

The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined.

- Isaiah 9:2



Rise, shine, you people! Christ the Lord has entered
our human story; God in him is centered.
He comes to us, by death and sin surrounded,
with grace unbounded.

- WS 773, Text: Ronald Klug

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. John 5:24 ESV

He Comes to Us in His Word

We are about to begin the season of Advent. Everyone is looking forward to Christmas and the celebration of the Savior's birth, but I doubt that many people think: "Oh good. It's Advent." It seems that many think of Advent as the 'runup' to Christmas. Advent means coming. In the season of Advent, it is traditional to consider the different ways that the Savior comes to us.

When people think of Jesus' Coming, they probably think of His second coming in glory. Christ will come to judge on the Last Day as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There will be no missing Him. But we don't have to wait till judgment day, because Jesus comes in mercy to communicate with us in His Word. Jesus promised that whoever hears His word and believes in Him will not come into judgment, but has already passed from spiritual death to spiritual life.

When we study the Savior's words, Jesus comes to us. He speaks to us. He comforts us. Honestly, the best way to be prepared for the celebration of the Savior's birth is not by putting up lights or wrapping gifts, but by unwrapping His Word. There He tells us why He came in humility—to be our righteousness and to bear our sins.

Jesus comes to hearts rejoicing,
 Bringing news of sins forgiv'n;
 Jesus comes in sounds of gladness,
 Leading souls redeemed to heav'n.
 Alleluia! Alleluia! Now the gate of death is riv'n.

The Lutheran Hymnal 56:3

“This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

1 Corinthians 11:24b-25 ESV

He Comes to Us in the Sacraments

Misunderstandings happen from time to time. It’s an unfortunate part of life in this fallen world. I was once asked by a concerned parent after a Vacation Bible School session how I could forgive anyone their sins. I remember answering that Jesus authorizes all of His disciples to announce the forgiveness He won on Calvary. It’s true. It’s true that the pastor says, “I forgive you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” But he’s not offering his own forgiveness, but pointing to the cross of Jesus that He paid for all sins. It’s because of Jesus’ sacrifice, not the pastor’s word, that sins stand forgiven. (See: John 20:22-23, 1 John 1:7, “The Office of the Keys”)

So also, when we come to the Lord’s Supper. It’s true that the pastor (or a helper) hands the bread to me and speaks and then the wine...but it’s not really the pastor who is speaking. It’s Jesus. He’s the one who comes to us in the Sacrament and says: “This is my body, given for you; this is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:28)

Jesus comes to us in the Sacrament of the Altar. He comforts our hearts. He chases our fears. We are forgiven! He would know. He confirms that He gave his body and shed His blood to make it so.

Jesus comes again in mercy

When our hearts are bowed with care;

Jesus comes again in answer to an earnest, heart-felt prayer;

Alleluia! Alleluia! Comes to save us from despair.

The Lutheran Hymnal 56:2

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 ESV

He Comes to Us to Reign in Our Hearts

It's a massive understatement, but it is a challenge to live a Christian life. The deck is stacked against us. First of all, the devil is always looking to undermine the Word of Christ and undercut our faith in Jesus. Secondly, we live in a fallen and corrupt world that is opposed to God and the will of God. Finally, there is a traitor within each of us, a fallen nature. We want to go our own way, thank you very much.

It would be hopeless to live as the children of God except that God has created in us a new spiritual person, the new man who desires to do what pleases God. Still, we find, as did the Apostle Paul, that we do what we don't want to do (following the lead of the flesh) and we do not do what pleases God. (Romans 7:19)

The sinful flesh doesn't have power over us anymore. Our old man was crucified with Christ and now by faith Christ lives in me. He helps me to overcome temptation by granting a way of escape. When I fall into sin, He reminds me in the Word of God that He paid my debt of sin.

Jesus has come to live in me. I no longer live for myself, but for Him who died for me and rose again. The life I live I live by faith in the Son of God.

Show me what I have to do; Every hour my strength renew.

Let me live a life of faith; Let me die Thy people's death.

The Lutheran Hymnal 459:7

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

Revelation 1:7 ESV

He Will Come Again in Glory

Jesus is coming! We rejoice and the world laughs. Sure thing! They mock, they say that everything continues as it has been from the beginning of creation (cf. 2 Peter 3:3). Well, won't they be surprised? When Jesus comes again, it won't be a secret. There is no "rapture" like some claim. When Jesus departed this earth at His glorious ascension, the disciples watched him ascend until he was hidden from their sight by a cloud. Then suddenly a pair of messengers stood by them and explained that the same Jesus would return the same way.

When Jesus returns everyone will see Him. Isn't that plain from this Scripture? He who once was hidden from sight by a cloud will come on the clouds of heaven. He whose departure was announced by angels will be accompanied by a host of angels when He returns. Everyone is going to see Him, even those who participated in His crucifixion. They will have been raised again to see the King of Glory come on His way. We will be there to lift up our heads and our eyes to meet Him! While the world will wail because they despised the gift God offered them during their time of grace, we will rejoice. If there are any tears, they will be tears of joy.

We have work to do until that day. People need to know why He came and what He has done for us all. They need to hear His Word and so do we. Then we will be prepared for the celebration that is coming.

Jesus comes on clouds triumphant

When the heavens shall pass away;

Jesus comes again in glory. Let us, then, our homage pay,

Alleluia! Ever singing till the dawn of endless day.

The Lutheran Hymnal 56:5

He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! Revelation 22:20 ESV

Come, Lord Jesus!

I'd like to think that as I grow older, I mature. I have matured in some respects, but in others, it's debatable. I pray that I retain the simple, childlike faith that God granted me as a child, as I grow older.

When I was a child, I was afraid to pray: "Come, Lord Jesus." I'm not talking about the table prayer, but expressing the desire that the Savior return from heaven with great power and glory. I think there is an inborn fear of the Judgment, because our consciences are so effective at making known our guilt. The best way to chase your fear of judgment is to camp out at the foot of the cross.

Listen carefully. Jesus prays: "Father, forgive them." He was surely thinking of those who put Him on the cross by means of metal spikes. He was also thinking of you and praying for you. The Father answered that prayer on the third day when He raised up His Son from the dead. Jesus' resurrection is your receipt that all your sins are forgiven.

My parents didn't leave us with a babysitter and go out on a date often, but when they did, we were happy to see them return. While this fallen world (if it's honest) is terrified that He will return; we have a different take. We look forward to the Savior's return to this earth, because He's coming to take us home. In the meantime, we pray:

Come, Thou almighty King, Help us Thy name to sing,
Help us to praise. Father all-glorious, O'er all victorious,
Come and reign over us, Ancient of Days.

The Lutheran Hymnal 239:1

Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. Luke 2:17, 18

Christmas Traditions

For the vast majority of the population in our land, the season of Christmas is looked forward to with great anticipation. All kinds of preparations are made. Decorations are put up. Gatherings are scheduled. A festive spirit permeates nearly everything for most of the month of December.

Christians have the best of reasons to look forward to the season of Christmas. We long to again celebrate the coming of the Savior Jesus at his birth long ago in Bethlehem. The shepherds, who had been keeping watch over their flocks by night outside of Bethlehem, were among the first to hear of Jesus' birth. They told others what they had seen: the newborn King! Those who heard this blessed news "marveled." They were amazed. They rejoiced greatly.

By God's grace, we have come to know the Savior Jesus as our Lord and King! And so, down through the years, believers have adopted certain traditions which we observe during the Christmas season. However, we do not do these things out of mere habit or custom. Along with the chief traditions of gathering with our fellow believers to worship our newborn King, we also do other things which can help to focus our hearts and minds on the message of Christmas. During this week, our meditations will focus on some of these traditions and how they can aid us in our spiritual lives during the Christmas season. May God help us to keep our Savior at the front and center of our Christmas season!

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to earth to be our Savior. Help us to always see You as the One who has brought us forgiveness, life, and salvation. Amen.

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." John 8:12

Jesus Is The Light of Christmas

During the Christmas season, it has become common to have lights out on people's homes. Some cities have very elaborate light displays that are viewed by a great many people. Colorful, twinkling lights attract people of all ages. They shine and brighten the darkness.

Jesus declared Himself to be the light of the world. He came to bring light to a world covered in darkness. This world was shrouded in the worst kind of darkness that there could ever be. Each person was totally enveloped by the wickedness of sin and its curse. Sin's consequence is eternal darkness apart from God. Mankind is naturally without God and without hope.

To this world of darkness and sin the Savior Jesus came. Jesus brought light, saving light. "In Him was the light of men." (John 1:4) When we look at Jesus, we see the brightness of God, for Jesus is God. When we look at Jesus, we see the forgiveness of our sins, for Jesus came to die for sin. When we look to Jesus, we see our redemption from the eternal darkness of hell, for He Himself paid our ransom. When we look to the Christ-child, we see our eternal life, for His life of service to us went from cradle to grave and beyond. He arose and brought us Life! By believing in Jesus, we are living in the light and no longer in the darkness, for Jesus said, "He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

The people that in darkness sat,
a glorious light have seen;
The light has shined on them who long,
in shades of death have been.

To hail Thee, Sun of Righteousness,
the gath'ring nations come;
They joy as when the reapers bear
Their harvest treasures home. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 106:1,2

The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

Gifts

Probably the most common Christmas tradition of all is the giving of gifts. Whether it is on Christmas Eve, Christmas morning, or at some other time, practically all parents have the custom of giving some type of gifts to their children. And if the extended family meets during the holiday season, some kind of gift-giving will take place. A newer tradition in our family has been to play a game after the family meal is over and the carols are sung. People bring a variety of gifts for various age groups, and as each game is won, a gift is selected.

But gifts quickly become old, wore-out, or lost. Few remain important for very long. Only one gift which we receive truly lasts. It is the gift that our Savior Jesus came to bring us. As the Apostle Paul reminds us here in Romans, God's gift for you and me is eternal life. God gives us the best gift we could ever receive by sending us the Christ-child. Jesus is the perfect gift for you and for me. It is only through Him can you or I or anyone receive eternal salvation!

Most gifts that we receive in our life are things that we did nothing to earn or deserve. Someone gave us a gift simply because they loved us. They wanted us to have it and wanted to bring us joy. So it is with our salvation. None of us has deserved it. None of us has earned it. It was a gift of God's love. Our heavenly Father loved us so much that He sent His only Son to be our Savior! (John 3:16) Christ Jesus came to live under the law in our place. He came to suffer and die in our place. Everything that our Savior Jesus did was to earn for you and for me the precious gift of eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I have not deserved the salvation which you earned for all sinners. And so, I thank you for coming to earth and bringing me the wonderful gift of eternal life. Amen.

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” Luke 2:13,14 NIV

Christmas Carols

A favorite holiday tradition from my youth is when the Christmas songs would be sung at family gatherings. Either my mother or one of my three aunts would accompany us on the piano. All the cousins and aunts and uncles joined in songs we had memorized in Sunday School and also in some that were less familiar. I am thankful for having learned them long ago so that I still know them now.

It is a blessed thing for believers to sing praises to God, no matter our age. While we do that throughout the year, at Christmas we have a particular reason to joyfully sing our praises. Christ the Savior is born! This is why the heavenly host of angels appeared on that first Christmas. They joyfully praised God for the wonderful gift of His Son coming to earth. They were joyful over the birth of Jesus! The favor of God rested on earth, for the Savior Jesus was here to bring peace between God and man.

Christians have been praising the Lord in song for centuries, and for many believers, the songs of Christmas are their favorite. One of the earliest songs in our hymnal is a Christmas song dating to the early 400's! And so we continue to sing our carols of praise during the Christmas season yet today. We sing “Joy to the World!” remembering the great blessings we enjoy because the Lord has come! We sing “O Come, All Ye Faithful!” to adore Him who was born, Christ the Lord! We sing “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” to proclaim with the angels that Christ is born in Bethlehem!

Of the Father's love begotten, Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega, He the Source, the Ending He.
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see, Evermore and evermore.

The Lutheran Hymnal 98:1

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. John 1:4

Christmas Trees

What says “Christmas” more than seeing a nicely-decorated tree? We enjoy seeing decorated trees in people’s homes, in businesses, in our churches, outside and inside. For many families, a tradition going back many years is decorating a tree, whether it is one they cut themselves, bought, or maybe even brought out of a box from the attic.

A tree set up near Christmas time may mean different things to different people. For some, it may have no meaning at all. It may be only a nice addition to their other holiday decorations. For the Christian, a tree in our home or church points us to Christ and what He came to do for us!

Our lives can often seem quite withered, dull, and brown, kind of like a “Charlie-Brown Christmas tree.” We get weighed down with the burden of our sin. The prospect of any kind of relief and new life can appear so far away. But, the Savior tells us in His Word: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Almost universally, trees used at Christmas are evergreen. When other trees have lost their leaves and colors, the evergreen is still green. The life which you and I have as believers in Christ is not just for a little while. The life which the Savior came to win for us is everlasting life! What we have in Christ does not grow old, get robbed of its joy, or lose its beauty.

For several centuries, believers have been decorating and lighting trees as a way to be reminded of the light and life brought to this world with the birth of the Savior Jesus long ago. Whenever we trim our tree at home, or look upon one which has been beautifully-decorated, may we rejoice over He who brings us peace and joy, not just at Christmas, but always!

Dear Savior, keep us always looking to You, who is our light and life! Amen.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

The Hope of Prophecy

It is no mere coincidence that we use candles to remind us of the coming of Jesus. Traditionally, they represent the coming of the Light into darkness with each candle representing a different characteristic of the promised Light.

The first candle represents Prophecy. The prophets, speaking of Jesus' coming, gave hope to those who sat in darkness. The prophets themselves were not the Light to shine in the darkness, but rather pointed to the Light who was coming to shine forth in the darkness. "Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me." (Micah 7:7)

Jesus fulfilled over three hundred prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. Jesus brought Light to the darkness of the world. When Jesus came, the hopes of the prophets and the people who put their faith in the promises of God were realized, sin was paid for, and death was vanquished.

When we light the Prophecy candle, we remember the hope that the prophets had in the promises God made that were fulfilled in Jesus. This candle reminds us that we too have hope in the promise from God, a promise that will be fully realized when He calls us home to be with Him.

How should I not have known Isaiah would be there,
His prophecies fulfilled? With pounding heart I stare:
A child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me.
A child, a son, the Prince of Peace for me.

Worship Supplement 715

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

The Peace of Bethlehem

The second advent candle is called the Bethlehem candle. This candle stands for the peace that Jesus brought and continues to bring to us. We read in Micah about the prophecy that corresponds to Bethlehem and the bringer of peace that was to be born there.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.’ Therefore He shall give them up, Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; Then the remnant of His brethren Shall return to the children of Israel. And He shall stand and feed His flock In the strength of the Lord, In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth; And this One shall be peace.” (Micah 5:2-5)

If we look at the physical life of Jesus, we wouldn’t come away thinking this was the Prince of Peace who was prophesied by Isaiah. He was actively sought out by the religious leaders to be put to death and was crucified on a cross. However, it was through these unpeaceful acts that Jesus accomplished bringing His peace to the world. Mankind was at war with God because of our sinfulness, but by His sacrifice on the cross Jesus ended that war and brought peace between mankind and God. Jesus is our peace. When we light the Bethlehem candle, we can remember the peace that Jesus freely gives us through faith in Him. Peace that surpasses all understanding that keeps our hearts and minds in Him as our Lord and Savior.

In peace and joy I now depart At God’s disposing;
For full of comfort is my heart; Soft reposing.
So the Lord hath promised me,
And death for me is but a slumber.

The Lutheran Hymnal 137:1

Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. Luke 2:17

The Joy of Shepherds

The third candle is the shepherd candle. We sometimes refer to this candle as the “Joy” candle because of the great joy that the shepherds exhibited upon seeing the Savior. Their joy was so great that they couldn’t keep it inside. They made “widely known” what was told to them about Jesus.

What a rollercoaster of emotions these shepherds found themselves on that night! Their plans of a long night watching over sheep in the fields had been wildly interrupted by an angel. The sudden appearance of this heavenly being brought great fear to their hearts. The angel did not let this emotion of fear remain. “Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’” (Luke 2:10-12)

Then a multitude of angels appeared before the shepherds proclaiming the glory of God. What choice did the shepherds have, but to investigate what these heavenly messengers had told them? They found Jesus as the angels said. Great joy entered their hearts when they met their Savior in the flesh.

When we light the Shepherd candle, we too can have joy in our hearts. Our joy is to know Jesus as our Savior. Our joy is knowing all our sins are forgiven. Our joy is so great we can’t help but share it with those around us. May your joy in your Savior overflow.

While by the sheep we watched at night,
glad tidings brought an angel bright.

How great our joy! Great our joy!

Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!

Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!

Praise we the Lord in heaven on high!

Lift Up Your Hearts #90

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. Luke 1:26-27

The Love of Angels

The fourth candle is the Angel candle. Angels were created by God to serve Him and carry out His acts of love toward mankind. Psalm 91 states that God gives His angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways. The Lord sent two angels to Sodom to get Lot and his family out of the city prior to its destruction. The angel of God visited Jacob on his way to meet Esau to let Jacob know that God was with him. Angels even take a special interest in us. “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10)

The angels’ mission was to announce the love of God made manifest to the world in Jesus: first to the father of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus; then to Mary, Jesus’ mother; and then to the shepherds who found out that their Savior was born in Bethlehem on that first Christmas night. The angels’ mission continued at the resurrection by telling the women that Jesus was alive, and at the ascension when they assured the disciples that Jesus would return in glory. The angels will also carry out God’s plan of love in Jesus’ return on the Last Day. “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.” (Matthew 25:31) They will carry out the job of gathering together Jesus’ elect from the four winds (Matthew 24:31).

When we light the angel candle, let us remember God’s love made manifest in Jesus and announced by the angels.

Angels we have heard on high,
sweetly singing o’er the plains,
and the mountains in reply
echoing their joyous strains:
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Lutheran Service Book 368:1

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” John 8:12

The Light of Christ

The fifth candle in our advent wreath is the Christ candle. This candle represents Jesus, the light of the world, arriving in the flesh to take on the task of fulfilling the law on our behalf doing what we could not do on our own.

Have you ever tried to walk through a dark room only to be tripped by something you couldn't see? As law breakers, we could do nothing but walk around blindly in the darkness of our sins getting tripped up on a regular basis. Try as we might, we could not live up to the perfect law that God has laid out for us. However, with Jesus, the Light, taking away the darkness, we no longer walk in darkness but in the light of life. Like turning on the light in a dark room to guide us through unseen perils, Jesus lights the way back to an eternal and complete relationship with God. This is what our celebration of Advent and Christmas is all about: the restoration of peace and good will with God, purchased with the blood of Christ.

When we light the Christ candle, let us remember the Light of the World made manifest in Jesus. Let us find hope in the assurance of the prophecies fulfilled. Let us find peace in our Bethlehem-born Prince of Peace. Let us rejoice exceedingly as the shepherds did. Let us share the great love that God has bestowed on us just as the angels shared it those many years ago.

Silent night! Holy night!
 Son of God, love's pure light
 radiant beams from Thy holy face
 with the dawn of redeeming grace,
 Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!
 Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!

The Lutheran Hymnal 646:3

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. ... Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, to be registered along with Mary, who ... was pregnant. Luke 2:1-6 CSB

Obstacles

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was far from smooth for Mary and Joseph. Despite Mary being well along in her pregnancy, the Roman government mandated that the couple travel approximately 90 miles to be counted. Caesar Augustus, during one of the most peaceful times in history, decreed that everyone must be recorded, making this trip mandatory. It likely took Mary and Joseph four to five days to navigate various obstacles, including steep hillsides, river crossings, and potential encounters with wild animals and thieves. Nevertheless, they persevered and completed the journey.

At times, our lives are filled with many obstacles that pull us in different directions. Rules, family traditions, and various activities can make us feel overwhelmed and ready to give up. Mary and Joseph could have easily said, “Not right now. The time isn’t right for us to make this trip,” but they didn’t. Neither should we.

Our Heavenly Father knew that Mary and Joseph needed to get from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and He made it possible for them to make the trip. The same is true in our lives today. Our Heavenly Father knows us and is with us as we journey through our earthly pilgrimages—“I know the plans I have for you” (Jeremiah 29:11). As we reflect on the trust that Mary and Joseph demonstrated early in their lives, may we apply the same simple faith in Christ Jesus during our own earthly obstacles.

Come, your hearts and voices raising,
Christ the Lord with gladness praising;
Loudly sing His love amazing, Worthy folk of Christendom.

See how God, for us providing, Gave His Son and life abiding;
He our weary steps is guiding, From earth’s woe to heav’nly joy.

Gracious Child, we pray Thee, hear us,
From Thy lowly manger cheer us,
Gently lead us and be near us, Till we join th’ angelic choir.

The Lutheran Hymnal 90: 1,3,8

... because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:7 CSB

Hurdles

Mary and Joseph made their way from their home in Nazareth to their ancestral home in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was a small village in Judea, modest, with a population likely in the hundreds, and was primarily an agricultural community. It has existed for over four thousand years and was the birthplace of King David, an ancestor of the Messiah.

The village itself was characterized by simple homes, often built with stone and mud, and it had a few key structures like inns or guesthouses. The natural geography of the region included rolling hills and fertile land, which supported the local agriculture. Among those who lived there were shepherds who oversaw flocks of sheep. Since this region is hilly, it is likely that many flocks were kept in caves.

Imagine, after several days of travel while pregnant, arriving in your ancestral home only to find there was no place to stay. This could have been an overwhelming hurdle for Mary and Joseph, but the Lord provided what was needed. They found an empty stable that night where they could find safety and rest from their exhausting journey.

At times, our journey through life can be filled with hurdles that are exhausting and overwhelming. By spending time reading a devotion or scrolling through the scriptures, we begin to see our challenges come into focus, revealing direction where we once saw only chaos. Once again, we witness how our Heavenly Father uses trials in our daily lives to help us focus on “the one thing needful,” Him. Amid the world’s hustle and bustle, resting in the Lord’s promises and assurance allows us, like Mary and Joseph, to find rest.

With all my heart and being, O Christ-child sweet and dear,

I love Thee, and Thee only; Oh, be thou ever near!

My heart I in Thy manger lay; Let it remain there and for aye

Draw it to Thee that it may be Secure eternally.

The Lutheran Hymnal 89:4

Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger. Luke 2:7 CSB

Promise Kept

Of all the promises you have made or were made to you, how many were kept? The number of promises kept can vary widely depending on the context. The concept of promise-keeping can be quite subjective and depends on the perspective and criteria used to evaluate them. As Christians, we strive to keep the promises we make; however, as sinners, we often fall short. Fortunately for us, our Heavenly Father keeps His promises. There are roughly 7,000 promises recorded in the Bible that the Lord has made and kept.

Some 2,000 years ago, in the humble surroundings of Bethlehem, the promise of a Savior made in the Garden of Eden 4,000 years earlier and repeated throughout the Old Testament was fulfilled. The announcement by the Angel Gabriel to Mary nine months earlier came to fruition in a quiet animal stable. The angel's message to Joseph in his dream, that Jesus was to be born of Mary, was realized in the middle of the night. The Savior of the world entered the world and was laid in a manger. As humble as the setting was, it underscores the profound truth that the King of kings is truly the King of all!

While the Lord kept His promise and saved us from our sins, it also reassures us that everything our Heavenly Father has promised has been and will be fulfilled. As we continue our earthly journeys, awaiting the promise of heaven, we find comfort in Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 28:20: "And remember, I am with you always." May our annual celebrations of Christ's birth lead us to cherish all the promises the Lord has made.

Let the earth now praise the Lord, Who hath truly kept His word
 And the sinners' Help and Friend Now at last to us doth send.
 What the fathers most desired, What the prophets' heart inspired,
 What they longed for many a year, Stands fulfilled in glory here.

The Lutheran Hymnal 91:1-2

In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields ... an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Luke 2:8-11 CSB

Glorious Proclamation

The birth of the Savior of the world was not something that could be kept quiet. In the middle of the night, on the quiet hillsides of Bethlehem, where shepherds peacefully kept watch over their flocks, heavenly angels announced the promised arrival of the Messiah—the Savior of the world.

“Terrified” might be an understatement to describe the shepherds as “...the glory of the Lord shone around them.” These shepherds were likely awe-stricken and trembling with fear at the sights and sounds that night. However, the first words of the angel were calm and reassuring: “Don’t be afraid.” The world had waited for thousands of years to hear this message. Many had given up hope and stopped believing that such good news would ever be proclaimed—but it was.

While we may not experience such a glorious proclamation in our earthly lives until Judgment Day, may we share in the enthusiasm. We can rejoice in the proclamation of our Heavenly Father, “Your sins are forgiven.” The shepherds’ immediate reaction was to check it out. Similarly, may our response to the forgiveness of our sins inspire us to proclaim this magnificent message to the entire world.

Come, Desire of nations, come, Fix in us Thy humble home;
 Oh, to all Thyself impart, Formed in each believing heart!
 Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the new-born King;
 Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”
 Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the new-born King!”

The Lutheran Hymnal 94:4

When the eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus—the name given by the angel before he was conceived. Luke 2:21 CSB

Name Above All Names

The Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 4, “God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive the adoption of sons.” To meet the requirements of the Old Testament law, the Savior of the world humbled Himself to save us. In accordance with the law, Jesus was circumcised to fulfill what was required. In the New Testament, we celebrate our baptism into Christ because He has fulfilled all that His Heavenly Father required, so that “Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.”

As baptized children of the Lord, eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus, we strive to live lives that reflect our love and gratitude for what our Savior has accomplished for us. Redeemed from the world, the devil, and our sinful flesh, we live for Christ here on earth while looking forward to being with Him in eternity.

Eight days after Christ’s birth, He was given the name Jesus just as the angel directed Mary in Luke 1:31. The name Jesus is derived from the Hebrew name Yeshua (or Joshua), which means “Yahweh (the LORD) saves.” This name reflects Jesus’ mission, sent by God to save humanity from their sins.

Jesus has saved us, restoring our relationship with our Heavenly Father to what it was for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the fall into sin. May we daily give thanks and praise to our Redeemer for what He has done for us and all mankind.

Redeemer, come! I open wide
My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!

Let me Thine inner presence feel,
Thy grace and love in me reveal;

Thy Holy Spirit guide us on
Until our glorious goal is won.

Eternal praise and fame
We offer to Thy name.

The Lutheran Hymnal 73:5

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

Luke 2:10 ESV

Fear Not

The Bible uses the word 'fear' in two different ways. The first and most familiar way is referring to an unpleasant feeling that something bad is going to happen. The second kind of fear describes an intense feeling of respect and awe that God deserves from us human beings.

Imagine going from the first kind of fear to the second over the course of a few seconds. That's what happened to the shepherds outside the town of Bethlehem when one of God's angels appeared to announce the birth of the Savior. When an incredibly powerful celestial being shows up out of nowhere, shining with the glory of God Himself, you can understand why they might be afraid. It wouldn't be surprising if some of those shepherds figured they were about to die.

Imagine the change in their emotions when they were told by the angel not to be afraid. The shepherds became calm enough to hear that the promised Savior had finally been born. Their hearts must have nearly burst with joy when they heard that God was finally fulfilling the promise He had been repeating to the people of Israel for hundreds of years.

This is the same kind of joy that we will experience as believers when Judgement Day finally comes. For those of us who may be left on earth when that day arrives, any initial fear we have about what's happening will completely disappear when we realize what is happening. God is finally fulfilling the promise He has been repeating for thousands of years in the words of the Bible.

As we once again look forward to celebrating what happened during the first advent, or "coming", of our Savior, let us also keep in mind that Jesus is coming back again. This time He will come to bring every one of his believers to spend eternal paradise with him in heaven forever.

O Lord, remove our unpleasant fears of your judgment and give us a steady, healthy love and respect for your glorious mercy through Jesus Christ. Amen.

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

Luke 2:10 ESV

Great Joy

"Joy" can come in many different forms. When someone's sports team wins the championship, you might be able to see their joy by how much they're smiling or how loudly they cheer. A new parent might feel an incredible amount of joy the first time they hold their child, even though they are completely silent and standing still.

"Joy" for a Christian can be a little tricky to understand. The Bible tells us to "rejoice always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16). What if we aren't always cheering and smiling? Are we doing it wrong? When things go wrong in our lives, it might be especially difficult to feel joyful about much of anything.

No doubt the shepherds outside Bethlehem on that first Christmas were joyful on the outside. They must have had the biggest smiles when they realized that God had finally sent the long-awaited Messiah to earth in order to fulfill God's promise of taking away the sins of the world. They might have even cheered as they raced into Bethlehem to see the promised Savior.

But there's also no doubt that those same shepherds later experienced trials and hardships in their lives. Even after the first Christmas, there must have been days when they didn't feel joyful about much of anything. Even on the toughest and most heart-breaking days, though, those shepherds most definitely had joy on the inside, because they knew that they had a Savior from their sins.

The holiday season is a tough time for a lot of people for a variety of reasons. It might be that you, reading or hearing this, do not feel a lot of joy on the outside around Christmas time. If you are, I encourage you to find great joy in the news of a Savior from sin. Even though you might not be smiling or cheering on the outside, you will have a rock-solid base of joy in your heart knowing that God has and will continue to fulfill every single one of His promises to you.

Dear Lord Jesus, grant us your true joy, so that no matter our changing feelings and circumstances, you would give us peace and contentment within. Amen.

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord.* Luke 2:11 ESV

In the City of David

When God makes a promise, He keeps it. Throughout the Old Testament, God made many promises about the coming Savior from sin through many different prophets. From these different prophecies, God gave the people of Israel information on the Messiah's mother, the Messiah's name, and the Messiah's death. Through the prophet Micah, God even pinpointed the exact city where Jesus would be born: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."

Many people might figure that the angel of the Lord was talking about Jerusalem when he referred to the Messiah's birth in "the city of David." Jerusalem was a large, impressive, and spiritually important city to the people of Israel. It was the city from which King David had ruled during Israel's golden age of conquest and military success.

This was not, however, what God had promised. This promise came true when Jesus was born in the small town of Bethlehem, the village where King David had been born. What mattered most wasn't that the Messiah was born in Israel's capital, but rather that God kept His promise.

The same thing applies to our lives. God hasn't promised to give us what we expect, but you can count on the promises that He makes us in His Word. You can be just as sure that Jesus was born in Bethlehem as you can that He forgives every single one of your sins. Because the Savior was born in the city of David, lived a life without sin, and suffered hell for us on the cross, you can be sure that He sits in heaven at the right hand of God, waiting for the day that you come home to Him.

**Almighty and Unchanging God, let Your good news of the
Messiah's humble birth bring gladness and hope to our hearts.
Amen.**

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord.* Luke 2:11 ESV

A Savior

What do you need to be “saved” from right now? Are you dealing with debt or other financial difficulties? Are there personal issues with people in your family or among your friends that you wish would just go away? Maybe work or school is especially tough right now, and you wish you had someone to save you from all the stress and deadlines. Perhaps you’re dealing with emotional or mental health issues that make everyday life feel terrible.

On the first Christmas, the shepherds outside of Bethlehem probably had a lot of things they wanted to be saved from. They probably wished someone would save them from the Roman military that was occupying their country. They might have wanted someone to save them from the boring, exhausting, and occasionally dangerous daily grind of having to look after large groups of sheep. Those shepherds might have also had problems with money, family, friends, or their mental health.

When the angel of God appeared to the shepherds that night, he told them about a Savior that had been born for them. This Savior wasn’t going to “save” them from the problems they had with other people, with money, or inside themselves. Jesus, the Savior of the world, had been born to solve the human race’s problem with sin, the most important and serious problem of all.

During His life on earth, every action, word, and even thought of Jesus would be perfect. There wouldn’t be a single sin to be found anywhere in His entire life. At the end of His perfect life, Jesus would sacrifice Himself and die a sinless death so He could give that record of perfection to us as a free gift, saving us from our sins.

God has given us a Savior from sin in His Son, Jesus Christ, just as He promised He would. God hasn’t promised to save us from all the other problems in our lives. However, we do know that He has promised to always be with us and guide us, no matter what difficulties we might face.

Save us, O Lord, from every evil, and deliver us from the great debt of our sins. Thank you for your saving grace. Amen.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” Luke 2:11-12 ESV

Christ the Lord

“Christ the Lord” is a name that needs some unpacking. The title of Christ is essentially the New Testament version of the Old Testament term “Messiah”. This Messiah was mankind’s Savior from sin that God had promised to Adam and Eve right after they first fell into sin. The entire world, particularly the people of Israel, had been eagerly waiting for thousands of years for this Messiah, or Christ, to arrive.

When the angel said that the Savior was also “the Lord”, this meant that the Messiah would be the Lord God Himself. God had promised the world a Savior that would be perfect and without sin, just as God Himself is perfect and without sin. That means no ordinary, sinful human being would be able to get the job done. The Son of God, Jesus, was the only person capable of taking away the sins of the world.

If someone said that God was coming to earth in a human body, most people would probably expect someone tall, muscular, and good-looking. He would make a grand, flashy entrance and be wearing incredibly nice clothes.

The real Messiah was almost exactly the opposite of that. The angel told the shepherds that the Savior of the entire world would be a baby. More than that, the baby would be lying in a feed trough for animals inside of a barn, wrapped in strips of cloth. “Christ the Lord” looked, by all appearances, like the most unimpressive person in the world.

But the point of Jesus wasn’t to be impressive, or popular, or flashy. The point of Jesus was to live the perfect life we never could, sacrifice Himself on the cross for us, and suffer the torment of hell in our place. Since Jesus humbled Himself for us to be our Savior, let us “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Dear Jesus Christ, you are Lord, and we come to You on bended knee. Rule in us and rule for us so that we would not be taken captive by any other power. Amen.

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Galatians 4:4-5

What Does “Epiphany” Mean?

“Epiphany” is a word that we don’t use every day, and as a season of the church year, its significance may not be as immediately recognizable as Christmas or Easter. What does “epiphany” mean? “Epiphany” comes from a Greek word that means “appearance” or “manifestation.” So, this is the part of the church year where we celebrate the manifestation—the showing forth or revelation—of Jesus as the true Son of God. Accounts that emphasize this manifestation include the visit of the wise men, Jesus’ baptism, and His first miracle at the wedding at Cana.

What is so important about this manifestation? Ever since His life on this earth, people have claimed that Jesus was a spiritual, moral, ethical, or political leader, and, in that sense, He is seen merely as an important figure to model one’s life after. What these people miss, though, is crucial. Yes, Jesus was a human who was subject to all the temptation and pain that we are, yet He is also true God. As true God, Jesus was also born without sin. If we look honestly at how we live our lives versus what God commands in the Ten Commandments, we know we cannot go a day, or even minutes, without sinning. Furthermore, ever since Adam and Eve sinned, all humans have been born sinful into a sinful world.

On our own, then, our situation is hopeless. Thanks be to God who sent His only Son to this world to be born, live, suffer, and die for us to take away all our sin! This Epiphany, let us celebrate that God has been manifested and revealed to us as our Savior.

Songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesus Lord, to Thee we raise,
 Manifested by the star To the sages from afar
 Branch of royal David’s stem In Thy birth at Bethlehem.
 Anthems be to Thee addressed, God in man made manifest.

The Lutheran Hymnal 134:1

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord... but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. 2 Timothy 1:8-10

What Does “Epiphany” Not Mean?

The word “epiphany” means manifesting. This might cause some confusion for people who have heard the term “manifesting” in popular culture. A common idea today is that you can manifest your desires to be rich or famous or have some particular skill by just thinking about it.

This secular definition of manifesting does not fit the Christian concept of Epiphany because it depends upon us. There are some good effects of positive thinking and goal-setting, but if we start out this new year planning to manifest more money, a great job, or true love, and we go about it by just thinking our way to it, we might be unhappy with the results. Furthermore, if we are blessed with these gifts, we might not recognize they are all from God.

Because we are weak, sinful humans, we can gain great comfort from the true Christian meaning of Epiphany. Paul describes the “power of God who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” We don’t need to depend on our works to be saved, but we can rely on the power of God!

How puny our manifesting looks compared to the revealing of God’s plan, which was conceived before time even began. We don’t have to worry about manifesting our own good works to bring us salvation. The revelation that Jesus is our Savior assures us that He has rescued us from sin and eternal death.

**But God beheld my wretched state
Before the world’s foundation,
And, mindful of His mercies great,
He planned my soul’s salvation.
A father’s heart He turned to me,
Sought my redemption fervently:
He gave His dearest Treasure.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 387:4

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

The Son of God Is Revealed to All People

Many Christmas nativity scenes feature three wise men worshipping at the manger. While we do not know precisely how many wise men there were, we do know from the Biblical account that they came later to Joseph and Mary's house in Bethlehem. The visit of the wise men (or Magi) is associated in Christian worship with the start of Epiphany, and their account provides us ways to understand and celebrate this season.

The wise men are important because they are Gentiles (non-Jewish people) who worship Jesus as the Son of God. God's divinity is made manifest not just to the descendants of Abraham but to all the world. While the wise men were guided by the light of the star, we are also reminded that Christ is Himself "a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles." (Luke 2:32) The coming of Christ means that He fulfills God's Law for us and that we are His children not through our own heritage but through His grace.

We don't know precisely where the wise men came from, but they were guided by "His star in the East." (Matthew 2:2) These intelligent, educated individuals—who likely had been exposed to the Old Testament prophecies through the Babylonian captivity—embarked on a lengthy trip to bring gifts and worship a humble, seemingly insignificant child in a small, backwater town.

As we grow in our faith, we pray that the Holy Spirit provides us with the enthusiasm to dedicate our time and talents to our God and the faith to seek first the kingdom of God. May we give our Savior and God's Word preference in our lives rather than the pursuit of worldly success and knowledge.

**The wiser Magi see from far
And follow on His guiding star;
And led by light, to light they press
And by their gifts their God confess.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 131:2

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” Micah 5:2

The Son of God is Revealed Through His Word

The Wise Men were guided to the Christ Child by a miracle, the star in the sky that led their way. They did not head straight to Bethlehem, however; instead, they first stopped in Jerusalem. Since they were seeking the King of the Jews, it was natural for them to look first in the capital city instead of the lowly town of Bethlehem. When King Herod heard about this, he asked the chief priests and scribes where Christ would be born, and they told him in Bethlehem, quoting the prophecy in Micah.

We may think of the privilege of witnessing a miracle and how even more special it would be to see the Christ Child in the flesh. However, we are reminded by this account that we are blessed to always be able to find Christ in God’s Word. It was God’s Word that prophesied Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, and it is that same Word that reveals His Godhead. Though we haven’t seen Jesus in the flesh, we know Him through the sure and prophetic Word of God.

The wise men “rejoiced with exceedingly great joy” (Matthew 2:10) when they finally arrived at Jesus’ modest house in Bethlehem. So also we enter into our worship when God’s word is taught in truth and purity, for it is there where we find Christ. We may not worship in a majestic cathedral or a spectacular megachurch. Maybe it’s a small church or a quiet, humble living room of like-minded Christians. Yet, there we remember Christ’s promise found in His Word: “For where two or are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:2)

The Eastern sages, bringing Their tribute gifts to Thee
 Bear witness to Thy kingdom And humbly bow the knee.
 To Thee the star is pointing, And the prophetic Word;
 Hence joyously we hail Thee: Our Savior and our Lord!

The Lutheran Hymnal 130:2

And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17

The Son of God is Revealed Through His Baptism

In addition to the visit of the wise men, another event that is often associated with the season of Epiphany is the baptism of Christ. While His baptism may not seem connected with the wise men worshipping Christ, it does serve to more fully reveal, or manifest, His identity to us as true God. Just as we want to live up to the family name and disgrace it, Christ fully lived up to His name as the Son of God.

Did Jesus need to be baptized? No, he was sinless: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Nevertheless Jesus allows John to baptize Him to fulfill His Father's will. When John objects to baptizing Jesus, He responds, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15) And, we know this is correct because after He is baptized, we have the Father's voice approving of Him.

As the sinless Son of God, Jesus did not need to be baptized. But He was. Jesus also did not need to become a human and suffer and die for our sins. But He did. Christ's baptism, like the rest of His life on earth, exemplifies that not only is He the true Son of God but also that, because of His love for us, he became human to save us from our sins.

It is a miracle beyond our human comprehension that Christ was both true man and true God. Also miraculous is the fact that because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we are now his true children and, as such, we inherit the gift of eternal life.

Within the Jordan's crystal flood

In meekness stands the Lamb of God

And, sinless, sanctifies the wave,

Mankind from sin to cleanse and save.

The Lutheran Hymnal 131:3

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. Matthew 3:13-15

Jesus' Baptism: Baptized by John for Us

If Jesus had approached you or me to be baptized, we too may well have objected! Baptism is, after all, a means of grace through which we receive forgiveness. We are all sinful and need God's forgiveness, but Jesus? Jesus is perfect. He is "separate from sinners." (Hebrews 7:26) No one has ever successfully accused Him of sin (cf. John 18:23). Why would Jesus, therefore, need to be baptized?

Jesus provides the answer in His response to John: "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus came into this world to fulfill God's plan for our salvation. We are all unrighteous because of our sin. We all need a perfect righteousness to stand before our holy God. It is impossible for any of us on our own to achieve that perfect righteousness. Only the righteousness of Jesus can save our souls. Jesus' baptism was part of God's salvation plan, and so Jesus came to John to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness!"

John may not have fully understood the reason for Jesus' baptism, but he was willing to play his role in God's plan as called upon by his Savior. He, therefore, submitted himself to the will and purpose of God. He baptized Jesus . . . for himself and for us. By allowing Himself to be baptized by John, Jesus was preparing for us the perfect righteousness which enables us to stand before God without fear and with absolute confidence!

Dear heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for sending Jesus and having Him be baptized by John to fulfill all righteousness for us. May we, like John, fulfill our roles within Your kingdom, submitting our wills to Yours, so that Your grace and mercy might be shared with everyone. Amen.

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. Matthew 3:16

Jesus' Baptism: Anointed by the Holy Spirit

Why did the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove after His baptism? The reason lies in Jesus' title as the promised Christ. "Christ" in English means "the Anointed One." The Holy Spirit came to anoint Jesus as God's promised Savior as His ministry began, in accordance with God's eternal plan and in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The apostle Paul writes of this eternal plan: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who chose us in Him (Jesus) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." (Ephesians 1:3-4)

Isaiah prophesied with reference to Jesus and regarding His baptism: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Jesus was sent by the Father and anointed by His Holy Spirit to bring us the good news of our salvation—good tidings of forgiveness, healing, freedom, consolation, joy, praise, righteousness, life, and glory! May our lives reflect a growing confidence in Jesus—the Christ anointed by the Holy Spirit!

Dear heavenly Father, thank You for the assurance that You have given us by sending Your Spirit to anoint Jesus and thereby to identify Him as Your promised Christ—our precious Savior. May Your Spirit abide within our hearts, so that we might always embrace Jesus by faith and with joy! Amen.

Suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son!" Matthew 3:17a

Jesus' Baptism: Identified as God's Son

Jesus' baptism is often used by believers to support the teaching of the Trinity. All three persons of the Godhead were present at Jesus' baptism. Jesus, of course, was baptized, while the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove, and God the Father spoke from heaven—three persons revealing themselves in one historic incident.

The significance of God the Father's statement is that it reveals the truth that the man Jesus—the son of the virgin Mary, was and is also true God—the Son of our Father in heaven. That truth is vital for our salvation, because were Jesus only the son of Mary, merely a man, He could never be our Savior. Good men, even the very best of men, cannot save other men. The Psalmist explains why this is so: "None of them (referring to any and all human beings) can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for Him—for the redemption of their souls is costly." (Psalm 49:7-8a)

It remains for God the Father alone through His Son to save the world. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus that "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) Jesus then went on to explain God's plan for mankind's salvation in those most familiar and beloved words: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

It is only when we are led by the Spirit of God to acknowledge that Jesus is both true man and true God, that we understand that He is our Savior. Then and only then will we discover the comfort and certainty that our heavenly Father wants us to enjoy in this life, as we look forward to eternal life in heaven.

Dear heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus into this world and for identifying Him so clearly as Your Son and our Savior. May we always be led to entrust ourselves to Him, so that we might experience Your grace and forgiveness. Amen.

And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17

Jesus' Baptism: Affirmed by God the Father

Why are the final words of God the Father, spoken from heaven upon the occasion of Jesus' baptism, so very important? They are important because with those words "in whom I am well pleased," God the Father affirmed Jesus. This, in turn, was important for Jesus and remains important for us!

Throughout His ministry, Jesus was challenged both regarding who He was and why He had come into this world. From little on Jesus already knew that He was God's Son. As a twelve-year-old child He was determined to be about His "Father's business." (Luke 2:49) Yet, during His ministry Jesus was frequently accused by the Jewish religious leaders of being in league with "Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." (Luke 11:15) Repeatedly, Jesus took comfort in His connection to and affirmation by His heavenly Father. He told those opposed to Him: "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." (John 10:37-38) Later, when Jesus was on the cross and was tempted to question His Father's faithfulness (cf. Mark 15:34), the affirmation of His Father resolved all possible doubts as Jesus committed His spirit into His Father's loving hands (Luke 23:46).

For you and me, God the Father's affirmation of Jesus as the One in whom He is "well-pleased" assures us that Jesus is indeed our Savior from sin, death, Satan, and hell. We can follow Him with confidence and rest securely in His hands, for absolutely no one is able to snatch us out of His hands! (John 10:27-28)

Dear heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for assuring us through His precious words that Jesus is indeed Your Son and that His work on our behalf is pleasing in Your sight. Grant that our faith may always rest in Jesus, as we look forward to the time we will spend with You throughout eternity. Amen.

John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." John 1:32-34

Jesus' Baptism: A Foreshadowing of Our Own Baptisms

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus' baptism by John in a similar way—the initial event of Jesus' ministry. The Apostle John, however, addresses Jesus' baptism only indirectly through the comments of John the Baptizer. God had informed John the Baptizer that he would be able to identify the promised Savior when he observed “the Spirit descending and remaining on Him.” This happened at Jesus' baptism. Note John's observation that Jesus would baptize not just with water but with the Holy Spirit. John thereby directs our eyes to Jesus' gift of the Holy Spirit both at the time of Pentecost and our own baptisms.

Jesus, before His ascension, informed His disciples: “John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5) Peter, on Pentecost, identified that baptism of the Holy Spirit with the Lord's promise recorded in Joel: “It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh.” (Acts 2:17a) Later Peter appealed to all those listening: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

Today we receive that gift of the Holy Spirit at our baptisms. Our God has promised: “In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you.” (Exodus 20:24b) Let us praise God for His Spirit who leads us to repentance and brings us faith, forgiveness, hope, life, and joy!

Dear heavenly Father, we praise You for the gift of the Holy Spirit. May He dwell within our hearts, confirming our faith and sanctifying our lives until we stand before You in heaven. Amen.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matthew 4:1

Christ For Us

The Temptation of Jesus is a story many of us learned in Sunday School and heard almost every year at the beginning of Lent. That is very fitting because there is so much comfort and strength to be derived from this account.

First and foremost we need to understand that Jesus endured this temptation FOR US! Notice that Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness for the very purpose of being “tempted by the devil.” Jesus came to battle Satan for us.

In the Garden of Eden, our first parents were ambushed by Satan’s sly temptations. They were deceived and fell, bringing the whole world under the power and condemnation of sin. We have all inherited their sinful nature and therefore we too fall for countless temptations every day.

Here we see Jesus Christ, the Holy Son of God, face Satan head on—a sort of rematch for all those who have fallen. As David faced off with Goliath on behalf of the entire army of Israel and won the victory for them all, so Jesus our hero, faced Satan on our behalf and won the victory.

This was hardly the only time Jesus was tempted by Satan. He was truly tempted in all points as we are, yet remained “without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) This, however, was a visible showdown. Here we can see the temptations and see how Jesus overcame those temptations for us. Let’s watch our Savior again this week as He overcomes our greatest enemy for us. In the process, we will learn from Him how we can fend off the temptations of the devil, the world, and even our own flesh.

Jesus, grant that balm and healing In Thy holy wounds I find,
Every hour that I am feeling Pains of body and of mind.
Should some evil thought within Tempt my treacherous heart to sin,
Show the peril, and from sinning Keep me ere its first beginning.

The Lutheran Hymnal 144:1

And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." Matthew 4:2-3

Real Temptation

If you think these were not real temptations for Jesus, think again! Imagine if you were literally starving to death, you hadn't eaten anything for 40 days. Then imagine you had the power to easily make all the food you wanted. Jesus made food for the crowds, why couldn't He do the same for Himself? That seems harmless. His body needed it after all.

Remember, He was there for you. He came as your substitute. Therefore, He had to live the way you live. Can you turn stones into bread to feed yourself? Then neither would He. He had to trust His heavenly Father just like we do. After forty days without any food, wouldn't you conclude that the Father wasn't going to feed you? It's time to take things into your own hands.

The temptation becomes even greater when the devil taunts, "If you are the Son of God, prove it! What a weak and powerless Son of God! If you can't even take care of yourself, how can you help anyone else?"

This temptation represents several temptations that we have fallen for: not trusting in the Father but taking things into our own hands in sinful ways to help ourselves; trying to prove ourselves rather than glorifying God; thinking about ourselves and our own needs ahead of the will of God; thinking something is harmless even though it's against God's will.

Thank Jesus, our Lord and Savior, that He has overcome every temptation of Satan for us. He gives us His own perfect obedience and righteousness where we have sinned.

If the world my heart entices
On the broad and easy road
With it mirth and luring voices,
Let me think upon the load
Thou didst carry and endure
That I flee all thoughts impure,
Banishing each wild emotion,
Calm and blest in my devotion.

The Lutheran Hymnal 144:3

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Matthew 4:4

It Is Written

Jesus overcame every temptation with the Word of God. He did not give even a moment's consideration to Satan's temptations because they were against God's Word. He now credits that perfect obedience to us along with his death on the cross to pay for our sins.

What is your attitude toward sin now? Don't you hate it when you commit more sins against your loving Savior? The new man that the Spirit created in us which delights in the law of the Lord. The devil doesn't give up trying to lead us back into sin, however, and we are still easily enticed. Jesus gives us the power to overcome every temptation with the same powerful Word. We can also use an appropriate Word of God to stop every temptation in its tracks. This is what God says, how can I do anything else?

Of course, using God's Word as a shield and weapon against temptation requires knowing what God's Word says. We can use His commandments to resist those sins. We can use the words of Joseph to resist many temptations, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9) Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 where God told the Israelites that He let them get hungry before giving them manna to eat so that they would know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. God's Word is even more important than food. So let us live by the Word of God and use it to resist every temptation.

Help us Thy holy Law to learn,
To mourn our sin, and from it turn
In faith to Thee and to Thy Son
And Holy Spirit, Three in One.

Hear us, dear Father, when we pray
For needed help from day to day
That as Thy children we may live,
Whom Thou in Baptism didst receive.

The Lutheran Hymnal 288:2-3

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Matthew 4:5-7

Know When to Apply God's Promises

Oh the sly tactics of the devil. He knows God's Word perhaps better than any of us, and he knows how to twist and manipulate it to accomplish his will against God. He is especially good at getting people to trust the promises of God in times or situations where they do not apply.

Satan especially loves to lead people to trust God's promises of love and salvation when they are living in open sin and defiance of God. In order to recognize these deceptions of the devil, we need to know God's Word. We need to understand the role of the law and the gospel. We need to know when and where God's promises apply. It becomes obvious that we can't just jump off a cliff and trust the angels to protect us when God says, "You shall not tempt [or test] the Lord your God." It is also clear that we cannot count on God's love and forgiveness if we are living in open, unrepentant sin, for the Apostle John says, "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him." (1 John 2:4-5) May we live in genuine repentance and faith and His Word and truly rejoice in all God's promises.

O God, forsake me not! Lord, hear my supplication!

In every evil hour Help me o'ercome temptation;

And when the Prince of hell My conscience seeks to blot,

Be Thou not far from me,—O God, forsake me not!

The Lutheran Hymnal 402:3

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' " Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. Matthew 4:8-11

You Shall Have NO Other Gods.

Really? Did Satan think that he could get Jesus to bow down and worship him? It does seem preposterous, especially since everything already belonged to Him. Or did it? As God, He did possess all things, but as a man, before He could truly possess all the kingdoms of the world, He would first have to endure the most excruciating suffering and death. Satan suggested, "You don't have to go to the cross, just bow down to me and you can have it all." It was a lie of course.

This is a temptation that we fall for often, with much less incentive. Every time we disobey God we are essentially bowing down to Satan. We bow down to Satan simply to gain a few moments of pleasure, or to gain some perceived advantage. It is always a lie. Following Satan never results in any advantage, for it is always turning away from God from whom comes every good and perfect gift. (James 1:17) Thank God that He is so patient and long-suffering with us and always ready to forgive. Thank Him that Jesus resisted this temptation also and went to the cross for us. Trust Him alone! Live with Him and for Him, and rejoice that we have been freed from Satan's power.

O God, forsake me not! Take not Thy Spirit from me
 And suffer not the might Of sin to overcome me.
 Increase my feeble faith, Which Thou Thyself hast wrought.
 Be Thou my Strength and Power,—O God, forsake me not!

The Lutheran Hymnal 402:2

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read the following passages and summarize the main point that each is teaching you.

James 4:7-10 “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

1 John 5:19-21 “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

2 Peter 3:14-18 “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. Matthew 9:9

Following Jesus: Undeserved

In this series, we will consider five "follow me" invitations from Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. In four of these, some additional details are provided along with the command to follow. In this instance, however, Jesus simply says, "Follow me."

We know from the rest of the Gospel accounts that Matthew was being called to follow Jesus in a special way as one of His chosen apostles. What is striking about this is that Matthew was a tax collector. At that time, tax collectors were hated by the Jews, seen as traitors. As a group, they had the reputation of being dishonest thieves and extortioners in the way they performed their work for the Roman government. Matthew was a highly unlikely candidate for apostleship in Jesus' inner circle.

In the same way, aren't we the most unlikely and unworthy candidates to be called disciples (followers) of Jesus? We were born sinful and continue to exhibit this sinful condition every day. We know what following Jesus involves, but we continually stray from the path on which He has directed us.

Clearly, it cannot be anything in us that has prompted Jesus' invitation to be one of His chosen people. As with Matthew, Jesus selected us to be His own not because of who we are but in spite of who we are. "But God shows his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) Thanks be to God!

Lord, 'tis not that I did choose Thee;
 That, I know, could never be;
 For this heart would still refuse Thee
 Had Thy grace not chosen me.
 Thou hast from the sin that stained me
 Washed and cleansed and set me free
 And unto this end ordained me,
 That I ever live to Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 37:1

And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 4:18-19

Following Jesus: Our Mission

In this account, we see the calling of two more apostles. Like Matthew from our previous account, these blue-collar fishermen were unlikely choices for apostleship. They, like Matthew (and us!), were called purely by grace, not because they were eloquent speakers, proven leaders, or even 'good people.'

In this "follow me" directive, Jesus provides some additional details concerning a specific objective of this following. They would become "fishers of men." That is to say, following Jesus would mean that they would be instrumental in leading others to follow Jesus as well. And after Jesus' ascension, these men fulfilled this task in abundance!

As we have been made followers of Jesus, we too have the privilege and responsibility of being fishers of men. Our most important calling on earth is to bring the message of sins forgiven to as many people as we can. We cast our nets wide, never knowing (or worrying) how the message will be received. With both our words and actions, we strive daily to share Jesus, and the cross, and the empty tomb.

As we are following Jesus, we necessarily will be leading others to Jesus. May we always keep this in the forefront of our mind, praying for (and then watching for) opportunities to share our faith with others.

Spread, oh, spread, thou mighty Word,
Spread the kingdom of the Lord,
Wheresoe'er His breath has giv'n
Life to beings meant for heav'n.

Tell of our Redeemer's love,
Who forever doth remove
By His holy sacrifice
All the guilt that on us lies.

The Lutheran Hymnal 507:1,3

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Matthew 19: 21-22

Following Jesus: Fulfilled by Him

When Jesus issues this 'follow me' invitation to the rich young ruler, He attaches a condition: give away all of your possessions. Without context, this directive sounds puzzling, for nowhere else in Scripture are we told that followers of Jesus must give away everything they own.

But if we read the verses preceding our text, we see that Jesus is responding to this young man's claim that he had kept God's commandments since his youth. In addition to 'keeping' all of the commandments, this wealthy individual wanted to know what else was needed to be saved. Jesus' directive to sell his possessions was a dose of law the man needed, meant to make him realize that he was not the perfect person he thought he was.

Jesus' words to the rich young ruler have application to us as well. No, we are not to immediately liquidate all of our assets and give them away. But, our Savior would have us take a hard, honest look at ourselves. If we ever think that we are doing well enough to merit salvation, in fact, if we think we are contributing anything to that cause, then we ought to go back and carefully examine ourselves through the lens of God's holy Law. Then we will have no choice but to say, "Lord, I have NOT kept your Law since my youth. Thank you for keeping that Law perfectly for me and for suffering hell in my place so that heaven is open to me!"

Lord, Thee I seek, I merit naught;

Yet pity and restore me.

Just God, be not Thy wrath my lot;

Thy Son hath suffered for me.

The Lutheran Hymnal 317:3

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Matthew 16:24

Following Jesus: Crosses to Bear

In this call to follow, Jesus tells His disciples (and anyone who is to follow Him) that they are to 'deny themselves' and 'take up their crosses.'

What does it mean to deny oneself? Simply put, this is placing our personal wants and desires last. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbor is to come ahead of love for ourselves. This is the essence of what following Jesus looks like in our daily lives. Jesus says, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

What does it mean to 'take up our cross'? For some of the disciples to whom these words were spoken directly, this may have literally meant that they would need to be prepared to suffer crucifixion as a result of following Jesus. Clearly, not everyone who follows Jesus will be subject to this gruesome fate. But, all followers of Jesus can expect lesser trials and difficulties because of their allegiance to Him. Elsewhere we are told, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22). And, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20). Also, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:12) It is a guarantee: following Jesus will cause earthly hardships for Christians. When these sufferings come, may we have the attitude of Peter and the apostles in Acts 5:41 who "rejoic[ed] that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."

Come, follow me, the Savior spake,
All in My way abiding;
Deny yourselves, the world forsake,
Obey My call and guiding.
Oh, bear the cross, whate'er betide,
Take my example for your guide.

The Lutheran Hymnal 421: 1

Then another of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” But Jesus said to him, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” Matthew 8:21-22

Following Jesus: Top Priority

In this ‘follow me’ example, the disciple makes what seems to be a legitimate request: let me go and bury my father. Whether his father had recently died and burial preparations needed to be made, or if his father was nearing death and the disciple wished to spend time with him, these seem to be noble and even God-fearing (4th commandment) undertakings.

But Jesus’ response indicates that the directive to follow Him takes precedence over the needs of his father or family. The mission of Jesus to the living supersedes any earthly responsibility to the dead. This is even more true when it involves an attachment to a “dead” unbelief that would keep us from following Him who alone gives life.

The message to us is about priorities. We have a variety of responsibilities in this life, many of which are to be carried out as part of our Godly calling in life (parent, Christian friend, helping the needy, etc). But, our top priority must always be following our Lord and Savior. Nothing can interfere with that. Not even something as close as the bond of family. In Matthew 10:37, Jesus says, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Yes, we have obligations in this life. We have family relationships and responsibilities that occupy our time. But in everything we do, may God keep us focused on following Him as the ultimate purpose in our earthly walk.

Dear Father in Heaven, as we conclude this ‘follow me’ series, our hearts are broken with the recognition that we have not been good followers of you. We have not taken advantage of opportunities to be fishers of men. We have not kept Your commandments. We have tried to sidestep crosses rather than bearing them. And we have prioritized many things ahead of You. But, we thank You for sending your Son to be the perfect follower in our place, and crediting that to us, so that we may stand blameless before You. Amen.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there... And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

John 2:1, 3

The Wedding at Cana

The first of Jesus' miracles is a bit of an outlier when considered among the body of His recorded works. Many times we see him healing from physical maladies and demon possession. He shows His power over nature and His power over death. Here we see His mother bringing him a problem that would be classified as more of a want than a need: the wedding that He is attending has run out of wine.

What an incredible example of Christian prayer Mary provides here. She does not demand or even prescribe a solution. She simply lays the problem at Jesus's feet: "They have no wine." She casts her care upon the Savior with confidence that He will deal with the problem in His way, in His time. Even more incredible is Jesus' care for us. He could have left the married couple to their problem of running out of wine, but He shows His boundless love in sparing their embarrassment. He not only provides more wine for the celebration, but also the best wine.

It's easy to feel that our problems are too small to bring to the Savior. We just need to learn to deal with discomfort, embarrassment, and so forth on our own. But nothing is too insignificant to lay at the feet of Christ. Maybe God would have us sit with our discomfort for a time, but that does not mean that He's unloving or unconcerned with us. Like Mary, we can lay our every care on our Savior, confident that He will take care of them, in His way, in His time.

**What a Friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!**

The Lutheran Hymnal 457:1

When [a certain nobleman] heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” The nobleman said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies!” Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. John 4:47-50

Healing a Nobleman’s Son

Jesus’ second miracle is much more emblematic of His work during His ministry. He healed the nobleman’s son with nothing but His omnipotent word.

The nobleman saw a pressing need for Jesus to come to Capernaum, but Jesus saw an opportunity to test, strengthen, and confirm the nobleman’s faith. First, Jesus pressed back at the nobleman, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” Somewhat early in His public ministry, Jesus was already battling the idea that He had descended from on high to be a miracle performance artist. However “the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7) Jesus knew precisely how to test the nobleman’s faith without discouraging his request.

Christ further tested and strengthened the nobleman’s faith by refusing his request to accompany him. The nobleman, undisturbed, “believed the word that Jesus spoke to him,” having seen no sign or wonder with his own eyes. The account continues to tell of his son’s miraculous recovery the very hour that Jesus spoke. John concludes the account: “And he himself believed, and his whole household.” Christ’s simple word accomplished its purpose of bringing both (spiritual) life-saving faith and (physical) life-saving healing.

Come, Thou incarnate Word, Gird on Thy mighty sword;
Our prayer attend.

Come and Thy people bless, And give Thy Word success,
And let Thy righteousness On us descend.

Lutheran Service Book 905:2

Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" Mark 1:23-24

Driving out an Evil Spirit in Capernaum

What a day at the synagogue for the people of Capernaum! First, Jesus delivers His powerful word to the people as “one having authority” (Mark 1:22). At the synagogue, the people usually heard a message about the traditions of the elders. Jesus’ message was different; it “astonished” them. Luther wrote in explanation: «With authority, that is, His preaching was as of one that means it with all seriousness; and what He said had power and lived, as though it had hands and feet.»

After His astonishing exposition of the Law and Gospel, a demon-possessed man cried out, “Let us alone!” Christ, having power over the legions of hell, commanded the demon to come out of the man. It left with convulsions, but without harming the man. Jesus demonstrated His authority to those assembled by casting out the demon. Their faith was not based entirely on seeing the sign, but was confirmed in seeing Jesus’ power over demons.

In our current materialistic time, we often ignore the existence of Satan and his legions. That is a dangerous oversight. 1 Peter 5:8 reminds us, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” That sobriety and vigilance does not come from inner strength or bravery, but from leaning entirely on our Savior’s loving-care and His Almighty power over all our enemies.

The Word they still shall let remain,
Nor any thanks have for it;
He’s by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.
And do what they will—Hate, steal, hurt, or kill—
Though all may be gone, Our victory is won;
The kingdom’s ours forever!

Worship Supplement 2000 774:4

Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them. Mark 1:29-31

Healing Peter's Mother-in-Law

In Jesus's fourth recorded miracle, He again demonstrated His love. Having seen some of Jesus' earlier miracles, the apostles brought their problem to Jesus: Peter's mother-in-law was sick.

Times of tribulation are sometimes when faith is strongest. Sickness is a result of man's sin, but God allows those kinds of difficulties to remind us that our earthly life is a temporary sojourn toward either eternal life or eternal damnation. As the hymn writer Edward Mote wrote, "When every earthly prop gives way, He then is all my hope and stay" (The Lutheran Hymnal 370:3). Times of sickness and the loss of loved ones is not a time to doubt Jesus' care; rather, it is a time to consider our desperate need for the healing that only He brings. "It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick," Christ says in Matthew 9:12.

Our Great Physician rebuked the fever of Peter's mother-in-law and gently lifted her. Immediately restored to full health, she was able to show her love for her Savior in serving Him. Though spared grief that day, Peter experienced many trials throughout the rest of his life. We close with Peter's encouragement to rejoice in our trials: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:5-7).

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

The Lutheran Hymnal 370:2

At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him. Mark 1:32-34

Healing Many Sick and Oppressed at Evening

In the last four devotions, we considered Jesus's first recorded miracles, three of which involved healing individuals. Following these events, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record a great outpouring of Jesus's grace. "The whole city was gathered together at the door" for healing.

When we see the effects of sin and Satan's work in our lives, we may consider questions like, "Why would God let this happen?" Perhaps we have friends like Job who voice those questions, "Call out now; is there anyone who will answer you?" (Job 5:1) Reflect on the Scripture reading. Jesus' healing miracles clearly display His boundless love. The sun had set, and Jesus was at His friends' house, probably ready for evening rest when a great number of people came to the door. And Jesus, the Great Physician, is always on-call. Despite doing nothing to earn or deserve His care, Jesus healed the needy multitude of Capernaum. Christ's compassion is far beyond human understanding.

"Where is your God?" He took time from an already busy day to heal the sick and demon-possessed who seek His mercy. He lived a perfect life in our place. He bled and died on the cross to atone for the sins of the world. Now, He sits at the right hand of the Father, caring for us every day. We pray with Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17: "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."

Thus might I hide my blushing face While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness, And melt mine eyes in tears.

The Lutheran Hymnal 154:4

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost. Luke 1:41 KJV

The Leaping Babe

In this Bible verse the babe turns out to be baby John the Baptist. He is growing inside his mother, Elizabeth, when he realizes that his Savior is near. On this realization, he leaps inside his mother's womb! We can safely assume that baby John is overwhelmed with joy and other emotions as he becomes aware of his Lord being so near within Mary's womb. John is to prepare the way for this unborn babe as he grows older. Just think of what Elizabeth must have been thinking as she recalled God's wonderful providence in taking away her reproach among men by blessing her with a child.

The words that God spoke to Jeremiah are very applicable to baby John as well as every other unborn baby. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." (Jeremiah 1:5) Now certainly not every baby is ordained a prophet as Jeremiah or John were, however, they are all formed in their mother's bellies by our Heavenly Father. They all have intrinsic worth and unmeasurable value as they are all made in the image of God. (Genesis 1:27)

Unfortunately, not every mother in our world recognizes the value in their unborn baby. Nevertheless, we have here the wonderful examples of virtuous women such as Elizabeth and Mary who took care of their babies. The tender care of these two women directed towards their infants and their faith in God's promises were richly rewarded.

Look around you today and observe your fellow man and woman. Do you see those whom God created and loves when you look at your friends, your family, or the unborn baby in a mother's womb?

Lord, help us to value all life and remember that you died for all of mankind's sin. Amen.

And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey.

Mark 1:6 KJV

A Country Bumpkin

John the Baptist was a rugged man of the outdoors. He could certainly find his way around the wilderness as he preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. How would you feel if your pastor was clothed in camel's hair and rawhide? It might feel a little strange for us in our modern era, but that is certainly how John dressed in his day. The words of an old country song come to mind when thinking of how we might greet John if we saw him today. The song goes, "I've seen some sights, but, man, you're something. Where'd you come from, country bumpkin?"

However, these clothes that John wore were not for dramatic effect. They were the clothing of a simple and humble man preparing the way of the Lord our Savior. Reading about John and his humble appearance should give us gladness and hope for our daily lives. It takes the pressure off of us when we might try to "overdress" for the occasion by putting on our own self righteousness, which is like filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6) Rather, we should humbly ask Christ to embolden us to share the good news of His salvation as we go about our daily lives. There is no need to dress up special when telling your son about Christ's love while you help him change the oil in his new car. There is no need to get decked out in a suit before telling your cashier, at the grocery store, how good God has been in your life. No, we can simply share the gospel with everyone as we go about our daily lives, just as John did. It doesn't matter whether we're a country bumpkin or city dweller, as Christ is our shared Savior about whom we can all tell others.

Lord, help us to humbly share your message of salvation with all who will hear. Amen.

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

John 1:32 KJV

An Old Baptismal Certificate

Have you seen old baptismal certificates hanging on the walls of old buildings such as your grandparents' house? Or maybe you've seen one in a local museum displaying the German heritage of the region in which you live or are visiting? These old certificates remind us of God's promises such as the fact that "even baptism doth also now save us." (1 Peter 3:21)

However, the old scene on these certificates should remind us of another amazing reality. The scene I am referring to is the descending of the Holy Ghost upon our Lord in the form of a dove. There are usually angels portrayed in this image, looking down in adoration at the revealed Son of God. We also see John the Baptist pouring water upon our Savior's head as brilliant light shines down upon Jesus. All of these beautiful old images on these certificates make it abundantly clear that Jesus, whom John is baptizing, is indeed the very Son of God! God the Father made this very clear in His exclamation, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) Jesus is no mere mortal in need of salvation through baptism but, as He Himself said when John hesitated to baptize Him, "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3:15)

Think of the amazing miracle that occurred that day when Heaven declared that Christ is indeed the Word that has come to dwell among us! Many of the onlooking Pharisees must have been especially amazed since they had only recently been asking if John might be the Christ. No, John was not the Christ, and he had been right in confessing that Jesus is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

Are we bold enough, in our secular day, to confess with John the divinity of our Lord? Can we remember the old baptismal certificates and tell others about the Gospel message which they contain?

Dear Lord, may we have the courage to proclaim our Saviour's true nature in a hostile world. Amen.

And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Luke 3:3 KJV

Fruits Worthy of Repentance

John the Baptist had a hard job to do as a prophet of God. He had to preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. This would be especially hard to preach to the stiff-necked audience of Jews who were very prideful of their heritage. They would not accept Christ as Savior when He arrived. These Jews, led by the Pharisees, had compiled a book known as the Talmud, which contained much idolatry, blasphemy, and lies. The Pharisees seemed bent on trusting in their Talmud much more than on the inspired Scriptures. It was amongst this group, which John termed a “generation of vipers,” that he was sent to preach repentance. (Luke 3:7)

Do you sometimes feel as if you may resemble these Jews of John’s day? Do you sometimes think to yourself that your worldview, no matter how tainted by secular humanism it may be, is more trustworthy than the Scriptures?

We must humble ourselves and reject that pride which makes us trust ourselves more than God’s Word. A wise man once said that the Scriptures should mold our worldview and our worldview should not mold our interpretation of the Scriptures. After we repent, then we may ask, as the Jews did, “What shall we do then?” John gave us an answer to what we are to do once we, through the Holy Spirit’s leading, have repented of sin. In Luke 3:11,13-14 John tells the people, publicans, and soldiers to share with their fellow men: do not steal, don’t harm others, don’t lie, be content with what God has allowed you to have. These are acts of humility. These works display the realization that we are not wiser than God. These are the “fruits worthy of repentance” that John tells the people to bring forth. Without them, there is nothing but chaff which will be “hewn down, and cast into the fire.” (Luke 3:8-9) Let us heed John’s words to similarly repent and care for our fellow man.

Lord, help us to humbly bring forth fruits worthy of repentance as we wholly submit to your Word. Amen.

He must increase, but I must decrease. John 3:30 KJV

A Bold Yet Humble Sinner

John the Baptist's disciples witnessed Jesus baptizing people and went to tell their Rabbi about the occurrence. John told them that his joy was fulfilled now that he knew Christ was present. He had prepared the way and now the Son of God had finally arrived! He then told his disciples that he must decrease, and Jesus must increase.

Throughout history it has been obvious that God has used the least likely people to accomplish His plans. His chosen people did indeed decrease, as they lived their life in service to their Lord. Why does this happen, and why does God choose such lowly creatures to fulfill His tasks? Well, God tells us in His Word. "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." (1 Corinthians 1:27) Why else would God use a smelly man of the wilderness who ate locusts and honey to prepare the way for His Son? It is because He confounds the worldly through doing so.

If one would read through the book of Hebrews, one would understand that God truly uses the weakest and most unlikely to turn the world upside down. Moses was a murderer, Abraham was a coward, Peter was a simple fisherman, Paul wasn't an eloquent speaker, Rahab was a harlot, etc. These examples from Scripture should give us hope because we know that God can use us lowly Christians despite all our flaws and shortcomings. Martin Luther once said, "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly." His point was not that we should choose to sin, but that we can rest easy knowing that when we sin God forgives and continues to use us. Let us decrease so that Christ would increase. Let us humbly accept our lowly state and praise our Lord for his eternal majesty, power, and dominion!

Dear Lord, help our sinful pride to decrease and help us to give you proper praise and honor. Amen!

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Look up Luke 3:3. How does John the Baptist describe baptism?
2. Look up the following passages on baptism: Romans 6:3-5, Galatians 3:27, Acts 2:38. Reflect on what God has done for you through baptism. (If you still have it, take out your baptismal certificates and read your name and the Bible passage printed there.)
3. John the Baptist “decreased” until he was beheaded by Herod. What are some ways you can decrease your own self in your daily life in order to increase the awareness of Jesus?

Give us this day our daily bread. Matthew 6:11

The Fourth Petition

We began this study of the Lord's Prayer in a previous edition of Daily Rest. It was mentioned that a majority of the petitions deal with our spiritual needs. The fourth petition is one of two petitions that address our earthly needs.

As we pray for "our daily bread", it would be easy for us to think that we are only asking for food. However, as Martin Luther brings out in his Small Catechism, what we are requesting is broader. He writes, "'Daily bread' means everything we need for our bodily well-being. It includes food, drink, clothes, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money and goods, a godly husband or wife, godly children, godly workers, godly and faithful leaders, good government, good weather, peace, health, education, honor, faithful friends, trustworthy neighbors—and things like that." Keep these earthly blessings in mind as we pray this petition.

How are we to regard such divine blessings? James writes in his letter, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (1:17) While many have the attitude they are deserving of any good thing, this Word of God reveals to us that all good things are undeserved, divine gifts.

This Bible passage also reassures us of God's faithfulness to provide us with the many earthly things we need. This truth is pointed to every time we pray this petition saying, "Give us this day our daily bread." Everyday we look to God for our temporal needs, and trust Him to provide for us tomorrow.

Give us this day our daily bread
 And let us all be clothed and fed,
 From war and strife be our Defense,
 From famine and from pestilence,
 That we may live in godly peace,
 Free from all care and avarice. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 458:5

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Matthew 6:12

The Fifth Petition

Relationships are important to us, foremostly our relationship with God and secondarily our relationship with those with whom we interact. Sadly, these relationships are ruptured and damaged by human sin. This is described as debt, what is owed another by reason of an offense or sin. Because of our debts, Jesus instructs us to ask God for forgiveness. Through the Holy Spirit we learn to express our willingness to forgive others.

Hasn't God already forgiven all human sin (2 Cor. 5:19)? If so, why are we to pray for God's forgiveness? In Luther's Large Catechism, he writes, "There is here again great need for us to call upon God and to pray, 'Dear Father, forgive us our trespasses.' It is not as though He did not forgive sin without and even before our prayer... But the purpose of this prayer is that we may recognize and receive such forgiveness... (When we sin, our) conscience is thrown into unrest, so that it is afraid of God's wrath and displeasure. So it loses the comfort and confidence derived from the Gospel. Therefore, it is always necessary that we run here and receive consolation to comfort the conscience again."

As to us forgiving others, this does not come naturally. Because of our sinfulness, it comes naturally to hold a grudge and seek revenge. When it comes to being willing to forgive others, we shouldn't look within ourselves. In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul exhorts, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." (V.32) When Paul encourages us to forgive others and then speaks of God's forgiveness, he is not simply pointing to the example of God's forgiveness in Christ Jesus, He is also pointing us to the source of our strength to forgive others. His forgiving love fills our hearts with love whereby we then are willing to forgive others in Christ Jesus.

Since we sin daily, it is important to remember the Fifth Petition.

**Forgive our sins, Lord, we implore,
Remove from us their burdens sore,
As we their trespasses forgive
Who by offenses us do grieve. Amen.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 458:6

And do not lead us into temptation. Matthew 6:13

The Sixth Petition

Some might think this petition indicates God is capable of tempting us. However, it is not in our Father's nature to tempt, for He is a holy God. In James' letter we read, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." (1:13)

And so, we find Martin Luther explaining this Sixth Petition, "God indeed tempts no one; but we pray in this petition that He would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our flesh do not deceive us or lead us into misbelief, hopelessness, or any other shameful or sinful acts; and, although we are tempted by them, we ask that we win in the end and keep the victory." We know that temptations come from our sinful nature (James 1:14; Mark 7:21-23), unbelievers (Proverbs 1:10), and the devil (Revelation 12:9). And since we are weak by nature, it is very important to seek God's help to overcome temptations.

Looking at the word "temptation" used by Jesus in this petition, it is helpful to note that in the original language this word can mean trial and adversity, as well as temptation to sin. Whenever God allows adversity to come, the devil uses it to tempt us to sin. Whereas God uses it to strengthen our faith.

Job is a good example of this. In the book of Job, we read how God allowed the devil to severely afflict Job, causing him to lose almost everything, including his health. With every adversity, the devil was trying to get Job to renounce God. But listen to what Job said after undergoing afflictions, "But He (God) knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold." (1 Peter 1:6,7)

Into temptation lead us not,
 When evil foes against us plot
 And vex our souls on every hand,
 Oh, give us strength that we may stand
 Firm in the faith, a well-armed host,
 Through comfort of the Holy Ghost! Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 458:7

But deliver us from the evil one. Matthew 6:13

The Seventh Petition

Martin Luther writes in his Large Catechism: “In the Greek text this petition reads, ‘Deliver or preserve us from the evil one,’ or ‘the hateful one.’ It looks like Jesus was speaking about the devil, like He would summarize every petition in one. So the entire substance of all our prayer is directed against our chief enemy. For it is he who hinders among us everything that we pray for: God’s name or honor, God’s kingdom and will, our daily bread, a cheerful good conscience, and so forth. Therefore, we finally sum it all up and say, ‘Dear Father, grant that we be rid of all these disasters.’ But there is also included in this petition whatever evil may happen to us under the devil’s kingdom: poverty, shame, death, and, in short, all the agonizing misery and heartache of which there is such an unnumbered multitude on the earth...”

This last petition then can be regarded as dealing with both our spiritual and physical welfare. The evils in this world started with the fall of man into sin, causing all manner of troubles that touch our lives: sickness and disease, natural disasters, human conflicts and wars, etc. We look to our heavenly Father to deliver and protect us from all harm and danger that affect our bodies and souls, because everyone and everything is subject to Him. The believer Job, who was troubled by all kinds of afflictions, said of God’s deliverance, “He shall deliver you in six troubles, Yes, in seven no evil shall touch you. In famine He shall redeem you from death, And in war from the power of the sword.” (Job 5:19-20)

And we know and trust that because God is loving and merciful. If He allows any bad thing to afflict us, He will work it out for our good, even our eternal welfare. The final deliverance from evil is when God takes us home to heaven.

From evil, Lord, deliver us;
 The times and days are perilous.
 Redeem us from eternal death,
 And when we yield our dying breath,
 Console us, grant us calm release,
 And take our souls to Thee in peace. Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 458:8

*For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen. Matthew 6:13b*

The Doxology

The Lord Jesus, who has given us the Lord's Prayer to pray to our heavenly Father, would have us conclude it with The Doxology. The word "Doxology" means words of praise or words of glory. What a truly fitting way to end this precious prayer that covers all the many different needs in life both for our body and soul. God the Father, who grants us all the petitions we ask of Him in this prayer, deserves all the credit, honor, and praise for so doing.

Our Father in heaven deserves all the praise, because His is "the kingdom". Since God rules over all both in heaven and on earth, everyone and everything is subject to His dominion and His will. Therefore in His all encompassing governance He will carry out what we ask of Him in the Lord's Prayer.

God the Father has "the power" to accomplish everything we beseech of Him in all the petitions. We have every confidence concerning this, because Scripture reveals that one of His characteristics is that He is almighty (all-powerful). There is absolutely nothing that our God cannot do for us.

And His is "the glory". On account of everything our heavenly Father so graciously and mercifully grants us in answer to our petitions to Him in the Lord's Prayer, He deserves all the honor, glory, and praise.

Finally, we close this prayer with "Amen". In His small catechism, Luther explains what Amen means: "Amen" means that I should be certain that these petitions are really heard by the Father in heaven, for He Himself has instructed us to pray in this way and promised that He will hear us. "Amen! amen!" that is, "Yes, indeed, it shall be so!"

**Amen, that is, So shall it be.
Confirm our faith and hope in Thee**

**That we may doubt not, but believe
What here we ask we shall receive.**

**Thus in Thy name and at Thy word
We say: Amen. Oh, hear us, Lord! Amen.**

Weekend Rest Journal

1. As we stated at the outset of our study of the Lord's Prayer, Holy Scripture has many Bible passages that can help us better understand what we are praying about in the Lord's Prayer. Here are some Bible passages that expand our understanding of the last four petitions and the doxology in this prayer.

The Fourth Petition – Exodus 16:16-34, During Israel's wilderness journey, they had to put this into practice. See how this worked for Israel in regard to manna.

The Fifth Petition – Psalm 51, On what basis do we ask God to forgive us of our sins?

The Sixth Petition – 1 Peter 1:6-7. As noted in our devotion on the sixth petition, when we encounter trials of life, the devil will use it to tempt us to forsake God. Whereas God will use trials for our spiritual good. What good does Peter speak of trials serving?

The Seventh Petition – Romans 8:20-25, How is nature faring under the curse of sin that causes all kinds of evil conditions? How does this teach us about hope?

The Doxology – Revelation 7:11-12, According to the angels of heaven what praises does God deserve?

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" Mark 9:2-3, 7

Jesus, The Son of God

The first half of Mark's Gospel shows the Jewish crowds grappling with an important question: "Who is Jesus?" They see Jesus cast out demons (1:25-27) and ask, "What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him." They see Him forgive sins (2:5-7) and wonder, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" He quiets storms (4:39-41), and they marvel, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!" Jesus restores sight and hearing (7:35-37), and the crowds are astonished. "He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

The people of Israel wrestled with this question during Jesus' three-year public ministry. Mark, in his inspired record, is trying to get his readers to ask that same question. "Who is this Jesus of Nazareth?" It was clear to many that Jesus was a great teacher. But Jesus is more than a great teacher. Jesus was a great miracle-worker, acknowledged even by extra-Biblical sources as "a doer of wonderful works." (The Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus) But Jesus is more than a miracle-worker.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, God the Father spoke from heaven to answer this question once and for all, "This is My Beloved Son!" Our Savior-God is more than a moral teacher, more than a powerful prophet—He is God Himself. And how shall we respond to this vision of Jesus? "Hear Him!"

Swift the cloud of glory came:
 God proclaiming in its thunder
 Jesus as the Son by name! Nations,
 cry aloud in wonder: Alleluia!

Worship Supplement 719:3

And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—because he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid. Mark 9:4

Jesus, the Hero of Heroes

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus was joined by two heroes of the Old Testament: Moses and Elijah. Moses was appointed by God for many things—any one of which would have secured his place as a hero of the Old Testament. He wrote the first five books of the Bible by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. He met with God on Mount Sinai and received the Law. He performed miracle after miracle, from the courts of Pharaoh to the barren wilderness.

Elijah was a great prophet. He opposed the wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He fought, outnumbered, against the prophets of Baal. He performed many miracles—from raining fire on an altar to raising a child from the dead. He spoke with God on Mount Sinai and was ultimately carried to heaven in a whirlwind of fire.

Yet here on the Mount of Transfiguration, these two heroes of the Old Testament were acknowledging the real Hero of the Old Testament—Jesus, the Messiah. Moses may have written the Law, but Jesus dictated it. Elijah may have prayed for fire, but Jesus sent it. After meeting with God on Mount Sinai, Moses’ face shone from having seen God’s glory. Jesus radiates with His own glory.

As great as these heroes are, Jesus is better. In fact, Jesus is the Hero of these heroes. The hopes of every Old Testament hero—Moses, Elijah, David, Abraham—were placed on Jesus. It was His work on the cross that bought their salvation and rescued them from destruction, and it is this same heroic work that rescues us still today.

**This is God’s beloved Son! Law and prophets sing before him
First and last and only One All creation shall adore him!
Alleluia!**

Worship Supplement 719:4

And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Luke 9:29-31 ESV

Jesus, the Willing Sacrifice

Peter, James, and John have witnessed some incredible things these past few years. They've seen Jesus heal incurable diseases, cast out demons, multiply food—even raise people from the dead! This has brought a lot of attention. Everywhere Jesus goes, He's surrounded by crowds so large that they cannot enter cities. (Mark 1:45) At times, the massive crowds threaten to crush Jesus and his disciples. (Mark 3:9) Jesus' ministry is exploding.

Now, at the peak of His popularity, Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up a mountain where He shines brilliantly and talks with Moses and Elijah. Imagine what they must have been thinking! Could this be the beginning of an amazing new phase of Jesus' ministry? Jesus, Moses, and Elijah would certainly make for an incredible team. Would they lead a spiritual revival in Israel? Free Israel from Roman tyranny? Establish a kingdom in Israel that would last forever?

Whatever they imagined in that moment, I doubt they could have foreseen the next time Jesus would take those three aside. Instead of radiating His own glory, He would be flat on His face, dripping with bloody sweat, agonizing over what was to come. I doubt they foresaw the Garden of Gethsemane and the torture that awaited their Lord and friend.

Yet, this was the amazing new phase of Jesus' ministry. This phase would spread the Name of God beyond the borders of Judea, deliver all mankind from the tyranny of Satan, and establish an everlasting spiritual kingdom.

It was this phase that would not only rescue Peter, James, and John, but you and me as well. Jesus lovingly sacrificed Himself for us. Let us live lives of willing sacrifice in thanks to Jesus, our willing Sacrifice.

**Jesus on the mountain peak Stands alone in glory blazing
Let us, if we dare to speak Join the saints and angels praising
Alleluia!**

Now as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant. Mark 9:9-10

Jesus, the God of the Living

After the Transfiguration, Jesus came down from the mountain and turned His face towards Jerusalem. Unlike Peter, James, and John, He knew what came next. He knew the agony that awaited Him there. Yet He went anyway. For this was the purpose of Jesus' ministry. By His death and resurrection, He would conquer death forever, winning eternal life for those who trust in Him. Paul puts it this way: "For since by man came death, by [Jesus] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Moses, standing on the mountaintop with Jesus, proved this true. Moses had died over a thousand years earlier—and yet here he was. Moses was alive. Yes, Moses had died, but he was not dead. Through faith in God, Moses' death was simply a door into greater life.

The same is true for everyone who has put their trust in Jesus. There is no such thing as a dead Christian. Jesus states this clearly in Matthew: "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matthew 21:31-32)

Abraham is not dead. Neither is Isaac, Jacob, Moses, or Elijah. Neither is anyone who has died in Christ. They may be absent from us, but they are by no means dead. They are alive, with Jesus, in paradise, having escaped the power of death forever.

Praise be to Jesus, the God of the Living, who has bought our lives with His death and resurrection.

Fulfiller of the past, Promise of things to be,

We hail Thy body glorified And our redemption see.

The Lutheran Hymnal 135:3

And He said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. Mark 9:1-3

Jesus, the Coming King

Peter, James, and John had spent a lot of time with Jesus. They had become accustomed to His appearance and mannerisms. They had become comfortable enough in His presence even to question His plans. When Jesus lifted the veil on His glory, however, these three disciples dove for cover. They had known Jesus during His first coming. Transfiguration gave a glimpse of Jesus at His second coming, and it was terrifying.

Like the disciples, we are much more comfortable with first-coming-Jesus. We decorate our homes and churches with pictures of a kind man with long brown hair and a neatly kept beard. We are so accustomed to this veiled Jesus, that we often forget the true magnitude of His power and glory. Here we see that the same Jesus who welcomed children on His knee is the Jesus who shone like the sun on top of the mountain. The same Jesus who shared His meals with sinners is described in the first chapter of Revelation as having eyes like flames of fire, feet like fine brass, and a voice of roaring waters.

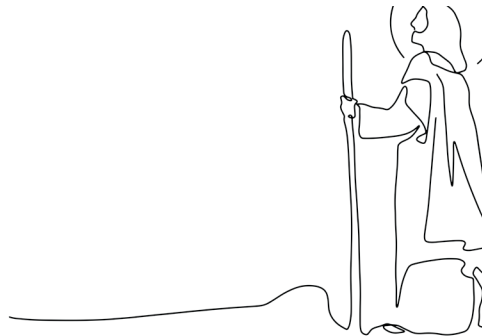
We can take comfort in the knowledge that the Jesus who is coming in glory on the Last Day is the same Jesus who willingly gave up His life for us. The Coming King is our Savior and Brother.

O'er the distant mountains breaking
 Comes the redd'ning dawn of day.
 Rise, my soul, from sleep awaking;
 Rise and sing and watch and pray.
 'Tis thy Savior, 'tis thy Savior,
 On His bright returning way.

The Lutheran Hymnal 606:1

Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

- Isaiah 9:7



Tell how the Father sent the Son to save us.
Tell of the Son, who life and freedom gave us.
Tell how the Spirit calls from ev'ry nation
God's new creation.

- WS 773, Text: Ronald Klug

