



ABOUT THE PROPER

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Third Sunday in Advent

December 15, 2024



A Real Christmas

A Real Christmas Results in Great Joy

Multiple studies have proven that the holiday season exacerbates mental health issues. For some, the pressure to have “a perfect Christmas” can be overwhelming. For others, their loneliness is amplified. Such people need a real Christmas, one that results in great joy. But joy is not the same thing as happiness. It is infinitely better. Happiness is an emotion. Joyfulness is a condition. Happiness comes from your circumstances. Joyfulness comes from Christ assuring you of his abiding love and your glorious future. Therefore, happiness—“holiday cheer”—is fleeting. Joyfulness is enduring. As we reach the midway point of Advent, we ask Christ to empower us to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4).

First Reading³ Zephaniah 3:14-17

What bright words in the midst of the darkness of Old Testament judgment! On this Sunday of rejoicing, God speaks words of most tender love. The promise that brings rejoicing points to the real source of our salvation: not our repentance, but our Savior God. The God of free and faithful love is with his people to save them, to take away their punishment, to turn back their enemy. See the unbelievable nature of our God. Though we need a message of repentance and coming judgment, God loves us anyway—more than that: he delights in us! And grace of grace, God rejoices over us. Let us rejoice together!

Second Reading³ Philippians 4:4-7

As we anticipate the coming deliverance, Paul says, “Rejoice always,” for “the Lord is near.” Let our Advent joy be expressed in prayer and thanksgiving that stem from God’s peace, given us in his transcendent gift of his Son as our Savior. So many parts of this sorted world seek to rob our joy in Christ. No wonder Paul told us twice: “I say it again, Rejoice!”

Gospel³ Luke 3:7-18

The Gospel continues the account of John the Baptist. John minced no words in his message, neither to those hypocrites who did not want to listen to John’s call to repentance nor to those believers who heeded John’s call and desired to change their ways. So near is the Lord’s judgment that the ax man has already placed his blade on the trunk to line up his first swing. Yet with repentance comes good news: the winnowing fork in his hand does more than expose the chaff in the winds of judgment; it gathers the wheat into his barn.

Psalm of the Day⁴ Psalm 130 B “Remember Your Mercy, O LORD”

The Church sings Psalm 130 in services that emphasize repentance and forgiveness through faith in Jesus. It is the 11th of the 15 songs of ascents (Psalms 120-134) and the 6th of the 7 penitential psalms (Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Martin Luther said, “Psalm 130 is a prayer psalm. The psalmist confesses that no one is righteous before God, and that no one can become righteous by their own works and righteousness. People can only become righteous through grace and the forgiveness of sins, which God has promised. The psalmist prophesies Christ in verse 8, and the entire psalm is based on this promise.”

Gospel Acclamation Matthew 11:10

“I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.” Speaking to his disciples, who were sent by John the Baptist to ask if Jesus was “the one to come,” Jesus confirmed his identity as the promised Messiah. He then pointed to the Baptist as the one prophesied by Malachi (3:1), who would be sent ahead of the Messiah to prepare his way (quoted by Jesus in Matthew 11:10). Jesus points to John who points to Christ and his work to save us.

Prayer of the Day

Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus Christ, and come with the good news of your mighty deliverance. Drive the darkness from our hearts, and fill us with your light; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day 324 “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You” (Paul Gerhardt, 1607-1676)

Church Year Season ³ Advent

Advent is a season of preparation and anticipation. The Church looks for the coming of her Savior in this threefold advent: his coming in the flesh as a baby in Bethlehem, his return in judgment on the Last Day, and his present coming to us in Word and Sacrament. The Church encompasses all these facets of the season in a single word that defines Advent worship: “Come!” Throughout the prayers, hymns, and readings that single word is our invitation, our anticipation, our sure and certain hope. Come, Lord Jesus!

Colors & Symbolism Blue

The traditional color for Advent is purple. Advent is a penitential season of preparation for Christmas; thus the color purple which symbolizes sorrow and repentance (along with royalty). Since another theme of Advent is hope and anticipation, the color blue (the sky) has come to be used in many churches to symbolize the believer’s hope and expectation of Jesus’ Second Coming.

Minor Festivals St. Thomas, Apostle (December 21)

Thomas, also called “Didymus,” was one of the Twelve apostles of the Lord Jesus. After Thomas doubted the other disciples’ claims that Christ rose from the dead, Jesus physically appeared to him and charged him to “stop doubting and believe.” Having been convinced in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that Christ has indeed risen and conquered death and sin, we approach Jesus in faith and echo Thomas’ reply, “My Lord and my God!”

Traditions The Advent Wreath

A tradition of the Advent season is the lighting of candles on a wreath. Each light reminds us of Jesus, the Light of the world (John 8:12). Each Sunday we light an additional candle, providing a visual countdown to the celebration of Christ’s birth. On Christmas Eve we light the center candle, remembering Jesus’ nativity and the light and life that he brings (John 1:4,9).

Nain Paraments Advent

Superfrontal: “Come Lord Jesus” is the Advent (meaning “coming” or “arrival”) prayer of Christians who await Christ’s promised return (Revelation 22:7,12,20) on the Last Day (Revelation 22:17,20), and who desire to eagerly receive Jesus now in the Gospel. The stars are representative of the Church’s anticipation of Jesus’ return when he will “appear in the sky...with great power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). The stars also remind us of God’s creative work. They especially remind us of Jesus, the bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16) and Light of the World (John 8:12) who came to save us from the darkness of sin and death.

Lectern antependium: Chi (Χ) and Rho (Ρ) are the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ (Χριστός). This ancient symbol represents Jesus and his office as the Messiah, the anointed King of kings and Savior of the world (Matthew 16:16).

Pulpit antependium: Alpha (Α) and Omega (Ω) are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. These two letters symbolize Jesus Christ, our eternal Lord and Savior, who is the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

³ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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