Who is the eternal King of Glory, does not remain apart from His people. The Christ is present everywhere and He is graciously present with His people. That is His promise, for He has said, *I will never leave you (thee - singular) nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5).* The Christ comes to be the Savior of the world and to deliver His chosen people, which is another name for His Church. Everyone in whom the Holy Spirit has bestowed the gift of faith in Christ through the Word of the Gospel, is a member of the Church.

The King of kings comes to deliver His people, whether it is one or two, as in the case of Adam and Eve, or a nation of a million, as in the case of the Hebrew people held in the chains of slavery. God does not do this from a distance. Rather, as the psalmist says, *For God is my*

King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

Deliverance by the Son of God is accomplished in this world, on this earth. To deliver His Church of eight on Noah's Ark, He flooded the entire world. He stayed Pharaoh's chariots, horses and riders and provided the way of escape through the Red Sea for His people. Jesus defeated Satan in the wilderness, stilled the storm on the sea, suffered and died on a cross for the salvation of the world, and defeated death by rising from the dead.

Jesus has done this for you. He defeated the devil for you. He died for you. He rose again from the dead for you. He has delivered you from this land of bondage. You are now on your exodus journey to the promised land, which is heaven. Though the times may be difficult and the tears flow so easily and bitterly - though there is pain of body and soul - though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the LORD is with you.

PRAYER — O my dear Lord Jesus, Who fills heaven and earth and all creation, I thank You that, according to Your Word of promise, wherever I am, You are with me. I confess that this truth causes "old-Adam fear" when I have sinned and fallen short of Your Law, or when I am troubled or doubting. Send Your Holy Spirit to give me the gift of repentance, not only to be sorry for my sin, but also to look to You for the forgiveness that you have accomplished for me. Then may I be comforted by the truth that You are with me. Grant me faith to say with the Church that You are my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth. Amen.

Hymn 131, 1 & 4.

JESUS came, the heav'ns adoring,
Came with peace from realms on high;
Jesus came for man's redemption,
Lowly came on earth to die;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Came in deep humility.

Jesus comes in joy and sorrow,
Shares alike our hopes and fears;
Jesus comes, whate'er befalls us,
Glads our hearts, and dries our tears;
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Cheering e'en our failing years.

Thursday - The First Promise of the Savior.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall crush your head and you shall crush His heel — Genesis 3:15.

Dear Redeemed,

Adam's original sin resulted in his fall from grace and into sin, and not this first man only, but also Adam's wife and all the generations descended from this one man - including you and me. Adam and everyone born of the union of a man and a woman would be headed to a date with eternal condemnation. There was nothing man could do to prevent it. Adam could not undo sin, nor can we. Eve could not make up for what had been done, nor are we able to undo a lie, or pay back sinful anger with godly thoughts, or uncommit adultery, or deal with a legion of other sins in the scales of Divine justice. Left to themselves; left to ourselves; left to yourself, there is everlasting destruction. We were lost.

The LORD God would not have it be so. Only He could change the course of our destruction. His justice required an eternal payment. Pure blood would have to be shed and an innocent life would have to be given. Likewise, God's mercy would not be denied, for He does not desire the death of anyone, but would have everyone be saved from sin, death and the devil, and be saved for holiness, life and heaven.

In the text for today, the LORD is speaking to Satan and is proclaiming what would happen to the devil. As Adam and Eve listened to the Word of God, they heard the promise of their Savior. God declared the commencement of hostility and strife between the devil and the woman, as well as between Satan's fellow devils and the Seed of the woman. It would be the Seed of the woman and not the seed of the man Who would be the One to crush the devil's head in a death shot. Even though Satan would strike a blow to the heel of the Seed of the woman, the devil would be defeated.

This is the first announcement of the Gospel to man. God the Father would send His Son to be the Savior of the world. Only God could do this, but it would require that the Son, Who is God, also be a man, born of a woman. The Savior would have to be man in order to suffer, to shed His innocent Blood and to die the perfect death. Thus, in the fullness of time, the Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of a Jewish virgin, a young woman named Mary.

Thirty-some years later, the work of the Christ in redeeming the world was finished as Jesus suffered and died on the cross. Satan struck out at the seemingly weak Jesus, but it was at that time that the devil was dealt the crushing, mortal blow. The full price was paid for all sins. Innocent blood - the blood of God - was shed. The Christ paid the full ransom price for all sinners. And behold, Jesus rose again from the dead and death is defeated! The Seed of the woman has taken care of sin, death and the devil - for you. This is the Gospel.

PRAYER — I thank You, Jesus - O great Jehovah, begotten of the Father from eternity and O Son of Man, born of the Virgin Mary - for coming into this fallen world to be its Savior. You are the promised Seed of the woman. You have defeated the devil for me and for all. You have paid the eternal price for all sins, and therefore, for my sins. You have overcome death for me and for everyone. I can not put into words or even form my thoughts as I ought in order to express what this means for me and to me. I thank You with this, my meager mind, and with these, my simple words. O gracious and ever-giving Savior, I also ask that I be able to remain steadfast in the faith that believes all these things, that, whether sooner or later, I may depart this life and be with you in Heaven. Lord Jesus, O King of Glory, may it be so. Amen.

Hymn 310, 6 & 8.

The Son His Father did obey,
And, born of virgin-mother,
He came awhile on earth to stay,
That He might be my brother.
His mighty power He hidden bore.
A servant's form like mine, He wore,
To lead the Devil captive.

(and the Son's response . . .)

The foe shall shed My precious Blood,
Me of my life bereaving;
All this I suffer for thy good;
Be steadfast and believing.
Life shall from death the victory win.
Mine innocence shall bear thy sin,
So art thou blest forever.

Friday - The Blood-Bought Garment of Righteousness.

And for Adam and for his wife the LORD God made garments of skins, and He clothed them — Genesis 3:21.

Dear Redeemed,

The first announcement of the Gospel occupied our thoughts yesterday; namely, that the Seed of the woman would be the Savior. This truth is intended for Adam, Eve and all their descendants. The King of Glory would be born for all the people and would give His Life for everyone. Faith trusts this Word of God and awaits the Advent of the Christ.

The Lord also provided a particular reminder of His justice and His mercy for our oldest parents. This was a specific blessing that was quite personal, as well as sobering and comforting. The Holy Spirit informs us through the Word that *the LORD God made garments of skins, and clothed them*. God clothed them with individual garments, which served as a covering for their nakedness and as a daily reminder of several realities. These garments are “awfully wonderful” gifts. Ponder the truths that are brought to mind concerning them.

First, these garments are now necessary. Adam's sin resulted in the fall from life to death, for on the day that he ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil he died spiritually and began dying physically. Eve, with whom Adam was one flesh, suffered the same consequence. So do you. The consequence is death. By this *one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death spread to all men (Romans 5:12)*.

Next, the garments remind one of the substitute. An innocent animal was sacrificed in order for Adam and Eve to have garments. Blood was shed, for *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22)*. This points us to the “terribly wonderful” Sacrifice of all times; that is, to Jesus - true God and true man - Who shed His innocent Blood for all sins and Who died on the cross and Who rose from the dead on the third day.

Third, the garment conveys the Redeemer's message to the individual. “Adam, this is your robe of My righteousness. Eve, I have redeemed you. I have called you by name and I am with you always.” And you, dear reader or dear hearer, what about you? Is there such a garment for you?

Behold, by the Holy Spirit's gift of faith in Jesus and in what He has done, the bestowal of the robe of Christ's righteousness occurs.

This Divine covering is given in Baptism, as well as in the hearing of the Gospel and in the Absolution when forgiveness of sins is announced in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost. This Blood-bought garment of salvation replaces the old-Adam cloak of condemnation that was yours.

PRAYER — O Thou beloved Savior and Redeemer, when I, in my mind's eye, behold You suffering, bleeding and dying on the cross, I experience mixed responses. Sorrow and wonder. My sins did that to You, and at the same time, You willingly bore my sins. You were clothed in my sin-stained, filthy rags in order that I would be dressed in the holy robe of Your perfect righteousness. Grant, I pray, that I may - ever and always, and especially on the last day of my life on this earth - have this garment of salvation. In Your Name, O Jesus. Amen.

Hymn 143, 1.

ONCE He came in blessing,
All our ills re-dressing,
Came in likeness lowly,
Son of God most holy;
Bore the Cross to save us,
Hope and freedom gave us.

Saturday - The Seed of the Woman.

And in your Seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed.

— *Genesis 22:18.*

Dear Redeemed,

The promise of the Seed of the woman was given to Adam and Eve. One of Eve's descendants would be the Savior Whom we know is Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man. This promise was given from one generation to the next. It passed from our first parents to their son, Seth and from him to his descendants, including Noah. Then it came to a man named Abram, who would be named Abraham. One of Abraham's descendants would be the Redeemer. We know that Jesus Christ is the Seed mentioned in our text because the Scriptures indicate that the reference is not to "seeds" but to one Seed, *which is Christ*

(*Galatians 3:16*). All of this is *in order that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the nations in Christ Jesus; in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:14)*.

The Word of the Lord came to Abraham and He said to him, "*In your Seed will all the nations of the earth be blessed.*" By virtue of the Son of God's advent in Bethlehem and because of the sacrifice of Himself on the cross for the sins of the world, all nations will be blessed. That message of hope for a hopeless world and life in Christ for a dying earth is intended for all. Just as Eve and Abraham believed God's promise and it was credited to them for righteousness, so also anyone, from any nation, who is given the gift of faith in Jesus is saved. This blessing is intended for all and especially for you.

Apart from Christ and His Gospel, there is only the curse of death. If anyone tries to earn God's blessing by the keeping of the Law, that person is under the curse. There is no salvation for any of us under the Law. Perhaps you recall that God told Adam the ground was cursed because of his sin and that, at the end of life in this world, Adam would return to be part of that cursed ground. Earth to earth. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. All of this a prelude to the everlasting curse of being always and completely and itchy apart from the LORD God. As it was for Adam, so it is for all nations.

Yet God would not have that be the eternal end of anyone. So the Son of God came to be under the curse in our place and as we deserved. In fact, *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13)*. Cursed in our stead, Jesus Christ hung on the leafless tree. As a result, all nations are blessed because of Jesus. It is no wonder that, as we await the Advent of our King, the Church longs to sing on Christmas Eve:

Joy to the World! the Lord is come:
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing. (Hymn 158, 1.)

PRAYER — In the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Though I have deserved only the consequences of the curse, I plead, for the sake of Christ Jesus, that the blessings of the forgiveness of all my sins, the salvation of my body and soul, and eternal life might be bestowed upon me. I do not ask this only for me, but for all the nations. Bless and be with the faithful scattered in the Diaspora in this world. Visit each of them with the Law and the Gospel

according to the needs of each. May the ears of each soul hear the Good News of Christ and be blessed. My petitions ascend also for those who, either because of ignorance or because of a stubborn will, are apart from You. Grant them true repentance that they be gifted with the removal of the eternal curse and with it, have the blessing that comes from, in and by You. Amen.

Hymn 158, 2, 3, 4.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns:
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love.

The Week of Advent 2

Sunday - The Good News of Judgment Day.

LORD, hear my prayer; listen to my supplications. In Your faithfulness answer me - in Your righteousness! And do not enter into judgment with your servant; for no man living is justified in Your Presence.

— Psalm 143:1-2

Dear Redeemed,

Last week the focus was on the First Advent (or coming) of the LORD God into this world after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. The Son of God is the King of Glory Who would not come to be served, but

to serve and, in His grace and mercy, to give Himself into death for our sins. Jesus would then rise from the dead and ascend into heaven, while, at the same time, being with us always, even to the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). From there He shall come again to judge the living and the dead. His Second Advent will occupy our thoughts and prayers this week.

With personal application to each of us, the first two verses of Psalm 143 direct us to the foundational doctrine of Christianity. That teaching states that we are justified before God, not at all by the Law of God, but only by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus, the God-man Who died for all sins and rose again. If this truth is denied or if it is not believed by the individual, then that man is not a Christian. The eternity of every person depends on this teaching; it is, literally, the difference between heaven and hell. If a congregation or religious body denies or loses this doctrine, then it is no longer Christian.

On Judgment Day, if a man desires to receive his eternal abode on the basis of the Law - on the basis of his self-justification and of his own righteousness he might present his case as follows. "I was a pretty decent fellow. I did not murder or steal. I attended church. I had more good works than I did sins. I tried not to cheat my neighbors and I didn't seek vengeance when they cheated me. I obeyed the laws of the state and did my share of work around the church. There may be others who deserve to be in heaven, but I'm really up there at the top of the list. Oh, and I tithed my offerings."

On Judgment Day, the child of God might say, "Jesus died for all of my many, many sins. He took my sins and gave me His perfect Word of complete forgiveness. He was condemned in order to pardon me. Christ's righteousness was declared to be mine. My case rests with Jesus."

Notice the difference. The Law man defends himself and snubs Jesus and ignores what Christ has done for him. Thus the man stands alone and attempts to justify himself, neither needing the Savior nor His Good News. The Gospel child of God acknowledges his sinfulness, confesses Jesus as his only defense and relies on Christ's righteousness. Notice one more thing. Jesus is the Judge.

PRAYER — Truly, dear Lord, I deserve only Your eternal wrath and condemnation, for I have broken Your Law with my deeds and my failures to do, with my mouth and my failures to speak, and especially in my thoughts. But dear Jesus, please listen to my prayers and hear my sighs and pleadings. According to Your faithfulness and not by virtue of my faithlessness, answer me. According to Your righteousness

answer me, for, apart from You, I have no righteousness that will avail. Without You and what You have done for all in Your Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, no one is justified in Your Presence. Jesus, continue to grant me Your grace, Your mercy, Your righteousness, Your forgiveness, Your perfection, Your holiness, Your peace and all other blessings and benefits that I may stand justified - in Your Presence - on Judgment Day. O Lord, in Your mercy, hear my prayer. Amen.

Hymn 552, 5 & 6.

O Jesus, Who my debt didst pay,
And for my sin wast smitten,
Within the Book of Life, O may
My name be also written!
I will not doubt; I trust in Thee,
From Satan Thou hast made me free,
And from all condemnation.

Therefore my Intercessor be,
And for Thy bloody merit
Declare my name from Judgment free,
With all who life inherit;
That I may see Thee face to face,
With all Thy saints in that blest place,
Which Thou for us hast purchased.

Monday - Salvation by Grace through Faith in Christ.

And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness — Genesis 15:6.

Dear Redeemed,

Abraham, a wealthy sinner, understood, confessed and relied on the foundational doctrine of Christianity. He did not place his eternal hope in his riches, in his own righteousness, or in his good deeds. Rather, Abraham trusted in LORD God for the full pardon of His sins through Jesus. He was justified by the grace of God through faith in Christ. The LORD God Almighty counted such belief to Abraham for

righteousness - the Son of God's perfect righteousness. Through faith in Christ, Abraham became an heir of heaven.

This is the Christian or catholic faith, which, except one has been given this gift and it be counted to him for righteousness, he cannot be saved. On Judgment Day, this will be the underlying basis for the eternal sentences of salvation and condemnation. How comforting to know, right now, how Jesus is going to make His decision when we stand before Him and await His ruling!

Jesus said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:16). This, dear redeemed, is pure Gospel. The only thing that will condemn a person, and condemn it will, is . . . unbelief! You are a sinner and have sinned every day in thought, word and deed. This will not condemn you. Only unbelief in Jesus, Who has died for you and removed your sins from you as far as the east is from the west, will condemn you. You believe in the Lord Jesus and it is counted to you as righteousness. Thanks be to God! That is Christ's Good News that enables you to live your life in this world in the full confidence of your eternal peace, as well as allowing you to close your eyes in sleep at night knowing that, if this be your last night in this world, you will awaken in the gracious, everlasting Presence of the LORD God Almighty.

Though he lived centuries before the Son of God was born in Bethlehem, Abraham was glad to see Jesus' day. In response to a question asked about whether Jesus had seen Abraham, our Lord replied that Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day, and then, when questioned further, said, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM*" (John 8:58).

Though you live centuries after the Son of God was crucified for the sins of the world, you rejoice to see Jesus' day. You, I and all Christians living after the Resurrection of Christ, join with Eve, Abraham and all the faithful living before the Incarnation of the Son of God in the one true faith. Belief in the Lord is counted for righteousness. As one holy congregation, we may confess Christ as our Redeemer and say of Jesus: "He is I AM and I AM He IS."

PRAYER — O Lord Jesus, my Savior, Redeemer and King, I confess that I have sinned and that I am a transgressor of Your Holy Law. Yet, the Holy Spirit, through Your Gospel Word, grants me the gift of faith in You. Such trust You account to me as righteousness. Thanks be to You! Therefore I rejoice and have confidence that You will not condemn me, but welcome me into Paradise. Amen.

Hymn 316, 1, 4, 5.

I DO not come because my soul
Is free from sin, and pure, and whole,
And worthy of Thy grace;
I do not speak to Thee because
I've ever justly kept Thy laws,
And dare to meet Thy face.

I know that, though in doing good
I spend my life, I never could
Atone for all I've done:
But though my sins are black as night,
I dare to come before Thy sight,
Because I trust Thy Son.

In Him alone my trust I place, –
Come boldly to Thy throne of grace,
And there commune with Thee.
Salvation sure, O Lord, is mine,
And, all-unworthy, I am Thine,
For Jesus died for me!

Tuesday - Fruits of Faith.

The man trusting in his wealth will be cast down; but the righteous ones will sprout forth like foliage — Proverbs 11:28.

Dear Redeemed,

We may understand the relationship between faith and works by comparing a tree with its fruit. First, the fruit does not come before the tree. The tree must come first; then the fruit appears. In a similar comparison, faith must come first; then the fruits of faith or works come forth.

Second, a diseased tree produces diseased fruit. It cannot produce beautiful, lovely, luscious fruit. Likewise, all people bear the image of Adam and are, by nature, sinful and unclean. Left to ourselves not one of us is able to produce a good work in the sight of God - no,

not one. Corrupt man yields forth corrupt deeds. The proverb states that the man who has faith in his wealth will yield the fruit which results in him being cast down.

A good tree produces good fruit, or, as Solomon has written, *the righteous ones will sprout forth like foliage*. Those who have been brought to faith in Jesus have been accounted righteous for Christ's sake and therefore their works are good. Now please understand that the Christian's works are, of themselves, no better than the non-Christian. However, not only is the Christian cleansed from all sins, so are his works. They are perfect.

Third, a diseased tree does not produce good fruit and a good tree does not produce diseased fruit. The non-Christian is unable to produce a single good work in the sight of God. His works are always rotten and worthless. The Christian always brings forth good works because, as said above, his works are cleansed by Christ. Or, as Christ the Vine said of His disciples: *"You are already clean by the Word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch can not bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine; neither can you, unless you abide in Me"* (John 15:4).

Fourth, and please follow along here carefully. Salvation is purely and only by the grace of God through faith in Christ - in Who He is and in what He did, does and will do. But on Judgment Day, the Lord's decision will be based on the fruits of faith. This is the context of several Scripture verses, which may cause questions.

Regarding the Resurrection of all people, Jesus says: *"they will come forth; those having done good, into the Resurrection of Life; but those who have done evil, into the resurrection of condemnation"* (John 5:29). The Apostle John wrote about seeing all the dead standing before God on Judgment Day and the books of all people were opened *"and the dead were judged according to the things that were written in the books, according to their works"* (Revelation 20:12) *"and they were judged, each man according to his works"* (v. 13).

This is the truth that the Church confesses in *The Athanasian Creed*. Concerning Jesus, we confess that "He ascended into heaven; He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give an account of their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved." This is most certainly true!

PRAYER — O Beloved Savior, You have already declared me clean by Your Word of forgiveness, pardon and grace. All glory and thanks to You. What joy is mine to know that even my feeble, tainted works which I do according to my various stations in life are also cleansed by Your sin-atonement Blood. What comfort this gives me - to know that, on Judgment Day, I am perfect in Your sight and all my works will be good according to Your Word. Keep me steadfast in the faith, trusting in You and not in anyone or anything else, that I may be called forth to the Resurrection of Life. Amen.

Hymn 356, 3, 4, 5.

By Thy blood our souls were bought,
By Thy life salvation wrought,
By Thy light our feet are taught,
Lord, to follow Thee.

Father, draw us to Thy Son;
We with joy will follow on,
Till the work of grace is done,
And from sin set free -

We in robes of glory dressed,
Join th' assembly of the blest,
Gathered to eternal rest,
In the fold with Thee.

Wednesday - The Second Advent of the Son of God.

And the LORD said to Noah, "You and all your household go into the ark, for I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation" — Genesis 7:1.

Dear Redeemed,

God does not withhold His judgment against unbelief forever. Though the Lord is long-suffering and merciful, the day of His wrath will come. While the day of judgment might be later this very day, we know that the day of grace is this present moment. Today is the day of

salvation. Only the LORD God Himself knows when the gracious day will go from the day of light to the time of darkness when the awful day commences.

In the days of Noah, the unbelief of man was so great that there were only eight believers (or Christians) left. The image and likeness of old Adam (Genesis 5:3) passed on from generation to generation and the imaginations of man's heart was, and is, only evil continually (Genesis 9:6). This was Noah's condition and it is yours as well.

Yet, the Bible indicates that Noah was righteous before the LORD God. We know that Noah's righteousness did not come from himself or because of his works, for the Bible states that all are corrupt and there is not one person who does good (Psalm 14:3). Rather, Noah was declared righteous by the grace of God through faith in the LORD - that is, through trust in the promised Seed of the woman. If anyone, yourself included, is righteous before God, it is because of the Holy Spirit's working faith in the Christ through the Word of God.

Notice God's patience and justice for the sake of His beloved Church. First, the LORD waits for Noah, who was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5) to build the ark. When the ark is finished, then the faithful congregate and enter the only Church wherein there is salvation. Second, notice that the LORD God Almighty will render judgment on the entire world in order to preserve and to protect His Church. This Church was saved from the destruction of the deep by means of water and each soul within it was saved in order to be in the Presence of the LORD by means of His Word.

The Apostle Peter declares that this reality of the ark corresponds to Baptism. Jesus, Who died on the cross that you might be baptized into His death, saves you from eternal death and brings you into eternal life. Jesus, Who rose again from the tomb, joins you with Him in His Resurrection. Through this blessed washing of the water with the Word, the righteousness of God is given, along with forgiveness, eternal life and salvation. In Baptism, one who was in the world and destined for destruction is now in the Church and made an heir of heaven.

Together those congregated by God in the Church await the advent of the King of Glory and the Day when everything here and now passes away and we arrive at the new heaven and the new earth.

PRAYER — Dear LORD God, I repent of my self-righteousness and hear Your Word granting me the righteousness that You desired me to have through Christ, that He has earned for me on the cross, and that You have called me to through the Gospel. Grant me continued

repentance that I may be sorry for my sins and trust in You for the forgiveness given me through Your Word. May this truth also comfort my brothers and my sisters in the Christian faith throughout the world. Watch over them and bless them. Blessed be the newborns in the faith and blessed be the old ones preparing to depart this life. Grant, I pray most earnestly, that the loved ones of my family and of my friends and of my neighbors who remain outside the Ark, may not perish but hear Your Word of Law and Gospel, believe it, be given everlasting life and be brought into Your Church. What joy to hear the Word of the LORD, *you and all your household go into the ark, for I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.* Then may they continue to hear for themselves, as I continue to hear for myself, that I am forgiven of all my sins in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Hymn 403.

Now Christ, the very Son of God,
On sinners sends another flood;
It is the water which the Lord
Has comprehended in the Word.

This flood, to cleanse sin's leprosy,
Mere earthly water cannot be;
But water and God's gracious word
Conjoined, this saving bath afford.

"Go ye," says Christ, "my Word proclaim,
Baptize the nations in God's name;
All who are baptized and believe
My full salvation shall receive."

God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
To be baptized invites the host;
He will be present, though unseen,
From all their sins to wash them clean.

So, too, by our repentance, must
The old man, with his sins and lust,
Be daily drowned, and then arise
A new man, righteous, pure, and wise.

That by the water and the Word
We're born again, we thank Thee, Lord!

In life and death Thine let us be,
And Thine in all eternity.

Thursday - The Kingdom Prepared for You by Jesus.

Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked - so that the righteous should be as the wicked! Far be that from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

— Genesis 18:25.

Dear Redeemed,

Our text for today is from the conversation that Abraham had with the LORD regarding the deliverance of the faithful in Sodom. He was interceding for the LORD's people in that place and was literally standing in God's way (see verse 22). While Abraham's stance and words may, at first, seem a bit forward or even inappropriate, they are not. Rather, he was demonstrating his faith toward the one, true God and his love for his neighbor, especially for the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). Faithful Abraham was interceding for the congregation in Sodom, making a confession of the truth, and praying the promises of God.

The day of reckoning was about to take place in Sodom. The Lord of heaven and earth was going down to that wicked place to render His decision and carry out the sentence against unbelief.

Abraham said to Jehovah, "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*" Spoken in faith, this question has the sense of: "The Judge of all the earth is good, holy, merciful and just. You are that Judge, O Savior of all the earth. You will always do what is right, won't You? The wicked and the righteous will not have the same end. You'll always render a perfect decision, won't You? Yes, You will. This is most certainly true."

On Judgment Day, Jesus will judge the living and the dead. He shall render a judgment for each one that is right and perfect. There will be no legal loophole for the wicked. There will be no unjust decision for the righteous. Those sinners whose faith was in something or someone other than Jesus and present no evidence of faith in Christ will be told to depart from His Presence and go into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Those sinners whose faith is in Christ crucified for the sins of the world and raised for our justification (Romans 4:25) will hear the decision: "*Come, you blessed of My Father. Inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matthew 25:41).

PRAYER — O Lord Jesus, Redeemer of the world and Judge of the living and the dead, is there salvation even for me, a sinner who has fallen each day? You have said that God so loved the world that He gave You, that whosoever believes in You should not perish, but have everlasting Life. God did not send You into the world to condemn the world; but that the world might be saved through You. This You have done for the world, and therefore, this You have done for me. You have redeemed me. You have called me by name. I am Yours. Whoever believes on You is not condemned; but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in You - not believed in the Name of the Only-Begotten Son of God. Is there not salvation and eternal Life for all, especially my family, friends and neighbors? Visit in mercy, I pray You, those who do not believe in You, that they may repent of their sin, trust in You for forgiveness and be heirs of heaven. Amen.

Hymn 133, 3, 4.

Lo, the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven.
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all, to be forgiven.

So, when next He comes with glory,
Wrapping all the earth in fear,
With His mercy He may shield us,
And with words of love draw near.

Friday - Comfort in Christ.

I have remembered Your judgments of old, LORD, and I have comforted myself — Psalm 119:52.

Dear Redeemed,

The psalmist speaks of the judgments and the decisions of God, that were, to him, *of old*. Ponder some of them, both great and seemingly small, in connection with four of the Lord's attributes or characteristics - His holiness, justice, mercy and grace. The decision in the Garden of Eden. The Flood. The Deliverance from Egypt. Ruth becoming a widow. The answer to Hannah's prayer. In each case, God's decision or judgment was made without compromising His holiness. Each one was just and right. At the same time, the Lord's

mercy and grace poured forth for the sake of His Promise and of His Church. The psalmist comforted himself with such thoughts.

Think of the application of these words for us: *I have remembered Your judgments of old, LORD, and I have comforted myself*. Ponder some of them that you and I recall, once again, in connection with those attributes of God. Gabriel's reprimand of Zechariah. The Incarnation. The Birth of the Son of God. Jesus healing on the Sabbath.

The greatest judgment of old took place on the cross when Jesus, true God and true man, was crucified for the sins of the world. God's holiness evoked the Divine reaction against sin. Jesus takes the sin of the world upon Himself and shoulders it to the cross. God's justice demands penalty and payment for all transgressions. Jesus' mercy is perfectly demonstrated when He does not give us what we deserve. His grace pours forth with forgiveness of all sins and the giving of eternal life and salvation. This is God's judgment of old and it is sealed in the Resurrection.

Dear redeemed, do you find comfort in this judgment of old? Now ponder what comfort this sweet sentence gives. It is not merely comfort that everything in the past was decided and done perfectly by the LORD God. There is not only comfort for the present day-to-day assurances that Jesus is with you and keeps you. There is, in addition, the soul-calming comfort that you have now concerning your presence before the LORD your God on Judgment Day. You already know the perfectly just decision that Jesus will render. You live in His grace, mercy and peace. In Christ you are holy. Therefore comfort yourself with this judgment of old.

PRAYER — Holy, merciful, just and gracious Jesus, as I think on Your judgments of old and as I ponder my life, Baptism and departure from this world, I am comforted by Your wonderful Word of Truth, *He who believes and is baptized will be saved*. Grant me Your Holy Spirit that I may ever remain one of Your faithful people scattered throughout this world. May I always trust in You and Your blessed promises. Keep me faithful unto death that I may be given the crown of Life and be with You and the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn 556, 3.

Exult, O dust and ashes! / The Lord shall be thy Part:
His only, His forever, / Thou shalt be and thou art!
Jesus, in mercy bring us / Soon to that land of rest:
Who art with God the Father / And Spirit ever blest!

Saturday - Waiting for the Salvation of the LORD.

I have waited for Your Salvation, O LORD!— Genesis 49:18.

Dear Redeemed,

It is possible that the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ will occur during your lifetime. At the Ascension of Jesus, the message was given to His disciples, that *this same Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven (Acts 1:11)*. No one on earth knows when that return of our Lord will be. Therefore, it is possible that you will depart this life by dying, *as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this the Judgment (Hebrews 9:27)*.

The text for today was spoken by Jacob, an old man on his deathbed. Partway through his last conversation with his sons, Jacob pauses and prays, *“I have waited for Your Salvation, O LORD!”* He has waited a lifetime for what had been prepared for him by the eternal Son of God.

What a life it was - one plagued with his own sin, fraught with family conflict, grief that wrung his soul. Jacob had deceived his own father and had been deceived by Rachel's father. He had tricked his brother, Esau, and then fled for his life. For decades Jacob had been lied to by his sons, who told him that his son, Joseph, was dead. Were there other problems that Jacob had. Most certainly and God only knows what they were. In the midst of this, the LORD remained faithful to His Word of forgiveness and eternal life, and to His promise of salvation.

Ponder your life for a moment. No doubt, it too, has been plagued with sins and the consequences of sins that are your own doing. The sins of others have impacted your life as well. And what of tragedy, grief, sickness and pain? There are also thoughts, words and actions that are so wretched that you would be humiliated for others to know about them.

Focus on two truths. First, Jesus has paid the eternal price for all your sins and, by the grace of God through faith in Jesus, you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost. Second, the instant you depart this life there will be no pain, no suffering, no sorrow, no sin, no hunger, no disease and no nightmares. You will be with Jesus in Paradise. Until then may you say to Jesus, *“I have waited for Your Salvation, O LORD!”*

PRAYER — Lord Jesus, my Hope and my Salvation, my Redeemer and my Judge, into Your nail-pierced hands I commend myself for time and for eternity. *I have waited for Your Salvation, O LORD!* If you should return during my lifetime, grant me trust to lift up my eyes unto You in faith. If it should be that I must depart this life by the separation of body and soul in death, abide with me and keep me steadfastly trusting You. Help me to be ready at all times for either and to say always, *“Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”* Amen.

Hymn 552, 6, 7.

Therefore my Intercessor be,
And for Thy bloody merit
Declare my name from judgment free,
With all who life inherit;
That I may see Thee face to face,
With all Thy saints in that blest place,
Which Thou for us hast purchased.

O Jesus Christ, do not delay,
But hasten our salvation!
We often tremble on our way
In fear and tribulation.
Then hear us when we cry to Thee;
Come, mighty Judge, and make us free
From every evil. Amen!

The Week of Advent 3

Sunday - The Word: the Means of Creation and of Grace.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and was void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, . . . — Genesis 1:1-3a.

Dear Redeemed,

The coming of the Son of God to be our Redeemer and the Savior of the world was the subject of our devotions for the first week of Advent. Last week the focus was on the advent of Jesus at the end of time and for the judgment on that Day. As we continue to *Search the Scriptures*, our attention on this third week of Advent is directed to the means of God's grace. These are the ways that the LORD comes to us now, in this dying world, in order to give us forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation; that is, to call us His own and keep us in His Kingdom of Grace.

Before the creation of time and space - of things visible and invisible - God IS. This one, true God - Father, Son, Holy Ghost - actively participated in creation. The Father created everything by means of the Son, even as the Holy Spirit moved over the face of the waters. Specifically, everything was created by means of the *Word*, for the Bible tells us, *And God said . . . God spoke*. The Lord did not create by means of a picture shown, or a smell given, or a touch imposed, or a taste imparted, or by a thought pondered. It was by the Word spoken.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us [1st Advent!] (*John 1:1-3, 14*).

Jesus is the Word and it is through this Word that the creation came into being. God *created all things through Jesus Christ* (*Ephesians 3:9*), God says, "*Let there be*" and the living creation has come into existence. Indeed, Jesus is the Word and it is also through this Word, Who was crucified and is risen, that eternal life comes into existence. Whoever hears this Word and, through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith, believes it, well, that person is now *in Christ, he is a new creation* (*2 Corinthians 5:17*).

PRAYER — O dear LORD God - Father, Son, Holy Ghost - all praise, glory, honor and majesty to You for Your work of bringing all creation into existence. I thank You for my creation, being and life in the midst of galaxies. I confess that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. You have given me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserve them. Especially do I thank You for speaking the Word of Life in Christ crucified and risen. Through the hearing of that Word You have wrought faith in my soul and made me a new creation. Now, being

Your workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, that I should walk in them, grant me grace, courage, prudence, wisdom and strength to follow You and love my neighbor. May it be so in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Hymn 113, 1, 2.

O WORD of God Incarnate,
O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging,
O Light of our dark sky;
We praise Thee for the radiance
That from the hallow'd page,
A lantern to our footsteps,
Shines on from age to age.

The Church from her dear Master
Received the gift divine,
And still that light she lifteth
O'er all the earth to shine.
It is the golden casket
Where gems of truth are stored,
It is the heaven-drawn picture
Of Christ, the living Word.

Monday - The Name of the LORD our God.

In every place where I cause My Name to be remembered, I will come to you and I will bless you — Exodus 20:24.

Dear Redeemed,

Amidst the smoke and thunder on Mt. Sinai, the Son of God spoke to Moses, "*I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*" (*Exodus 20:2*). The Word of God came to Moses and told Moses His Name . . . Jehovah, Yahweh, LORD, I AM. In this Name - in this Word, there God is present. Neither Moses nor anyone else would have ever discovered this had it not been specially revealed. Following the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses drew near the thick darkness. Then, among other things, the

LORD spoke the words of our text - *In every place where I cause My Name to be remembered, I will come to you and I will bless you.*

Jesus repeated this in the New Testament: *“For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).* God gives us His Word, reveals His Name to us and causes it to be remembered. Wherever that might happen in this world, there the LORD comes and blesses. Both are needed.

If we only knew that the one true God comes to us wherever the Name of the LORD is remembered and that He did not come in blessing, it would be a most fearful place. The Word came to Jacob at the time of Jacob’s ladder: *“I am the LORD, ... Behold, I am with you” (Gen. 28:13 & 15).* And Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, *“Truly the LORD is in this place and I did not know it.”* And he was afraid and said, *“How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven” (Gen. 28:16-17).* This is the place where the LORD causes His Name to be remembered; that is, the House of God. It is a *dreadful* place!

The LORD not only comes to the place where He causes His Name to be remembered, He also blesses. What are some of these blessings? First is to be in His Presence despite our sin. Second is, because the Son of God lived, died and rose again, we are forgiven of all our sins. Where there is such pardon, there is also eternal life and salvation. Jesus blesses with His peace, with His gifts, with our being called children of God. This is the place where the LORD causes His Name to be remembered; that is, the House of God. It is the Gate of Heaven and it is a *wonderful* place!

Apart from His Name, God is neither graciously present nor bestowing His gifts. *There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name, under heaven, given among men, in which we must be saved (Acts 4:12), that, in the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven and in earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD (Phil. 2:10-11).*

PRAYER — O Holy Spirit, all thanks and praise to You for having caused Your Name, the LORD, to be remembered at many and various places and times throughout history. I thank You that the Word has come to me and that in this Name I have eternal life and salvation; that is, that I was brought into the Kingdom through Your means of grace and I am forgiven of all my sins in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost. May every congregating place be where You are and where You bless, so that the House of God would be a *dreadful, wonderful* place. Amen.

Hymn 303, 1, 2.

ALMIGHTY Lord, before Thy throne,
Thy mourning people bend;
‘Tis on Thy grace in Christ alone,
Our failing hopes depend.

Dark judgments, from Thy heavy hand,
Thy dreadful power display;
Yet mercy spares our guilty land,
And still we live to pray.

Tuesday - Law and Gospel.

And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took two staves - the one I called Grace and the other I called Bands - and I fed the flock — Zechariah 11:7.

Dear Redeemed,

The Law and the Gospel are the two main teachings in the Scriptures. In the Bible verse for today the Christ speaks of these by referring to two staves - the *Grace* staff and the *Bands* staff. With these two, He tends the flock, which is His Church.

The Law commands us what to do and not do, what to say and not say, what to think and not think. In addition, the Law demands that we also be perfect. The Law does not cut anyone any slack. It offers no breaks and no second chances. The Law always accuses our old sinful nature and heightens the anguish of the soul. This is the *Bands* staff.

The Gospel makes no demands, insists on no conditions, and does not threaten. The Gospel is the Good News of Christ coming into the world to keep the Law perfectly in our stead, to offer Himself as the Sacrifice for all sins, to die in our stead, to rise again on Easter morning and to ascend into heaven. God’s forgiveness, eternal life and salvation are bestowed through this Word of Good News through the means of grace. The Gospel comforts the Christian and soothes the troubled soul. This is the *Grace* staff.

The Lord tends and feeds His flock with these two staves - with Law and Gospel. The Law is intended as a prelude to the Gospel, wherein the forgiveness of sins is announced to the repentant soul. The

means of grace are the ways that Christ has established so that the *Grace* staff may be used.

In order that people may obtain this Christian faith, Christ has given men to be pastors in His Church and the Holy Spirit calls such qualified men to be pastors in congregations and to tend the flocks under their care. These pastors are *to feed the Church of God, which He purchased with His own Blood (Acts 20:28)*. They do this by properly distinguishing and applying Law and Gospel - *Bands* and *Grace*. True pastors desire that people hear the Good News and are received into grace for Christ's sake, which happens not by our keeping of the Law or our merits, or our good works. Rather, it is through faith in God's gracious Word of forgiveness in Jesus.

PRAYER — O LORD God Almighty, I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the one, true faith. Grant that through this same way, others may be called and gathered into Your Church on earth. Send Your Word of Law where it is needed to accuse and to prepare for Your Word of Gospel. May this Good News comfort many souls. Please grant me and all in Your Church daily forgiveness of sins through Your means of grace. Help me to recognize the need for Law and for Gospel in my life, as well as in the application of the same to others, especially my loved ones, friends and Your children in the Diaspora. Amen.

Hymn 115, 1, 5, 6.

THE Law of God is good and wise,
And sets His will before our eyes;
Shows us the way of righteousness,
And dooms to death when we transgress.

The Law is good; but since the Fall
Its holiness condemns us all;
It dooms us for our sin to die,
And has no power to justify.

To Jesus we for refuge flee,
Who from the curse has set us free,
And humbly worship at His Throne,
Saved by His grace through faith alone.

Wednesday - Baptism.

And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean"— 2 Kings 5:10.

Dear Redeemed,

Naaman, the Syrian Commander, was a leper and sought to be cleansed of his leprosy. The LORD God, through the Prophet Elisha gave Naaman a special promise about being healed from his disease and cleansed from his leprosy. The promise was attached to a particular place (the Jordan River) and to the ordinance of God (washing seven times in that water). The means of healing was according to the Word of God.

Naaman was offended and quite angry. He complained and refused to proceed. As a result, Naaman remained without the promised blessing. He remained diseased. Finally after being urged by his faithful servants, Naaman repented and did as he was invited to do. He washed seven times in the Jordan River and his flesh was restored to health and he was clean.

Every one born of the union of a man and a woman in this world bears the image of Adam and is sin-diseased. Each one of us is sinful, unclean and in need of God's blessings. The Lord provides such a washing of regeneration and renewal, also known as Baptism. This is one of God's means of grace, whereby the blessings earned by Jesus in His Life, Death and Resurrection are given to the individual.

Baptism is not simple water only, but the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word. Jesus desires that all nations; that is, all people be made His disciples by baptizing them *in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19)*. Dearly beloved of God, *the Promise is to you and to your children (Acts 2:39)*.

Certainly, one can, as Naaman had done, reject the gift and remain diseased with sin unto all eternity. Such is not God's desire. Jesus states, *"He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). It is not the lack of baptism that condemns, but the rejection of baptism, which is a rejection of the washing of regeneration, a refusal of the renewal of the Holy Spirit, a denial of the forgiveness of sins - in short, a setting aside of the Word of God and the blessing of Jesus.

May it not be such for you. Rather, may you rejoice and say, “I am baptized! Thank You, Jesus, for this means of God’s grace.”

PRAYER — Dear LORD God, Heavenly Father, I hear the Word of Life in Baptism and I thank You for this wonderful gift. I have been baptized into Your Son, Jesus Christ, and therefore am baptized into His Death. I was buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, I too, might walk in newness of life. For if I have been united with Him in a death like His, I shall certainly be united with Him in a Resurrection like His. The robe of Jesus’ righteousness is given to me and I am covered on the outside and cleansed from sin’s stains on the inside. Grant me the gift of faith to trust in Your promise of continued forgiveness that I may often hear and always believe that I am right with You, not because of my works or merits, but because of Your Son’s works and merits. Amen.

Hymn 212, 1, 2.

COME to Calvary’s holy mountain,
Sinners, ruined by the Fall;
Here a pure and healing fountain
Flows to you, to me, to all;
In a full perpetual tide,
Opened when our Savior died.

Come in poverty and meanness,
Come defiled, without, within;
From infection and uncleanness,
From the leprosy of sin,
Wash your robes and make them white;
Ye shall walk with God in light.

Thursday - Confession and Absolution

And David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die”— 2 Samuel 12:13.

Dear Redeemed,

King David had sinned. He had broken every one of God’s Ten Commandments. He coveted. He committed adultery. He lied. He murdered. He fell into unbelief. He honored neither his parents nor God’s Name. He neglected and rejected God’s Word. David was apart from His Savior and on the way to eternal death.

According to His mercy, not wanting to give David what he deserved, the LORD God called Nathan to proclaim the Law to David; that is, to use the *Bands* staff. Nathan, like a faithful pastor, used that staff in such a skillful, marvelous way that David actually accused and condemned himself. (You may read how it was done in 2 Sam. 12:1-7.)

As a result of the Law doing its work of accusing and condemning, David was sorry for his sin, looked to God for grace, and confessed to Nathan, “*I have sinned against the LORD.*” Take special note that all sins are committed against the LORD. David would write, “*Against You, You only, have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight*” (*Psalm 51:4*). Nathan then used the *Grace* staff and spoke the Gospel to this repentant soul. In the stead and by the command of God, Nathan announced to David, “*The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*” David was completely forgiven of all his sins and restored in the Kingdom of Grace.

This is called *Absolution* and it is one of God’s means of grace in the application of the Word of the Gospel to the repentant soul. Absolution is neither an excuse for sin nor an eraser of the consequences. Rather, Absolution bestows Divine pardon and perfect standing before God.

You have sinned. Whether in thought, word and/or deed, you have broken each and every one of God’s Ten Commandments. Against the LORD only have you sinned, done what is evil in His sight and deserved eternal condemnation.

May God grant you His gift of repentance, that you are sorry for your sins and look to Christ Jesus for the pardon you need and that is abundantly available. May you then know that you will not die eternally because you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost.

PRAYER — O LORD God, against You only have I sinned and done what is evil. Your Word of Law, when measured against my life, always condemns me. But I am heartily sorry for all my sins - especially those of which I know not. I confess them all and look to Jesus, Who has died on the cross for all sins, mine included. Grant me

the faith to hear Your Word of Absolution. Thank You for this means of Your grace whereby I am forgiven and restored. Grant me a pastor to announce this Good News to me. Give me the strength, courage, faith, wisdom and discipline to understand and to live with any consequences of my sins as well as the sins of others. Amen.

Hymn 426, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

The words which absolution give
Are His who died that we might live;
The minister whom Christ has sent
Is but His humble instrument.

However great our sin may be,
The absolution sets us free,
Appointed by God's own dear Son
To bring the pardon He has won.

When ministers lay on their hands,
Absolved by Christ the sinner stands;
He who by grace the Word believes
The purchase of His blood receives.

This is the power of holy keys,
It binds and doth again release;
The Church retains them at her side,
Our mother and Christ's holy bride.

Let those who stings of conscience bear,
Whom sin would drive to dark despair,
To Jesus come with trustful mind
And peace in absolution find.

Friday - The LORD's Supper

It is the LORD's Passover — Exodus 12:11.

Dear Redeemed,

In the land of bondage, the LORD was preparing His people to depart Pharaoh's oppression. The final plague - the death of the

firstborn would soon take place. The faithful prepared for that First Passover by applying the blood of the lamb upon the doorposts and the headers of their homes and by eating the unleavened bread. Any first-borns in those houses covered by the blood of the lamb and partaking of the meal would be spared. All of this was according to the Word of the LORD for it was *the LORD's Passover*.

At the Second Passover, Jesus was preparing His disciples for His exodus. The death of the Only-Begotten Son would soon take place. Jesus took the unleavened bread of the First Passover, blessed and broke it, He gave it to His disciples and said, "*Take, eat; this is My Body.*" And He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, "*Drink from it, all of you, for this is My Blood of the New Testament which is shed for many, for the remission of sins*" (Matthew 26:26-28). All of this is according to the Word of the LORD for it is *the LORD's Supper*.

The Lord's Supper, or *Holy Communion*, is a special means of grace that Christ has given to His Church. According to the Word of the LORD God, along with the bread and the wine, those eating and drinking at the Table of the Lord, also receive the Body of Jesus and the Blood of Christ. This is the same Body of Christ that was born of Mary and was crucified on the cross. This is the same Blood of Jesus that was shed on His eighth day and that flowed from our Lord. This Supper is for the remission of sins.

The Lord's Supper, or the *Eucharist*, (a word that means "thanksgiving") does not create faith. Rather, it sustains and strengthens the faith, which trusts in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and looks to Him for salvation. What a blessing Communion is for those who are prepared; that is, who know what they are receiving (the Body and Blood of Jesus, together with the bread and wine) and why they are coming (forgiveness of sins)!

PRAYER — O Dearest Jesus, King of kings and Redeemer of the world, You have descended into this fallen land of bondage and become man in order to give Your Body into death and to shed Your Blood in order that my sins would be passed over to You. In Your Life and Death You have provided an accomplished salvation on the cross and now bestow Your gifts according to Your will and Word in the means of grace. In Your Resurrection and Ascension You have conquered death and the grave, and now reign over all, even according to Your human nature. Likewise, You are everywhere and are specially here - graciously - in Your means of grace. Grant to me a holy hunger and a thirsting for You that is fulfilled and satisfied in the Holy Communion.

May I be prepared to receive Your Body and Blood for the forgiveness of my sins, the assurance of eternal life and salvation, and the peace to commend myself into Your nail-pierced hands - now and for all eternity. Amen.

Hymn 224, 3, 5, 7.

But Jesus Christ, God's only Son,
To our low state descended,
The cause of Death He has undone,
His power forever ended,
Ruined all his right and claim,
And left him nothing but the name, -
His sting is lost forever. Hallelujah!

Here the true Paschal Lamb we see,
Whom God so freely gave us;
He died on the accursed tree,
So strong His love! To save us.
See! His Blood doth mark our door,
Faith points to it, Death passes o'er,
The Murderer can not harm us. Hallelujah!

Then let us feast this Easter-day
On Christ, the Bread of heaven;
The Word of grace hath purged away
The old and evil leaven;
Christ alone our souls will feed,
He is our meat and drink indeed,
Faith lives upon no other. Hallelujah!

Saturday - The Certain Word of the LORD our God.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God will stand forever — Isaiah 40:8.

Dear Redeemed,

Isaiah the Prophet has not recorded a lesson about grass and flowers. Rather, these statements about plants withering, buds blighting and blossoms fading concern the universal decay, disease and death of all creation that was subjected to futility (Romans 8:20) because of the

Fall. All nations, all generations, all people. No one is exempt from this declining and deadly condition. You are included and your *heart knows its own bitterness (Proverbs 14:10)*. Each day, when you look into the mirror, you are gathering visual evidence and sober reminders of this human condition. This is due to the truth that *the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23)*.

Thus far the Law and it is non-negotiable. Until the end of this world, this is the way the binding Word is. The Son of God would not have this be the only word from Him and so urges His prophet, "*Comfort, comfort My people!*" says your God (*Isaiah 40:1*). But how is a prophet, pastor, preacher and professor to comfort others with the Law? They aren't. There is another Word that Christ speaks and the Holy Spirit has written. That Word is the Gospel - the Good News that is directed to God's Church, and therefore, is directed to you. Your warfare with God has ended. Your iniquity is pardoned. The LORD's hand has provided double for your sins. God's forgiveness is greater than your sins and He assures you of that through His Word. While it remains a fact that *the wages of sin is death*, it is also most certainly true that *the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23)*.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God will stand forever. Jesus said it this way in the New Testament, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will not pass away*" (*Matthew 24:35*). Though you are getting older and the aches and pains increase, God does not change. Though you are pestered by the ever-increasing scratches on your soul caused by sin, Jesus' Word of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation offered in and through His means of grace remains.

Dear redeemed, rejoice, for you are one *having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, through the Living and abiding Word of God; because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of it as the flower of the grass. The grass withers and its flower falls away, but the Word of the LORD endures forever. Now, this is the Word which, by the Gospel, was preached to you (1 Peter 1:23-25)*.

Listen to an advent voice crying out in the Diaspora, "*Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God*" (*Isaiah 40:3*), for He is coming and His salvation is drawing near.

PRAYER — Indeed, O dear Savior and Redeemer, You and Your Word of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation come to me every day. Though my life is changing, often for the worse, You remain the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Even if my body wastes away, Your

Word of grace, mercy and peace remain. Grant me Your blessing and strength to grow in grace, good works and godliness for as many moments as You have allotted me on this earth. And when my days are ended here, take me to Yourself, as is Your promise, that where You are, there I may be also. Amen.

Hymn 110, 1, 2, 9.

LORD Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the even-tide;
Let not Thy Word, that heavenly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness,
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

O grant that in Thy holy Word
We here may live and die, dear Lord;
And when our journey endeth here,
Receive us into glory there.

The Week of Advent 4

Sunday — The Birth of John Foretold.

Behold I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me — Malachi 3:1a.

Dear Redeemed,

Thus did the Son of God speak to us through the Prophet Malachi who wrote these words at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Christ would send His messenger before He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. It would be four centuries before this promise was fulfilled. Therefore the faithful waited, not only for the First Advent of the Messiah, but also for the one man who would come before Him. *Behold, I will send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.* The Church awaited the voice in the wilderness declaring, *"Prepare the way of the LORD" (Isaiah 40:3).*

In the days of King Herod of Judea, an old man named Zachariah, served the Lord as priest. He was married to Elizabeth, a well-seasoned woman. Both were righteous in the sight of God and walked in the Lord's Commandments. In other words, by means of the Word and the grace of God they trusted the Lord, and they were accounted righteous by God. They responded with fruits of faith in their vocations. Their vocations, however, did not include father and mother for the couple had no children.

On one day, in the course of their days, the lot fell to Zachariah to burn incense within the temple of the Lord. While he was doing this, Gabriel the angel appeared to him and said to him, *"Fear not, Zachariah, for your prayer is heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will call his name, John" (Luke 1:13).* John would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from Elizabeth's womb and he would be the Christ's messenger and prepare the way for the Lord.

Zachariah questioned this and put up an argument. The angel said, *"I am Gabriel, who stands in the Presence of God. I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and not able to speak until these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."*

As a result, God remained faithful to His promise — *Behold I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.* Zachariah remained speechless. He returned to his home and shortly thereafter, Elizabeth became pregnant. The messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord resides in the womb of an older woman. We are in the season of miraculous conceptions and approach the season of wonderful births!

PRAYER — Almighty God, my heavenly Father, Whose attributes include mercy and faithfulness, I heartily beg You to visit those who doubt, reject or have strayed from Your Word of Good News that You intend for all to hear and believe. Through Your Law bring them to a knowledge of their error and through Your Gospel restore them that they may be given the gifts of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation through Jesus. Remove all haughtiness, doubt and pride on my part that would ensnare me and lead me astray from Your glad tidings of great joy. Amen.

Hymn 116, 1, 6.

THE Gospel shows the Father's grace,
Who sent His Son to save our race;
Proclaims how Jesus lived and died
That man might thus be justified.

May we in faith its tidings learn,
Nor thanklessly its blessings spurn;
May we in faith its truth confess,
And praise the Lord our righteousness.

Monday — The Birth of Jesus Foretold.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and call His name, Immanuel — Isaiah 7:14.

Dear Redeemed,

Though declared centuries before the Birth of Jesus, this stunning announcement of a virgin conceiving and bearing the Son of God continues to evoke wonder, amazement and awe. Here is the immaculate conception! The Seed of the woman would be called *Emmanuel*, which means “God with us.” Concerning this Savior, Who would be God and man, the Prophet would ask “*Who has believed what we have heard?*” (*Isaiah 53:1*). Indeed, who has believed Isaiah’s report of the virgin? The faithful have.

Six months after the events of yesterday’s devotion, Gabriel the angel was sent from God to a city in Galilee named Nazareth. Gabriel came to a virgin named Mary, who was betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph. “*Rejoice, highly favored one. The Lord is with you! (Luke 1:28)*. Mary was troubled at this greeting and what it might mean.

The angel Gabriel said to her, “*Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His Name JESUS. He will be great and will be called Son of the Highest and the LORD God will give Him the Throne of His father David, and He will reign over the House of Jacob forever and of His Kingdom there will be no end*” (*Luke 1:30-33*).

Mary asked, “*How will this be, since I do not know a man?*”

And answering, the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you. Therefore, also the Holy One Who is to be born will be called the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your kinswoman, has also conceived a son in her old age and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible” (v. 34-37).

Mary’s reply was a faithful, trusting, “*Behold the maid-servant of the LORD! Let it be to me according to your word*” (*v. 38*).

And so it was. This is the Incarnation of the LORD God Almighty. The tiny, tiny single cell Who was within the womb of a virgin is Emmanuel, which means *God with us*, come into this world to be the Savior of all those, who by the union of a man and a woman, were conceived in sin. That means the Son of God and the Son of Mary came for you and for me and for everyone - from the single-cell person who was conceived and given life just moments ago to the oldest among us born more than one hundred years ago.

PRAYER — O most wonderful and loving Father in heaven, Who has given Your Only-Begotten Son, Your eternal Word, to be made Incarnate by the Holy Spirit within the womb of a Jewish virgin, grant to me and to all Your Church throughout the world the grace and faith to put away all sinful desires and to be ready for the advent of the King of Glory. Gladden the hearts of all members of the Diaspora as, together, we rejoice in the yearly celebration of the Festival of the Incarnation of Your Son. Amen.

Hymn 141, 1, 2, 3.

SAVIOR of the heathen, come,
Virgin’s son, here make Thy home;
Wonder at it, heaven and earth,
That the Lord chose such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood,
By the Spirit of our God
Was the Word of God made flesh -
Woman’s blossom, sweet and fresh,

Though the virgin was with child,
Chastity proved undefiled;
Many a virtue rare forth shone,
God was there upon His throne.

Tuesday - The Visitation and the Magnificat.

O magnify the LORD with me and let us exalt His Name together.

— *Psalm 34:3*

Dear Redeemed,

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zechariah and

greeted Elizabeth.. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she called out with a great cry, “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For lo, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she that believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:39-45).

The six-month-old baby in Elizabeth’s womb, who will be named John, is already preparing the way of the LORD. Being in the Presence of the unborn Son of God prompts this unborn son of Elizabeth to leap for joy. The mothers must certainly have hugged each other and laughed together for the joy that they were experiencing in response to the Word. Everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit and it would not be wrong to imagine the enactment of the Psalmist’s words: *O magnify the LORD with me and let us exalt His Name together.*

To magnify is to enlarge and cause to grow. To magnify God is to cause that magnification to be manifested in one’s life - to praise God for His love, promise, deliverance, grace, mercy, forgiveness and salvation. Now God certainly is not in need of magnification, but we pray that He would, through His Word of the Gospel, be magnified in our souls and our spirits rejoice in this Good News of great joy. This magnification is done in faith in the LORD God and with joy welling up from within and expressing itself in confession.

That is exactly what happens next in the house of Zechariah as Mary, the mother of our Lord, begins those words of the *Magnificat* - *My soul magnifies the LORD, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior* (Luke 1:47). Mary confesses that God has sent His Son to be her Savior from sin, death and the devil. She rejoices that this Good News has come to her. We rejoice too!

PRAYER — Almighty God, Who has dealt wonderfully with Your handmaiden, the Virgin Mary, and did choose her to be the mother of Your Son, and graciously made known that You regard the poor and lowly and despised; grant me grace in all humility and meekness to receive Your Word with hearty faith and so be made one with Your dear Son. May all of Your people, especially the lonely, the hurting, the dying and those away from home, who are scattered throughout the world during these days join our souls, spirits and voices together to magnify You and rejoice in Jesus, our Savior. In the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Hymn - *The Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55).

*My soul doth magnify the LORD,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden:
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For He that is mighty hath done to me great things;
and Holy is His Name.
And His mercy is on them that fear Him
from generation to generation.
He hath showed strength with His arm;
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich He hath sent empty away.
He hath helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy;
As He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to His seed forever.*

Wednesday - The Birth of John.

The voice of him that cries in the wilderness — Isaiah 40:3.

Dear Redeemed,

Mary remained with Elizabeth for three months and then returned to her house in Nazareth. Then it came to pass that Elizabeth gave birth to a son. The one who would be the voice crying in the wilderness and who would prepare the way of the LORD, drew his first breath. Elizabeth’s family rejoiced with her, even as old Zechariah continued in his forced silence.

On the eighth day they all gathered for the circumcision and for the naming of the child. Already they called the infant boy, Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth corrected them, indicating that his name would be John. The people were bewildered and looked to the muted old man. Zechariah motioned for a writing tablet and wrote: HIS NAME IS JOHN. Everyone marveled at this. Immediately, Zechariah was able to speak. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he spoke the words of what is known as *The Benedictus*. A part of Zechariah’s hymn is as follows (the entire hymn is printed at the end of this devotion), as father speaks to and concerning his son, John:

“And you, child, will be called prophet of the Highest, for you will go before the LORD to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins” (Luke 1:76-77).

The Voice precedes and prepares the way for the Word, even though, in the beginning was the Word, just as John is born before and prepares the way of Jesus, even though Jesus is Jehovah. John comes to give knowledge of salvation to God’s people. He preaches repentance, which consists of two parts: sorrow for sins and looking to Christ for the forgiveness of sins. John will point to Jesus as the *Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)*. The Son of God did this for you in His Life, Death and Resurrection.

PRAYER — Lord Jesus, I thank You for having sent John the Baptist to be the voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for You by preaching and teaching the knowledge of salvation through the remission of sins. I am a wretched sinner and deserve nothing but Your temporal and eternal wrath, but You are the wonderful Savior of the world and You have carried all my sins to the cross and paid the awful, eternal price for them. Therefore I trust, not in my works, but in Your gift of grace through the redemption sealed in Your Resurrection and in my baptism. Grant me steadfast faith and the ability to hear Your Word as it is preached and taught in its truth and purity. Grant that this same Word may go forth throughout the wilderness of this world and may accomplish the purpose for which You send it. In Your Name, dear Jesus. Amen.

Hymn - *The Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79)*.

*Blessed be the LORD God of Israel;
for He has visited and redeemed His people,
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of His servant David,
As He spoke by the mouth of the holy prophets,
Who have been since the world began,
That we should be saved from our enemies
And from the hand of all who hate us,
To perform the mercy promised to our fathers
And to remember His holy covenant,
The oath which He swore to our father Abraham,
To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before Him, all our days.*

*And you, child, will be called prophet of the Highest, for you will go before the LORD to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins,
through the tender mercy of our God;
With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us,
To give Light to those who sit in darkness and
in the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Thursday - The Savior and Joseph.

I - I am the LORD; and beside Me there is no savior — Isaiah 43:11.

Dear Redeemed,

The Son of God spoke these words hundreds of years before He was born in Bethlehem. Christ is the LORD and this Messiah is the only savior. Apart from Him there is no salvation. In Christ there is forgiveness of sins, righteousness, eternal life and salvation.

Joseph, the espoused husband of Mary, was a righteous man. As we know, Mary was with child even though she was a virgin. Even though Joseph and Mary were husband and wife, this took place, as the Bible says, *before they came together*. When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, and knowing that he was not the father, he, *being a righteous man and not willing to publicly disgrace her, sought to put her away quietly (Matthew 1:18-19)*.

Joseph, a righteous man, sought to do the righteous deed. (Note: Joseph was a righteous man apart from his works of the Law. Doing deeds does not make a man righteous. Joseph, as with any Christian, is righteous by God’s grace through faith in Christ - Who is the only Savior. Righteous works follow like fruit from a tree.)

As Joseph pondered his plan of action concerning Mary, the angel of the Lord appeared to him as he was sleeping and said, *“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son and you will call His Name, JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (v. 20-21)*.

When Joseph woke from his sleep, he did as the angel had declared. He took Mary as his wife, caring for her and providing for her as a husband is called to do, *and he knew her not till she had brought forth a Son. And he called His name JESUS (v. 24-25)*.

“Jesus” is a word that means “Savior.” Joseph was called to care for his Savior as a father cares for his son. Joseph is a righteous

man by the grace of God. As God gave him strength, wisdom and ability, he would love, protect, lead and care for his Savior and for his wife as a father and husband should.

PRAYER — O King of kings and Lord of lords, You are the promised Savior - the only Savior. In the fullness of time You were conceived in the womb of that virgin, Mary, and commended to the care of that righteous man, Joseph. Bless me with Your righteousness declared unto me by Your Word of grace and grant me wisdom and strength to avoid the hopeless righteousness that comes through my deeds of the Law. Bestow upon me the desire and the ability to carry forth in my various vocations. Protect all unborn children that they may be born into this world and born again through Baptism. Be with all mothers who are with child, giving them the desire to bear their children into this world and to the baptismal font. Abide with all fathers that they may be men who trust in You and who serve those in their care. Provide homes for orphans and grant children to those husbands and wives who are without them. Amen.

Hymn 144.

JESUS, Thy Church with longing eyes
For Thine expected coming waits:
When will the promised light arise,
And glory beam from Zion's gates?

E'en now, when tempests round us fall,
And wintry cloud o'ercast the sky,
Thy words with pleasure we recall,
And deem that our redemption's nigh.

Come, gracious Lord, our hearts renew,
Our foes repel, our wrongs redress,
Man's rooted enmity subdue,
And crown Thy Gospel with success.

O come, and reign o'er every land;
Let Satan from his throne be hurtled.
All nations bow to Thy command,
And grace revive a dying world.

Teach us in watchfulness and prayer
To wait for the appointed hour;

And fit us by Thy grace to share
The triumphs of Thy conquering power.

Christmas Eve Day - The Christmas Decrees.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, although you are little among the thousands of Judah, from you will come forth for Me One Who is to be ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting — Micah 5:2.

Dear Redeemed,

In the days of Samuel, one of the shepherds tending the sheep outside of Bethlehem was the young man named David. Bethlehem, a word meaning “house of bread,” was where David grew up. Many years later, the Holy Spirit, via the hand of Micah the Prophet, issued the decree that Bethlehem would be the place where the Son of God would be born. This Ancient One, Whose goings-on are from eternity, would be born in this little town in the land of Judah.

Attention, Bethlehem, city of David! It is decreed that you will be the place where the Christ will be born. Thus far the decree of Micah.

But Joseph, Mary and the incarnate LORD God residing in Mary's womb are in Nazareth of Galilee. How is it going to be that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem? Behold . . . *It came to pass in those days a decree (dogma) went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment when Quirinius was governing Syria, and all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child (Luke 2:1-5).* Thus far the decree of Caesar Augustus.

And so it was, that while they were there, the days were fulfilled for her to be delivered, and she gave birth to her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in the same country, living in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the LORD stood before them, and the Glory of the LORD shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of

a great joy, which will come to all the people, for there is born to you, this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the LORD. And this will be a sign to you - you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and 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!'" (v. 6-14). Thus far the decree of the Christmas Angel!

And it came to pass, when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was spoken to them concerning this Child. And all who heard it marveled at what they were told by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them (v.15-20). Thus far the decree of the Christmas shepherds!

Please note, dear redeemed, that this Good News of a great joy, which will come to all the people, is intended for you. The Son of God came into this world for you. He was born for you. He was baptized, lived, suffered, was crucified and died for you. He rose again from the dead for you and ascended into heaven for you. This is why God became man, and He did it for you - that you may have eternal life in place of everlasting death - that you may have salvation by His grace instead of condemnation under His law - that you may be forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thus far the decree of God's Word to you!

PRAYER — O LORD God, Who has made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of Jesus, the true Light of the world; grant, I beg You, that as I have heard these wonderful mysteries of that Light on this earth, that I, my family, my friends and neighbors, and all, especially the beloved members of the Household of Faith throughout the world, may come to the fullness of those joys in heaven which are given by grace through faith in Christ. Glory be to You O LORD God; that is, to the Father and to the † Son and to the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Hymn 150, 1, 2, 3, 4, 15.

FROM heaven above to earth I come
To bear Good News to every home;

Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
Whereof I now will say and sing.

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.

This is the Christ, our God and Lord,
Who in all need shall aid afford;
He will Himself your Savior be,
From all your sins to make you free.

He brings those blessings, long ago
Prepared by God for all below,
That in His heavenly Kingdom blest
You may with us forever rest.

Glory to God in highest heaven,
Who unto man His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth
A glad New Year to all the earth.

Christmas Day - The Birth of the LORD God.

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, "I have gotten a man - the LORD" — Genesis 4:1.

Dear Redeemed,

The promise of Adam and Eve's Savior was declared to them before they left the Garden of Eden. The Seed of the woman would defeat the Devil and its legions. Obviously Eve was the only woman who heard this and knew that it applied to her. Thus, when she gave birth to her firstborn son, she declared that she had given birth to her Savior. The literal translation of the Hebrew words are: "*I have gotten a man - the LORD.*" Eve, *mother of all the living (Gen. 3:20)*, declared that she was the mother of the devil-defeating Seed - of the LORD God. She claimed Cain to be the incarnate God born to be the promised Savior. Eve's theology was spot-on correct. Her application and timing were off.

The Savior of the world would have to be *a man - the LORD*. The Savior would have to be true man in order to be under the Law and to suffer in body and soul, shed His Blood, give His Life, die and be buried. *God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order to redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4-5)*. To accomplish this, the Savior would have to be true God in order to provide a sufficient sacrifice for all sins of all people of all times, for *the Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sins (1 John 1:7) and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2)*.

Eve understood the Promise. She was wrong, however, on who would bear the infant Savior. The Baby's mother was not Eve, but rather, a daughter of Eve who lived in Galilee many generations later. Mary could rightly have said, "*I have gotten a man - the LORD,*" for her firstborn Son was true God, conceived by the Holy Spirit and true man, carried within her womb. The Scriptures do not record that she did say this. Rather, the Bible indicates that *Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart (Luke 2:19)*.

What things? These things - *Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy, which will come to all the people, for there is born to you, this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the LORD*. This is the Birth of the LORD your God - of the Messiah your Redeemer - of the Christ your Savior, which means your *Jesus!*

PRAYER — Grant, we beg You, Almighty God, that the Birth of Your Only-Begotten Son in the flesh may set us free from the sin, death and devil that He came to deal with, that we may, this day and for as many days as You grant us on this earth, ponder all these things and sing our joyful praises to You. Lord, thank You for the Birth of Your Son, for this Festival of the Incarnation of our Lord, and the Holy Spirit wrought faith to believe in this Word of glad tidings and great joy. Amen.

Hymn 154, 1, 2, 3, 5.

HARK! The herald-angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;

With th' angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Hark! The herald-angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, th' Incarnate Deity,
Pleased as man with men to dwell;
Jesus, our Emmanuel!

Mild He lays His Glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

Hark! The herald-angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"

Dear Redeemed, Jesus is your Savior from sin, death and the devil. Rejoice! Christ is born! He is born indeed!

PRAYER — Dear Jesus, Your Incarnation and Your Birth are great and mighty wonders. Truly Your Name is Wonderful. Though I am a wretched sinner, You are Mighty God and Everlasting Father. You have come into this world to bring me into Your Church, the Family of God. You are the Prince of Peace crucified for my sins and You are the Counselor come to be with me always, even to the end of my days here. Grant me the faith and trust to always call You - my Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

Hymn 155.

To us a Child of hope is born,
To us a Son is given,
And on His shoulder ever rests,
All power in earth and heaven. (*repeat line*).

His Name shall be the Prince of Peace,
The Everlasting Lord,
The Wonderful, the Counsellor,
The God by all adored. (*repeat line*).

His righteous government and power
Shall over all extend;
On judgment and on justice based,
His reign shall have no end. *(repeat line)*.

Lord Jesus, reign in us, we pray,
And make us Thine alone,
Who with the Father ever art
And Holy Spirit, One. *(repeat line)*.

The four weeks of these devotions, plus devotions for the rest of the Church year, are available in the larger work titled *Search the Scriptures - A Daily Devotional on the Life of Jesus the Christ*. The 800-page, first volume of that work is a hardcover book with 365 devotions. The second volume also has a devotion for every day of the year. The third volume is a work in progress.

For more information on these first two volumes please go to the scholia.net or stores.lulu.com/scholia website.

The Holy Spirit, via the hand of the beloved disciple, caused these words of Jesus to be written . . .

“Search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have Eternal Life; and it is they that bear witness to Me” — John 5:39.

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” — John 5:46.



Jesus and the Doctors of the Law
Alexandre Bida