



ABOUT THE PROPER

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 22, 2024



A Real Christmas

A Real Christmas Will Lift Up the Lowly

By this time of the holiday season, people are often weighted down. They feel guilty about presents that are not perfect, or parties that did not go as planned, or year-end projects that did not get completed. To top it all off, now is when it dawns on people how little attention they have given to the spiritual preparation Advent invites. If that is how we feel, perhaps the frenzy of December has done us a favor. We have been stretched to our limits. We have been made painfully aware of our shortcomings. We have been humbled. Perfect! For being made aware of our weakness does not disqualify us from God's care. It does the opposite. It is what prepares us for the work he does best. He is a God who lifts up the lowly.

First Reading³ Micah 5:2-5a

Verse 1 calls on the city to prepare for the onslaught of God's judgment upon rebellious Judah. Yet what follows is a message of deliverance for the faithful. A king will be born to bring peace. But not just a descendant of David. He will trace his roots to Abraham, Adam, indeed before the creation of the world. This same passage that pointed the Magi to Bethlehem and the Savior, points us to this God-man who will rule more than the clans of Judah. He will bring peace and justice to the ends of the earth.

Second Reading³ Hebrews 10:5-10

The writer to the Hebrews explains the significance of God made flesh by stressing the sacrificial purpose for the Christ's body. Quoting Psalm 40:6-8, the Lord gives us confidence in willingness of the Christ to make the only true sacrifice once for all. He had to become man, so that by his body we might be made holy once and for all.

Gospel³ Luke 1:39-55

The exclamation of Elizabeth, the leaping of baby John, and the song of Mary are all Spirit-wrought reactions to the imminent fulfillment of God's promised deliverance. We join Mary in marveling at the great things done by the Mighty One. The contrast of judgment for the wicked and deliverance for the faithful illustrates the depth of God's mercy to every generation in Christ.

Psalm of the Day⁴ Psalm 85 A "LORD, in your Mercy, Hear My Prayer"

The Church sings Psalm 85 in services where we encounter the holiness of God, leading us to repentance and peace through faith in Jesus our holy Savior. The psalm uses the covenant name LORD one time in each of its four sections. Martin Luther said, "Psalm 85 is a prayer psalm. The psalmist asks that God withhold his wrath and supply his grace. In my opinion, God shows his wrath when he withholds his Word, faithful preaching, good government, peace, and a good economy. When he allows these things in his grace, people are able to live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness, as St. Paul teaches us in 1 Timothy 2:2."

Gospel Acclamation Matthew 1:23

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel." Isaiah's prophecy was first spoken to the unbelieving King Ahaz of Judah (Isaiah 7:14). This promise is now fulfilled in Mary's virginal conception and birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Immanuel, which means, "God with us." Jesus is true man and true God, come to save us.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins, and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

327 “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Latin hymn, c. 12th century)

This hymn takes its content from the “O Antiphons” of the sixth or seventh century. These invocations are addressed to Christ the Messiah under his many biblical titles. Around the twelfth century, someone wove five of these antiphons into a hymn, taking its title from the seventh and final antiphon, “O Emmanuel.” Around the thirteenth century the refrain was added. We rejoice that Emmanuel, the Root of Jesse, the Dayspring from on high, the Key of David – that is, Jesus Christ, has come to save us!

Church Year Season³

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 Festivals¹

St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr (December 26)

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist (December 27)

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs (December 28)

In the fourth and fifth century, the Western Church established a triduum of martyr festivals on December 26, 27, and 28 to commemorate St. Stephen, St. John, and the Holy Innocents. Medieval commentators suggest that these three festivals reveal the triple kind of martyrdom endured by the faithful: St. Stephen, martyrdom in will and deed; St. John, martyrdom in will but not in deed; the Holy Innocents, martyrdom in deed but not in will. Finally, on January 1, the Church celebrates the circumcision and naming of Jesus, Son of Mary and Son of 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 (X) and Rho (P) 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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