

Joy has dawned upon the world

Promised from creation

God's salvation now unfurled

Hope for every nation

Not with fanfares from above

Not with scenes of glory

But a humble gift of love

Jesus born of Mary



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Joy Has Dawned / Angels We Have Heard on High
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And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. Luke 1:35, 37, 38

We Believe

Unbelievable! That would be the natural reaction to the kind of news which Mary heard when the angel appeared to her. He had brought her news about the upcoming, promised birth of the Savior of the world! "How can this be?" That had been her question. That would be anybody's question.

The angel explained to her how this would be. This child would be brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit. Her son Jesus would be the Son of God, true God Himself. The angel also told her of how her cousin Elizabeth would soon be giving birth to John the Baptist at her advanced age.

Both of these things would normally be not just hard to believe, but impossible to believe. However, God makes all things possible! Mary believed the news of the angel. She said: "Let it be to me according to your word." She trusted that what God had promised, He would bring to pass.

You and I also believe what our Lord tells us in His Word about the birth of our Savior. We confess in our worship that Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." Many would say "unbelievable!" Yet, we know that it is true. All of the Bible is true. What would seem impossible, what would be impossible, we believe as true, for our God has told us so.

As we meditate during this Advent season on the miracle of God coming to earth to save us, may we continue to believe all that our God tells us! Amen.

**Savior of the nations, come, Virgin's Son, make here Thy home!
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth,
that the Lord chose such a birth. Amen.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 95:1

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God."

Isaiah 40:3

We Prepare

Christmas...not only is it the "Most Wonderful Time of the Year," it's also the most prepared-for season of the year as well. By the middle of fall, much of the country is in full Christmas mode with all of the plans and preparations underway. Lights are hung. Trees are cut or bought, or dragged out of a box, and decorated. For those who send photos, great care may be given to which pictures are the best of the children that year to send to all of the family and friends.

Besides all of the outward preparations, there is an inward preparation for Christmas as well. This preparation is more important, even necessary. This preparation involves the heart. It involves getting our hearts ready to receive the coming Savior and what He brings to us.

Centuries before Christ's birth, Isaiah spoke of how John the Baptist would prepare the way for the Savior. He would not only announce Jesus' coming on the scene, but would encourage the people to get themselves ready for Him. "Prepare the way of the Lord," he said. "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

Neither Isaiah nor John was talking about a road-construction project. The preparation that they spoke of is a spiritual preparation. We follow Isaiah's preparation instructions by first recognizing our sins. Our hearts are crooked with sins of every kind. But we hear of the Savior's coming and come to Him with a contrite spirit. We ask the Lord to smooth out the roughness of our lives by helping us to see ourselves as we really are: desperate and in need of our Savior's forgiveness.

And then, we are ready to receive Christ Jesus and the forgiveness He brings! We are prepared to receive the wondrous proclamation of our forgiveness in the Savior.

It's always good to be prepared. And, when we come to Christmas lowly in heart and believing that in Christ we truly see our God and Lord, we are ready for all the gifts our God gives us! Amen.

Lord, help us prepare to receive you! 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 aunts—all three of them church organists—would accompany on the piano. All the cousins, 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.

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 400s!

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.

And so we continue to sing our carols of praise during the Christmas season yet today. “Joy to the World,” we sing as we are reminded of the great blessings we enjoy because the Lord has come! “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” we proclaim as we gather together to adore Him who was born, Christ the Lord! “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” we rejoice as with the angelic host we proclaim 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.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness...

Isaiah 61:10

We Rejoice

For many years, I paid no attention to infant clothing. I had no reason to, I suppose. By the time our children came along, some people my age were having grandchildren. It was unreal how much variety there was when gifts started coming in for a new daughter. Clothing of every kind and color is showered upon a newborn.

It's humbling to be reminded that the most important birth in this world's history began in very simple fashion. In fact, we might say there was "no fashion," as far as clothing goes. The Gospels tell us that at Jesus' lowly birth, His mother Mary wrapped her new son, the true God, in simple swaddling cloths.

This may well be one of the reasons why many in Jesus' lifetime missed out on the wonder of what they were witnessing. To many, Jesus appeared just like anyone else.

And yet, Jesus was very different from everyone else! While He came in lowly form, like any other human, He still came as the perfect Son of God. He came to do what no one else could do. He came to bring about our salvation with His perfect life and His innocent sufferings and death.

And this causes us, believers in Christ, to rejoice! Our God has clothed us with the salvation won for us by the Savior. His righteousness has become ours! These garments, the "garments of salvation" and the "robe of righteousness," are much finer than the priciest suit or the most glamorous gown. They cover us in the very righteousness of Christ and make us perfectly acceptable to God Himself. Jesus' holiness and salvation have become our own by faith. For this we rejoice! We rejoice in our Savior who came to bring this about for us. We rejoice in Jesus' righteousness which is now ours! We rejoice in our salvation! Amen.

Savior Jesus, we rejoice and praise You for the righteousness and salvation that You have given us! Amen.

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Luke 2:15–16

We Worship Him

The shepherds in the Nativity account were simply going about their business, “keeping watch over their flocks by night.” To them, it was like any other evening of the year. They did not expect anything out of the ordinary to happen. But something did happen out there during their nightwatch that changed their lives. They heard the good news about Christ’s birth. Angels had appeared above them in the sky, proclaiming that the blessed event of Jesus’ birth had taken place!

And then, they were moved to leave the hills and their sheep to make their way to Bethlehem. They wanted to see for themselves what the angels had spoken of to them. They wished to worship to their Savior and God! And so, they hurriedly went to find Him.

Friends, in the birth of Jesus, something has also happened which has changed our lives! The “good news,” first promised to Adam and Eve thousands of years before Jesus’ birth, had finally come to pass. Jesus’ birth truly has changed our lives because He has arrived to crush the power of the Devil, as God had promised. Jesus’ birth has changed our lives because we see God’s tremendous love for us, demonstrated in sending His own Son to take our sins away.

This wonderful news leads us, forgiven sinners in Christ, to come and adore our Savior Jesus. Like those shepherds of long ago who made their way into Bethlehem to find the Christchild, may we continue to seek our Savior in His Word and find great joy in worshipping Him! Amen.

Oh, come, all ye faithful, triumphantly sing;
Come, see in the manger our Savior and King!
To Bethlehem hasten with joyful accord;
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Oh, come, let us adore Him,
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord! Amen.

The Lutheran Hymnal 102:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Open your Lutheran Hymnal to 62, "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel." Read through each of the verses. As you do, consider the phrases and their meaning and personal application.
2. Read Isaiah 40:1-5. Meditate how the thoughts contained here are emphasized during the Advent season.
3. Share with your spouse and/or children ways that you can or may focus your attention on the coming Savior during this season of preparation.

[illegible]

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’ Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” Says the LORD. “Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated.”

Malachi 1:2-3

The Lord of Love

The prophecy the Lord spoke through Malachi was the last message for His people until the coming of the promised Messiah. Malachi wrote about four hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The people in that interim were much like you and me today, who await the unknown day of the Messiah’s second advent.

Much of the Lord’s message for us in Malachi has to do with love. Sadly, most of it involves the lack of love shown by sinful man toward the God whose love remains steadfast throughout all generations.

It is all too common for people to question God’s love. “If God is so loving, then why...” Why do I suffer? Why do other people suffer? Or, as a reader of Malachi might ask, “If God is so loving, how can He say He hated Esau, but loved Jacob?” Does God love only certain people?

Two things can be true at the same time: God is love, and He shows His grace and mercy to all people. God is also righteous and holy. He hates sin and punishes sinners. What He really hates is when people who have known and experienced His love (like Esau and Satan) spurn that love and turn away from Him. Those who refuse God’s love deserve His wrath.

Yet the Lord of love shows His love in an amazing way. Though some returned His love and some rejected it, Christ died for all. Jesus died to forgive even the sins of those who hated Him. That is the way He has loved us. As you wait for your Savior’s return, do not let your love grow cold. Bask in the love of your Lord. Make that love known to those for whom He died to save.

Come, Lord Jesus, and forgive the hatred we have shown to You and others. Come, Lord Jesus, and fill our hearts with Your love so we are prepared to meet You. Amen.

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations,” Says the LORD of hosts. Malachi 1:11

Prepare with Pure Offerings

The bulk of the first two chapters of Malachi is a condemnation of the temple priests for their failures to lead the people in hallowing God’s name. The prophet describes how they would not offer their firstfruits. They would sacrifice sick, diseased, lame, and otherwise undesirable animals on the Lord’s altar. In their hearts, they found their work a drudgery rather than a joy. This was not only a sin against the first Commandment, but it broke the second as well. If God’s own priest couldn’t be bothered to revere the name of the Lord, why should the nations consider His name great?

We worship differently on this side of Jesus’ first advent, but no matter how we worship, God’s name must be hallowed. He still deserves our offerings. When Jesus comes again, He will be expecting to find fruit. Are we making our offerings a priority, or do we give to God only what is left over after we worry about ourselves first? Do our words and actions prove to others that our God is great, or do we curse, swear, lie, and deceive in His name?

Prepare for the Lord’s coming with pure offerings. All our offerings and sacrifices are given in response to the one great sacrifice that truly makes God’s name great among the nations. God’s Son gave His life as the atoning sacrifice to the Father for our sins. Jesus offered His perfect, unblemished life, and it was fully acceptable to God. On top of that, He gave us His righteousness so that we are able to offer pure and holy gifts by the power of the Holy Spirit. Offer the incense of a godly life to the Lord’s holy name!

**Come, Lord Jesus, and teach us to hallow Your name and offer sacrifices to prepare ourselves and others for Your coming.
Amen.**

“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:1

Behold, He Is Coming

It’s hard to imagine anyone, especially a Christian, being taken by surprise when Christmas comes. Maybe the day sneaks up on you a little faster than you want, but you look forward to it far in advance, and advertisements will remind you of its coming sometime prior to Halloween. Of course, we sadly know that so many are not really prepared for Christmas. So many are not ready to meet the Lord, the Messenger of God’s covenant of grace.

The same was true at the first Christmas. God would send John the Baptist to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah through the preaching of repentance and remission of sins. The majority of God’s people had fallen asleep and were not watching for the coming of the Day of the Lord. Everyone was surprised when the Savior finally came. Only by the grace of God did a handful of people have hearts ready to receive their King. Two of these were Simeon and Anna, who fulfilled part of Malachi’s prophecy by seeking the Lord in His temple through devout and sincere worship. They delighted to hold the baby Messenger of the covenant in their arms.

The second coming of Jesus will surprise everyone, too. Our Savior pleads with us here to stay spiritually awake until He comes again, though the wait may be long (it’s already far longer than the four hundred years between Malachi and the first Christmas). We know it will be sudden, but that’s no excuse for being unready. We have the same message that prepares our hearts for His coming. Prepare your heart. Seek Him. Delight in Him. Behold, He is coming!

**Come, Desire of nations, come. Fix in us Your humble home.
Amen.**

But to you who fear My name, The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; And you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. Malachi 4:2

The Son is Coming!

Go to YouTube and search “Cows coming out in the summer. Happy Cows!” As the title suggests, it’s a minute of Dutch cows that had been pent up all winter leaping and jumping in the green grass as though it were the greatest day of their lives. The happiness of God’s saints when the Sun of Righteousness comes is described in the same way.

The final chapter of the final book of the Old Testament begins with one last warning that the Day of the LORD is coming. When God uses this phrase through His prophets, He is talking about a time of judgment. It is the day when the wheat is separated from the chaff. It is the day when God’s Son comes with His perfect righteousness.

That day is a terrible day for all who want to rely on their own righteousness, because they really have no righteousness of their own before the holy God. So in the first verse of Malachi four, God says that Day of the LORD will set such people on fire.

But those who fear God and despair of their own righteousness look forward to the righteousness Jesus will bring just like cows waiting for summer. These last days are dark days, like the long nights of winter. But the Sun of Righteousness is coming just as certainly as the sun will rise tomorrow—even MORE certain!

When Jesus comes again, it will be the Day of the LORD. We wait in joyful hope knowing that Jesus brings healing, light, and life that will last forever. Because after we are judged righteous for Christ’s sake on the Last Day, there will not be another Day of the LORD. There will only be the endless summer day with our Son of Righteousness.

Come, Son of Righteousness, Jesus Christ. Forgive our faults. Heal us with Your perfect righteousness. Cause us to go out with joy as we await your coming. Amen.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. Malachi 4:5

I Will Send You Elijah

This is the final prophecy of the Old Testament, given some four centuries before Jesus came to earth to fulfill all Scripture. In this prophecy, God promises to send a man who would prepare the way for the Messiah. This messenger would be called Elijah.

But it wouldn't be Elijah sent back to earth. John the Baptist would pick up where Elijah left off and preach repentance and the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Added to John's ministry was the Holy Spirit's great gift of baptism for the remission of sins. All these things would make for a people prepared to meet the Lord.

We also are told to prepare for the coming of the Lord, and we don't know when that day will be any more than the people of Malachi's day. For that matter, the people who heard John preach had no idea that the Lord's coming was only a matter of months or weeks or days away.

We must be prepared. But we might ask, who is our Elijah? Will God send us a forerunner to call to repentance, preach the gospel, and baptize people? The answer is: Yes, God will and already has sent someone. Only it's not just one man. Every believer is called to preach the good news to prepare a way for the Lord. The second Elijah's directive in Malachi 4:6 is our command, too. Our call is to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers." Our mission as God's Elijahs begins in the home. How sad it is that so many neglect to prepare their own families for the Lord! Preach to those closest to you first. Then go out into the world to proclaim salvation through Christ. For those who turn to the Lord in faith, the dread is taken out of the "great and dreadful" Day of the Lord. For children of God, that day will simply be great.

Come, Lord Jesus. Make us Your prophets to prepare others for Your coming. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read Malachi 2. Write down the various sins that God condemns in that chapter. Consider how those sins are still with us today.
2. Read Malachi 3. Write down the wonderful promises that God makes purely out of His lovingkindness. Consider how those promises still give us comfort today.

[illegible]

*Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take
counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed.*

Psalm 2:1-2

Our Savior and Our King

One of the most striking aspects of Jesus' birth is its humility. Our Savior was not born in a palace to rich and famous parents; rather, He was laid in a manger because His unknown parents had no place to stay in Bethlehem. Indeed, this lowly birth testifies to how Christ, our Savior and King, humbled Himself for us.

The first section of Psalm 2 (verses 1-8) shows the "kings the earth" and "the rulers tak[ing] counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed," but their actions are futile: "The Lord shall hold them in derision" (Psalm 2:2) The most powerful kings and rulers of this world are puny and insignificant in the sight of God and His Anointed Son and King. Indeed, this King is God's own Son and His equal: "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to ME, You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." (Psalm 2:7)

It is quite a paradox: the lowly Christ child, lying in the manger, is also the all-powerful, begotten Son of God, a King Who could scoff at the irrelevance of the most powerful world leaders and nations. Yet, the power He brings is not earthly revenge and destruction but heavenly peace. The peace on earth that the angels sing of at Christ's birth is the ultimate peace that comes through Christ in the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With th' angelic host proclaim, "Chris is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

The Lutheran Hymnal 94:1

You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.
Psalm 110:4b

Christ as King, Priest, and Judge

Yesterday, we saw how Christ is the ultimate King, ruling over heaven and earth. Christ's Kingship and divinity are also emphasized at the beginning of this psalm: "The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" (Psalm 110:1) Jesus Himself references this passage as evidence of His deity (Matthew 22:44).

Not only is the Christ a descendant of David and a king, but He is also a priest "according to the order of Melchizidek." Melchizidek was a true priest of the Most High God. He is a prototype of the Messiah, who is a priest, not being a descendant of Aaron, but by divine decree. Christ, though, is the ultimate High Priest because He fulfilled God's Law in our place and now He intercedes, He speaks for us, with His Heavenly Father.

The last section of Psalm 110 portrays Christ as both a powerful King and Judge: "He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations'" (Psalm 110:5b-6a) While such an image may strike fear into our sinful hearts, we can take great comfort and look forward to Christ's Second Coming, for through Christ's death and resurrection, we stand innocent in God's eyes.

What a miracle we have at Christmas, as we worship Christ as true man—a humble baby—and true God and ultimate King, Priest, and Judge, as prophesied in the Old Testament.

Jesus, my great High Priest, Offered His blood and died;
My guilty conscience seeks No sacrifice beside.
His pow'rful blood did once atone,
And not it pleads before the throne.

The Lutheran Hymnal 220:1

For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. Psalm 8:5

Christ's Humiliation and Exaltation

Psalm 8 begins by praising the glory of God, which is seen in His miraculous creation of the world. The psalm goes on to ask, in light of this miraculous world: “What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?” (Psalm 8:4). When standing before the magnificence of God’s creation—peering out over the Grand Canyon or looking out at the immensity of the ocean—we too are humbled, wondering what this powerful God would have to do with us puny humans.

Our question is answered, though, in the Christmas story. Though we are nothing compared to God—or even to His created world—Christ took on our humiliation. What could be a greater humiliation than God becoming a human? Furthermore, Christ suffered taunts, insults, physical pain, and even death in our place. But Christ is also exalted by descending into hell to proclaim His victory, rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven. Now, He sits at the right hand of God, in the position of power, and will come to judge the world.

When we look at the beauties and wonders of the natural world, we have that natural knowledge of the power of God. We also recognize that God created Adam and Eve perfect. After the fall into sin, though, we live in a sinful state, one where God should not even recognize our existence. But the beauty of the gospel message is that through Christ’s humility and sacrifice, we too are exalted by being declared righteous in God’s sight and heirs of eternal life.

True Son of the Father, He comes from the skies;
To be born of a virgin He does not despise.
To Bethlehem hasten with joyful accord;
Oh, come, let us adore Him, Oh comes let us adore Him,
Oh, come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

The Lutheran Hymnal 102:2

I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; With my mouth I make known Your faithfulness to all generations. Psalm 89:1

The Faithfulness of God and His Covenant

Is God really in control? When bad things happen in the world or to us, we can be tempted by our sinful nature to question God's faithfulness and His love. Similarly, in Psalm 89, the psalmist first praises God's faithfulness and His covenant, only to later doubt them. We see, though, from God's Word—a record of God's promises kept—how God did keep His covenant.

The psalmist here discusses a particular covenant between God and David. God had promised David that He would “establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:13). Psalm 89 ends by questioning this covenant. If ungodly kings are removed from the throne, how could God keep His promise? If the kingdom of Israel suffers military defeats, how is God being faithful (Psalm 89:38-45)?

From an earthly perspective, God's promises didn't seem fulfilled. The psalm concludes with the lament beginning, “How long, LORD?” (Psalm 89:46a). Though the psalmist and the exiled children of Israel did not live to see this answer, God was still faithful, in spite of all their unfaithfulness. He promises: “Nevertheless My loving kindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow my faithfulness to fail.” (Psalm 89:33) God's Son came into the world as David's descendant. Jesus is the anointed Son of God, the true King who reigns forever.

When we celebrate Jesus' birth, we also celebrate God's faithfulness and love. His covenant of grace is truly a one-way promise. Despite our sin and unfaithfulness, God sent His Son to suffer and die for us so that we have eternal life.

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

The Lutheran Hymnal 94:4

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. Psalm 96:1

Sing to the LORD a New Song!

This psalm of praise reminds us of the glory and joy of Christ's coming to earth to bring about our salvation. This psalm, along with Psalms 97 and 98, practically bursts with joy. This is the same joy we feel, through faith, from the awesomeness of our deliverance from sin and death. This "new song" fits with the coming of the new covenant of being saved by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Indeed, the LORD's coming is so great that all of creation responds to it: "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; Let the field be joyful and all that is in it." (Psalm 96:11-12a)

It is good to praise and give thanks to the LORD for all He has done for us because it is a recognition that we are dependent on Him for everything, including our salvation. What a relief! We are free from the burden of trying to earn our way to heaven and never knowing if we have done enough. This joy, however, is also something we want to share with others: "Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among the peoples." (Psalm 96:2-3) We are reminded here to praise the LORD all the time, "day to day" and in all places to all people. While the angels had the privilege of singing the praises of our Savior on Christmas night, we have this same privilege every day!

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit preserves our Christmas wonder and joy year-round and that we share this good news with others.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King;

Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room

And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n and nature sing,

And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

The Lutheran Hymnal 87:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. The psalms that have been the basis of the devotions this week are often used in Christmas worship. Several of them are also Messianic psalms—that is, they contain prophecies about Christ and His roles. Look again at these psalms as well as Psalms 16, 22, and 40. What do we learn about Christ's roles from these psalms? How do they compare with Psalms 2, 8 and 110? What larger picture emerges about Christ's role?
2. The Bible demonstrates Christ's role as our Savior but also as our High Priest, Prophet, and King. How does Christ fulfill these roles for us? What is special about each of these roles?
3. In connection with Psalm 89, consider situations which may make people question God's power and control in this world. What other passages or Bible stories can you think of that demonstrate God's faithfulness or show we don't understand His greater plans with our earthly, limited perspectives.
4. Christmas should be a time of celebration and joy, but many people suffer depression in the holiday season. What comfort can we bring to those people from the Bible? Jot down a few specific passages or Bible stories.
5. Try to come up with three specific ways that you can share the joy of Christ's birth with others.

“May the God who gives endurance...” Romans 15:5 NIV84

Endurance

The most important Christmas gifts cannot be purchased with cash or credit cards. Even limitless funds can't buy true love or lasting happiness. Gifts like the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, contentment, joy, and peace cannot be purchased. Yet, God gives us these very gifts freely in His Son, Jesus Christ. In a real sense these are Christmas gifts, because they were fulfilled in the coming of Christ that first Christmas.

In Romans 15:4-13 Paul describes various gifts beneath God's tree. We can think of this tree as a Christmas tree—remembering, however, that this tree shed its needles and became the old rugged cross.

The first gift Paul mentions is ENDURANCE. The Greek word for endurance means to remain under; that is, to bear up under difficult circumstances without giving up or giving in.

Here the apostle is not offering a locker-room pep talk like “tough times never last but tough people do.” Indeed, the endurance of which Paul speaks has nothing to do with human strength and everything to do with God. For He is “the God who gives endurance.” And He gives us endurance through Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 12 we are encouraged to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (NIV84)

Do you need endurance? It's yours for the asking, gift wrapped and waiting beneath God's tree—the cross.

Lord Jesus, grant us the gift of endurance that we might patiently endure the difficulties in our lives. Amen.

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement..."

Romans 15:5 NIV84

Encouragement

The second Christmas gift Paul mentions is the gift of ENCOURAGEMENT. The Greek word used means to call to one's side. A beautiful image, and a familiar one too.

When you hurt yourself as a child, what did your mother do? She called you to her side, swept you into her arms, kissed your cheeks, dried your tears, and said, "Don't cry. Everything will be all right." And somehow, everything was all right, wasn't it?

This is the same picture contained in the New Testament word for encouragement. Where does true encouragement originate? Paul answers: "The God who gives endurance and encouragement."

If ever a man needed encouragement, it was the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians he lists many of the heartaches and hardships of his ministry: hard work, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, imprisonment, floggings, beatings, stoning, exposure to death. Can any woe or worry in our lives compare with his?

Yet, notice how Paul opens 2 Corinthians: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (1:3-4 NIV84) The term comfort in these verses means encouragement. Paul's encouragement came from God. Ours does too.

It's no coincidence that the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete—a name related to the word for encouragement in Romans 15:5. He encourages us by leading us to Jesus.

Do you need encouragement? It's yours for the asking, gift wrapped and waiting beneath God's tree—the cross.

Lord Jesus, encourage us daily through Your word. Amen.

“That through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4 NIV84

Hope

The third Christmas gift Paul mentions is the gift of HOPE. In Scripture true hope is always defined as hope placed in God; not in self, not in wealth, not in human beings. Why? Because God alone will never dash our hopes. God Himself promises in Romans 9: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him (Christ) will never be put to shame.” (NIV84)

In Romans 15:8 Paul explains why hope in God is such a certain hope, whether the hope is for eternal life or daily bread, a happy marriage or a productive ministry. In doing so, he points to Christmas and the first coming of Christ: “For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs.” (NIV84)

Jesus came not only to suffer and die for our sins, but to fulfill every promise God ever made about saving lost humanity. The coming of Christ that first Christmas is itself the proof that God always keeps His word and promises. And so you and I can be absolutely certain that God will keep all His promises to us—the promise to save us; the promise to protect us; the promise to provide for us, strengthen us, and bring us safely from grace to glory.

Do you want a life overflowing with hope? It’s yours for the asking, gift wrapped and waiting beneath God’s tree—the cross.

Lord Jesus, fill our lives with hope. Remind us that You alone will never disappoint us. Amen.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy."

Romans 15:13 NIV84

Joy

The fourth Christmas gift Paul mentions is JOY. But where does true joy originate? This time of year few phrases are more common than "have a merry Christmas." But what is it that makes your Christmas joyful? Does Christmas joy have anything to do with the number of presents beneath the tree, the weather on Christmas Day, the tenderness of the roast or texture of the mashed potatoes? If so, our joy is destined to dim and flicker like a bad Christmas tree light.

The Greek word for joy in Romans 15:13 is related to the word for grace: the undeserved love and favor of God. Biblical joy does not mean smiles and giggles. Rather, it means a Christian heart can rejoice in all circumstances. And the reason for this joy is Jesus Christ.

I remember one Christmas shortly after my parents divorced. I was ten at the time. I knew how my dad was struggling financially, and could not bring myself to ask for many Christmas gifts. In fact, the only gift I requested was a basketball. But that basketball meant more to me than many other gifts. Why? Because in relative terms, I knew how much it cost my dad to give it to me.

Our heavenly Father has given us the gift of salvation. How much did this gift cost Him? It cost Him the life of His own Son, Jesus. And His undeserved gift of salvation in Christ is always a reason to go on rejoicing regardless of our circumstances.

Do you want a life filled with joy? It's yours for the asking, gift wrapped and waiting beneath God's tree—the cross.

Lord Jesus, remind us that You are the source of true and eternal joy. Amen.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him.” Romans 15:13 NIV84

Peace

The fifth Christmas gift Paul mentions is PEACE. I once saw the front page of a newspaper published on the day World War II ended. The headline seemed to cover half the page, declaring in big, bold, capital letters: THE WAR IS OVER.

Beneath the headline was a large photograph of Americans dancing in the street—hugging, kissing, celebrating. And why not? Peace meant no more fighting, no more bombs and bullets, no more bleeding and dying, no more losing loved ones in a distant land.

Thinking about that newspaper... it was the headline that declared the objective reality of peace. But it was the photograph that revealed the inner peace, showing how that peace had gone from the headline to the heart.

So it is with us. Scripture tells us that when Jesus died for our sins, He established an everlasting peace between the holy God and sinful mankind. In Ephesians Jesus is called “our peace.” (2:14) At His birth angels proclaimed: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.” (Luke 2:14 NIV84)

It is this peace with God through Jesus Christ that fills our hearts with lasting peace and empowers us to be at peace, even when the world around us is in chaos. THE WAR IS OVER. The Bible proclaims this headline too, the end of a far greater war, the accomplishment of a far greater peace.

Do you want a life of peace? It’s yours for the asking, gift wrapped and waiting beneath God’s tree—the cross.

Lord Jesus, fill each of us with the peace of God that surpasses all understanding—the peace that comes from knowing You as our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read through the Christmas account of the angels' appearance to the shepherds in Luke 2:8-14. What other Christmas gifts came with the gift of God's Son?
2. Spend time thanking God and praying for the Christmas gifts mentioned in this week's devotions: endurance, encouragement, hope, joy, peace.
3. Read Romans 15:4-13 and repeat out loud the praise recorded in verse 11: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!"

[illegible]

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore.

1 Kings 4:29 ESV

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women. 1 Kings 11:1 ESV

Solomon: Wisdom and Foolishness

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the day we call Palm Sunday, the crowd that streamed out of Jerusalem to meet Him and the crowd that went ahead of him into Jerusalem cried out saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9, Psalm 118:26) They confessed Jesus to be the Messiah King promised to come from David’s family (2 Samuel 7:12). There were other kings that arose from David’s family and ruled. This week we will take a look at some of them, comparing them to the Eternal King, Jesus.

The first King to rise from David’s family was Solomon. The LORD appeared to Solomon at Gibeon in a dream and asked what he could give to David’s son. He asked for wisdom to rule the nation. God was pleased with the request and gave him wisdom and understanding greater than any before or after him (1 Kings 3:12).

Solomon used the wisdom that God gave him to rule well, but in his personal life he made grave mistakes by marrying many foreign women and joining them to worship their false gods. In this way, Solomon, King of David was both wise and foolish. On the other hand, the Eternal King, our Lord Jesus made no such mistake... but became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Faith He grants us to believe it,
Grateful hearts His love to praise;
Want we wisdom? He must give it,
Hearing ears and seeing eyes.

The Lutheran Hymnal 358:4

And when all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, “What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David.” So Israel went to their tents. 1 Kings 12:16 ESV

Rehoboam: Arrogance and Foolishness

We’ve all heard the expression, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” It’s an expression that is sometimes used to illustrate how children inherit their parents’ characteristics, be they physical or personality traits. The next king to rise from David’s family was born to Solomon and was named Rehoboam. In the case of Rehoboam, he illustrated his father’s foolishness, not his wisdom.

There were many capital improvements during Solomon’s reign, paid for by taxes imposed by King Solomon. When the Israelites petitioned the new King Rehoboam to lower the taxes, he consulted the elders who had advised his father. They urged him to lighten the tax load.

Reheboam was full of pride based on his new found authority and consulted his friends. He took the advice of his ‘greenhorn’ peers and was disrespectful, threatening still higher taxes. The result was a divided kingdom. Rehoboam, son of David was arrogant and foolish. On the other hand, the Eternal King, our Lord Jesus, did not come to demand anything of His subjects, but to become poor for the sake of His people. He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, so that we might have a place in the Father’s house.

To this vale of tears He comes, Here to serve in sadness,
That with Him in heav’ns fair homes We may reign in gladness.
We are rich for He was poor; Is not this a wonder?
Therefore praise God evermore Here on earth and yonder.

The Lutheran Hymnal 97:2-3

He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan). 2 Kings 18:4 ESV

Hezekiah: Restored the Kingdom, Restored in Body

The foolishness of King Rehoboam was just the beginning of the kingdom's troubles. As a result of Rehoboam's arrogance and boorishness, the other tribes set up Jeroboam as their king. He established the worship of golden calves, which would set the ball rolling down the slope toward judgment.

It wasn't much better in the southern kingdom of Judah—until Hezekiah, son of David. It is of note that we are told : "...he did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done." (2 Kings 18:3 NASB) The idolatrous practices begun with Solomon were torn down under Hezekiah. When the Assyrians came against Judah, God delivered them. God also delivered Hezekiah from a sickness that left him near death. Under Hezekiah, son of David, Judah was restored to a godly path, and King Hezekiah himself was restored to bodily health. Hezekiah was a godly King, one of a few in Judah. Sadly, much of his work was undone by his own son who followed.

The work of the Eternal King, our Lord Jesus Christ, was to defeat the enemy and to undo what was done in Eden. It was for this purpose that He appeared in flesh and blood (1 John 3:8). He crushed the head of the enemy and has abolished death and brought life and immortality to sinners.

Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you,
O Christians, lest the foe destroy you,
For Satan has designed your fall.
Wield God's Word, a weapon glorious!
Against each foe you'll be victorious;
Our God will set you o'er them all.
Is Satan strong and fell? Here is Immanuel. Sing hosanna!
The strong ones yield, With Christ our Shield,
And we as conqu'rors hold the field.

The Lutheran Hymnal 444:1

The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention. Therefore the Lord brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon. 2 Chronicles 33:10–11 ESV

Manasseh: Unbelieving...Undone

When we look at history, we may sometimes wonder why God allowed certain men to come to power and rule. No doubt, in some cases a wicked man in power is a judgment against a wayward nation. We may wonder why godly Hezekiah ruled for twenty-nine years...only to be followed by his son, Manasseh, son of David. While Hezekiah led spiritual reform, Manasseh undid the good his father had done, inviting God's judgment upon Judah. Manasseh was only twelve years old when he came to power. He ruled for fifty-five years in Jerusalem.

It is reported that Hezekiah's son "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord . . . for he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, and he erected altars to the Baals ... and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them." (2 Chronicles 33:2-3)

It was a criticism of the days of the Judges that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 17:6) These words are a criticism during the reign of Manasseh: "The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention." The Lord eventually got Manasseh's attention, and he did repent, but the damage was done.

When God foretold the rule of the Eternal King, He warned the people that if they did not hear the words of God spoken by Him, God would hold them accountable (Deut. 18:18-19). There was never a need for the Eternal King to repent, for He did all that the Father sent Him to do, perfectly. Christ the King will return visibly one day and all those who have dismissed His Word will mourn.

O my Savior, help afford By Thy Spirit and Thy Word!
When my wayward heart would stray,
Keep me in the narrow way;
Grace in time of need supply While I live and when I die.

The Lutheran Hymnal 342:5

And Josiah took away all the abominations from all the territory that belonged to the people of Israel and made all who were present in Israel serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not turn away from following the LORD, the God of their fathers. 2 Chronicles 34:33 ESV

Josiah: A Reformation

In some of our congregations, the spiritual role of elder is reserved for men who have years of experience under their belt. It's sometimes suggested that the passage of time is necessary for wisdom. Wisdom and youth are two words that don't often go together. However, Josiah, son of David, is an exception.

When Manasseh died, he was replaced by King Amon who followed in his wicked father's footsteps. He ruled just two years before being replaced by his eight-year-old son, Josiah. Josiah was just a boy with a 'child-like faith' who did what was right in the sight of the LORD. He purged the land of idolatry. Who would ever think that God would use a young boy to do what older kings refused to do? Well, that's exactly what the LORD did through Josiah.

When the Eternal King took on human flesh and blood, His faithfulness and understanding was on display at the age of twelve. It shouldn't be a surprise. The Lord foretold his faithfulness and his victory (Isaiah 53:10-12). God used every son of David to accomplish something, but nothing was as great as what was accomplished by the son of Mary, the Eternal King, descended from David, Jesus the Christ.

He nestles at His mother's breast,
Receives her tender care,
Whom angels hail with joy most blest,
King David's royal Heir, King David's royal Heir.

The Lutheran Hymnal 105:4

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Read 1 Samuel 8. Why was Samuel displeased when Israel sought a king? Why was the Lord displeased? What do you think would have pleased the Lord?
2. Read 1 Samuel 12. Please note the warnings given by the LORD through Samuel at Saul's coronation. Any idea how long it took for things to go bad?
3. Read Micah 5:2. Note the place that the Messiah King was to arise from. Notice that his 'goings forth' did not begin at his birth.
4. In our form of government, we aren't ruled by a king. If you could choose anyone to be an absolute ruler, a king, who would you choose? Why is Jesus the only King we would choose to have rule over us?
5. Read Matthew 21:1-11 and Revelation 19:11-16. They both picture the coming of the King. How are the two descriptions different?

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility consider one another better than yourselves.

Philippians 2:3 EHV

Humility

Humility is generally considered to be a virtuous thing. But what exactly does it mean to be humble? Perhaps one way to define humility is placing yourself lower than what you are entitled to. Although you have achieved a significant accomplishment, you do not share that with others and thereby forgo the praise or accolades which may well be deserved. Maybe you relinquish your VIP seat. Perhaps you concede your point in a debate, even if you are in the right.

But, as human beings, when we place ourselves at a status beneath that to which we are entitled, is that really much of a stretch? After all, we are all depraved, wretched sinners. Our best accomplishments are not really worth anything (“and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth” Isaiah 64:6 EHV). When we are exercising humility, maybe we are not really lowering ourselves but rather recognizing who we really are.

Now imagine someone who had it all. Someone who is perfect in every way. Someone who has the power to do literally anything. Someone who exercised that power in the creation of the universe! The Son of God certainly had enormous potential for lowering Himself beneath who He is and to what He is entitled. In this week’s devotion series, we will be considering the extent to which Christ humbled Himself so that He could gain for us redemption and salvation.

The humble heart and lowly
God lifteth up on high;

Beneath His feet in anguish
The haughty soul shall lie.

The heart, sincere and right,
That heeds God’s invitation

And makes true preparation,
It is the Lord’s delight.

The Lutheran Hymnal 75:3

Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. Philippians 2:6-7a EHV

Humility of a Man

If we consider humility as accepting a lower status than that to which we are entitled, there can be no more extreme case than that which is described in this passage.

Consider the pre-incarnate state of the second person of the Godhead. The opening verses of John's gospel (John 1:1-4 EHV) state, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind." Lest there be any doubt about who this 'Word' is, John clarifies a few verses later (John 1:14a EHV) with, "The Word became flesh and dwelled among us" and recounts how John the Baptist identified this Word as Jesus Christ.

The omnipotent Creator of the universe took on human form. The contrast in status cannot be put into words or even comprehended. Jesus willingly set aside the majesty due to Him. During His life on earth, while He continued to be God, He set aside His divine supremacy so that He could live the life of a true human being in our place. How difficult it must have been to remain humble and resist the temptation to exercise His divine authority and command the honor rightly due to Him!

God became man. There can be no greater lowering than from ultimate perfection to lowly human. But that is what had to happen in order for God's Son to be able to take our place, living the perfect life that we could not and paying the price for all of our sins.

All praise to Thee, eternal God,
Who, clothed in garb of flesh and blood,
Dost take a manger for Thy throne,
While worlds on worlds are Thine alone. Hallelujah!
Once did the skies before Thee bow;
A virgin's arms contain Thee now,
While angels, who in Thee rejoice,
Now listen for Thine infant voice. Hallelujah!

The Lutheran Hymnal 80:1, 2

*But he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant.
When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance
was like that of any other man, Philippians 2:7 EHV*

Humility of a Servant

Yesterday we attempted to consider just how great a lowering it was for Jesus to go from fully God to become man. Even if He had taken the form of the best human on the planet, the disparity would have been just as great. Even so, Jesus did not take the form of superhuman, regal ruler, or charismatic celebrity. His form was ordinary. Average. Like that of any other man. This was foretold in Isaiah 53:2 (EHV): “He had no attractiveness and no majesty. When we saw him, nothing about his appearance made us desire him.” Even compared to other men, Jesus would have been regarded as lowly (humble).

But it doesn’t stop there. Jesus took the nature of a servant. Although He was God, He not only placed Himself among humans but as a servant to them. Jesus said of Himself, “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt 20:28 EHV). He drove this point home to His disciples in the upper room when He washed their feet.

Indeed, Jesus’ entire life on earth was an act of service. His days were spent serving with such things as teaching, healing, intercessory praying, and even providing food when necessary. But His greatest acts of service were living a perfect life in our place and suffering the punishment for our sins in our place.

Upon a manger filled with hay
In poverty content He lay;
With milk was fed the Lord of all,
Who feeds the ravens when they call.
He who Himself all things did make.
A servant’s form vouchsafed to take
That He as man mankind might win
And save His creatures from their sin.

The Lutheran Hymnal 104: 5, 2

He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Philippians 2:8 EHV

Humility in Death

When the Son of God humbled Himself and took on human nature, He subjected Himself to all things that go with being human (except without sin). He accepted human limitations—hunger, fatigue, sorrow. But He also subjected Himself to the ultimate hallmark of humanity—death. With Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden of Eden, death became the inescapable end, as summarized in Romans 5:12 (EHV): “So then, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also death spread to all people because all sinned.” Though sinless, Jesus willingly bore even this consequence of being man.

Being subject to death in any form—even passing away peacefully in His sleep—would have been an extreme lowering (humiliation) of Himself. But the death that Jesus experienced would be—could be—no ordinary death. Not only did He die, but He suffered death on a cross—crucifixion. Crucifixion was an execution method designed to inflict maximum suffering and humiliation. The event was carried out in public, subjecting the individual to public ridicule. Forced to carry his cross, and often stripped naked, an extreme amount of shame was added to the unthinkable physical pain.

While many people experienced Roman crucifixion, there was none like this one. For as bad as the pain and shame inflicted by men, there was far greater inflicted by God. When Jesus took our place on the cross, He experienced God’s wrath as if He had committed every sin of all mankind for all time. The rightful pain and shame of the entire human race was placed on Him. This was the pinnacle of Christ’s humiliation.

Thou has suffered great affliction
And hast borne it patiently,
Even death by crucifixion,
Fully to atone for me;
Thou didst choose to be tormented
That my doom should be prevented.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be,
Dearest Jesus, unto Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 151: 6

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-10 EHV

Humility to Glory

Over the past few days, we have pondered the extent to which Christ humbled Himself by taking on human nature. If the story ended there, we might say it was an admirable or even impressive feat, yet a tragic tale. Fortunately, that is not the end of the story. For after Jesus' ultimate descent into the depths of suffering under his Father's wrath, He was raised from the dead, marking His sacrifice as satisfactory payment for our sins.

With His resurrection, Christ's humiliation ended, and He was restored to His rightful position at God's right hand. Now He reigns supreme. As King of all creation, the majesty that He is rightly due will be accorded to Him. Even those who treated Him scornfully, and even those who deny Him still will one day bow before Him and confess Him as Lord.

But now comes the greatest news of all. Because of Christ's work on our behalf, we will never need to suffer the humiliation He experienced, a humiliation we cannot even fathom. And although we did not endure His humiliation, we will share in His exaltation. When Jesus returns to claim His children, we will reign with Him in eternal heavenly glory. "This saying is trustworthy: Indeed, if we have died with him, we will also live with him; If we endure, we will also reign with him." (2 Timothy 2:11-12a EHV)

Praise be to Jesus who humbled Himself to live the perfect human life that we could not. Praise be to Jesus who humbled Himself and suffered death and hell in our place. Praise be to Jesus who has freely granted us His victory so that we may share in His eternal glory!

**Crown Him with many crowns, The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark how the heav'nly anthem drowns All music but its own,
Awake, my soul and sing Of Him who died for thee
And hail Him as thy matchless King Thro' all eternity.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 341:1

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Make a list of ways in which Jesus exhibited humility during His life. Challenge yourself to think of at least ten.
2. In the verse immediately preceding this section describing Christ's humility, verse 5 says, "Indeed let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Think of some times in your life (maybe even today) when you did not follow Christ's example of humility, and ask for God's forgiveness.
3. Although it is difficult for us to be humble, can you think of some possible earthly blessings that might be a result of a humble spirit? (Perhaps consider our relationships with others.)

[illegible]

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Matthew 4:23

The Work of Christ Jesus: Prophet

On Sunday morning, you're sitting in the pew, listening to the pastor preach his sermon. Everything he has said so far has been faithful to the Bible. After a while, you begin to doze off, not paying full attention anymore. After a few minutes in your trance, you tune back in to hear a striking statement. The pastor begins to pat his own chest and say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Your heart sinks. Did the pastor really just commit blasphemy in such a gross way? Did he really just call himself the Savior? After the service, you speak to the pastor to ask him, and he comfortingly assures you that the statement was a quote of the Savior Himself saying these words.

In the history of this world, there has only been one preacher who, while speaking with authority, can claim that very authority as His own. This one and only preacher, who proclaims the path to Heaven by saying, "trust in Me," is Jesus Christ, who still lives today, unlike the deceased frauds who claimed to be the great proclaimer of truth (Mohammed, Buddha, etc.).

As Jesus walked in Galilee and Judea, He preached this Good News: He came to offer His life for the forgiveness of your sins. He garnished His preaching by also showing His gracious power over disease and natural disaster (sin's effect on the world), over demons and their leader (the tempters), over death (sin's wage). And now, though ascended into Heaven, He sends forth preachers of His holy Gospel so that you too may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the one sent to take away your sin. Jesus, as your Prophet, still makes sure the Gospel is preached for your blessing and strengthening of faith.

Dear Lord, to Thy true servants give
The grace to Thee alone to live.
Once bound by sin, but saved by Thee,
They go to set the pris'ners free,
The Gospel message to proclaim
that men may call upon Thy name

The Lutheran Hymnal 482:1

*Not by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood
He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained
eternal redemption.* Hebrews 9:12

*If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus
Christ the righteous.* 1 John 2:1

The Work of Christ Jesus: Priest

The smell of meat cooking and the sizzle of steak blood on the grill are, at least to the author, unforgettable smells. I cannot imagine a smell like that wafting about the sanctuary mid-worship service. Old Testament Israel, however, could, for it was part of God's ceremonial law to perform burnt offerings.

Another thing I could never imagine is taking lambs' blood in a cup, dipping a brush in the cup, and splattering the blood on the congregation, waving the brush in the air. These were different, unforgettable times. The blood of perfect lambs foreshadowed the payment needed to save you. The smell of cooking meat, a pleasant aroma, foreshadowed the Father being pleased with us through the sacrifice of His Son. And the blood sprinkled on the congregation (perhaps the most unforgettable of the images) foreshadowed the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. His blood covers us and sanctifies us.

It was the Levitical priests who assigned to perform all these tasks back then, but your pastors and lay leaders today are not performing these functions, for they are no longer needed. Why? Jesus Christ is the ultimate High Priest. He only needed to sacrifice one lamb to pay for sin—His innocent self on the cross. He only needed to sprinkle one kind of blood on us—His own, as He cleanses us with His perfect blood and righteousness. He only needed to create one sweet smelling aroma—His perfect life and innocent death for you and me. The Father shows His favor to you because Jesus is risen and ascended.

Jesus, my great High Priest, Offered His blood and died;
My guilty conscience seeks no sacrifice beside.
His pow'rful blood did once atone,
And now it pleads before the Throne.

The Lutheran Hymnal 220:1

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Matthew 28:18

The Work of Christ Jesus: King

Prince of Peace!...born in a cattle feeding trough. King of Kings! ...with nowhere to lay His head. Hosanna (Save Now!), Son of David...riding on a donkey, not a regal horse. What kind of King is this? Pilate asked a good question of Him, “Are you a king...?”

Jesus answered Pilate truthfully that He is, in fact, a king. Jesus’ kingdom, however, is not of this world. He did not gather twelve men to be generals, and seventy to invade Roman provinces to establish political borders. He came to found a spiritual kingdom, one of grace. He lowered himself even to the point of death, in order to found a kingdom that cannot be defeated. A kingdom so powerful that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Through His life and death, He brought forgiveness—life and immortality. He founded the Kingdom by His work of redemption, and He populates His kingdom by the spreading of the Gospel. This is the warfare that is fought. It is fought by winning hearts and minds and creating faith.

You and I belong to this kingdom. Christ rescued us and brought us into it through our baptisms. Now He rules in our hearts by His Word. And we need not despair over falling away from His kingdom. When we pray, “Thy kingdom Come,” we are asking that His kingdom come among us, that Jesus sends His Spirit through the Gospel to keep us in His victorious kingdom. He also protects us. He curbs the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh—the kingdom’s enemies. Jesus has defeated these three through His work on the cross, and now He has all authority to put evil in its place.

We belong to Christ’s kingdom, and onward we march to an eternal home to rejoice with the King for all eternity.

**Crown Him with many crowns, The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark how the heav’nly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of Him who died for thee
And hail Him as thy matchless King thro’ all eternity.**

The Lutheran Hymnal 341:1

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11

The Work of Christ Jesus: Shepherd

So much can be said about the care for sheep, their needs and their weaknesses. Stubborn, mindless, seemingly low intelligence, weak, largely dependent, sheep have ascribed to them many adjectives that, if used to describe a human being, would be considered very rude. None of us wants to be called any of these things, for we naturally want glory, not shame. But, as sinners, can't the sheep description describe us? Most certainly...And as sheep, we need a lot of help.

A careless Bedouin shepherd once left his sheep alone near a sheer cliff. They all fell off the cliff. About the first half fell to their death, and the second half was cushioned by the wool of the deceased. If left to ourselves to make it to heaven and atone for our sin, we'd be falling off a cliff to our deaths, too. We need a Shepherd who is not careless. We have a caring Shepherd in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Jesus matches the shepherd description in so many ways. He feeds you by leading you to the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. He knows what is dangerous for you, sometimes using gentleness to lead you away, and other times allowing hardship to happen in order for your faith and understanding to grow. He protects you from sin, the world, and the devil. He knows you all by name and knows each of your voices. When He hears our bleating prayers, He knows exactly how to answer. We have come to know His voice, too: His Word!

The Good Shepherd Jesus has laid down His life for us, His Sheep. He has taken His life back up again, showing us that we have the most dependable Shepherd ever, one who will never leave us, nor forsake us.

I am Jesus' little lamb, ever glad at heart I am;
For my Shepherd gently guides me, knows my need,
and well provides me,
Loves me every day the same, even calls me by my name.

The Lutheran Hymnal 648:1

*The Father has given Him authority to execute judgment,
because He is the Son of Man* John 5:27

The Work of Jesus Christ: Judge

“Look who’s laughing now!” One can picture someone with a petty spirit of vengeance saying these words. I can almost picture a moment in a coming-of-age movie where a “nerdy” child pictures himself confronting his bullies years later, but this time he has all the power, because he’s their boss.

To say that’s how Jesus was when He looked at His scoffers is a big mischaracterization. Jesus wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He wanted to gather rebellious Jerusalem under His affectionate wing, like a mother hen with her young. It is true that Jesus will be the judge of all at the end of days. Those who spurned the LORD in unbelief, whether loudly or quietly, will be sent to the eternal fires of hell. Jesus will say as Judge to them, “depart from Me, you cursed . . .” (Matthew 25:41)

Jesus does not want this for people, that is why He gave His life as the ultimate case for your innocence. He suffered hell for you, in your place. He did this so that when He returns at judgment day, He as judge will say to you and all who have been called to saving faith in Him, “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the World.” (Matthew 25:34)

When we suffer for Christ’s name’s sake, we are truly blessed to have the same perspective: Jesus died even for them, and there still is time. It is our prayer and hope that as many people as possible may come to know Jesus as their Savior—to know He died on the cross to save them. That way, when He returns, they may join us in hearing the Judge’s sweetest pronouncement of innocence—the very innocence given through Him.

**O Christ, who diedst and yet dost live, to me impart Thy merit;
My pardon seal, my sins forgive, and cleanse me by Thy Spirit.**

**Beneath Thy cross I view the day
when heaven and earth shall pass away,**

And thus prepare to meet Thee.

The Lutheran Hymnal 604:4

Weekend Rest Journal

1. Make a grid with three columns and two rows. At the top of first column write "prophet", the second column "priest," the third column "king." At the far left hand side of the first row write "past," and at the second row write "present." In the "past" row, in each column write how Jesus served you as Prophet, Priest, and King in the past. In the "present" row, in each column write how Jesus still serves you as Prophet, Priest and King today.
2. Read the 23rd Psalm and highlight all the verbs which Christ does for you as Shepherd. Ponder each verb and think of ways in which Jesus has done and still does that for you today.
3. Jesus will be the Judge on the last day, but we do not need to be frightened by that. Write down how each of His other offices: Prophet, Priest, King, and Shepherd, have prepared you to meet Jesus, the Judge, with joy!

[illegible]

“There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose.”

Mark 1:7

The Creator Wore Sandals!

The Gospel of Mark is perfect for the Epiphany season. The opening verse says, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark sets out to shine a light on Jesus to reveal Him to the world as the Son of God and our only Savior from sin. He shows that Jesus came in fulfillment of prophecy which proves He is the One God promised.

The words above are recorded in all four gospels so they must be important, but I wonder if we fully appreciate what John was saying. John was clearly stating that Jesus was the Son of God. He knew he wasn’t worthy to do even the most menial task for Jesus. Even being a lowly servant of the Son of God would be an honour of which none of us are worthy.

But John is saying something else about Jesus. It’s so obvious that we pass right over it without giving it a thought, yet it is really the most remarkable thing. Jesus wore sandals! You say, “Of course, those were the shoes everyone wore in Israel.” Exactly, that’s the point! That is what is so remarkable. Jesus is the Almighty, Eternal Son of God. He is the Creator of all things, yet here He is, on earth, wearing sandals like everyone else. The Eternal Son of God, has lowered Himself to our level, to live like one of us; to be our substitute. As we skim through the Gospel of Mark this week, Jesus shows that He is the Creator with all power, wearing sandals as a humble Servant. Marvel at such humility!

O most gracious Lord, I marvel that you stooped down to wear sandals and live your life as my substitute to save me, a lost and condemned sinner. All praise be to You. Amen.

Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him.

Mark 1:12-13

No One's Perfect!?

How many times have you heard that said? Perhaps you've said it yourself. Those words are usually said to excuse yourself, right? "You did something wrong." "Yeah, well, no one's perfect!" So you can't expect me to be perfect. The only trouble is God does expect you to be perfect! Jesus said, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) That's what makes this account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness so precious to us.

Mark only mentions it briefly, but he gives us some interesting details. "The Spirit DROVE Him into the wilderness." Matthew tells us why. It was for a very specific reason—"to be tempted by the devil." (Matthew 4:1) Jesus walked in our sandals so that He would face all the temptations we face.

Mark also says "He was with the wild beasts." When are you most likely to fall for temptation? Isn't it in times of great distress and pressure? That is when the true nature of our heart is revealed. Jesus was in the most severe distress. He had eaten NOTHING for 40 days. (See Luke 4:2) He was at His weakest state physically. That was when He was most vulnerable to wild animals. This was also a time of emotional and mental distress. Satan was quick to take advantage of that. Yet Jesus remained perfect, without even a hint of sin. How wonderful to know there is One Who is truly perfect. The eternal, holy Son of God who wore sandals to walk in our place. He faced all the temptations we face and fall for daily and He remained perfect. He did that for us, as our substitute. His perfect holy life is credited to us.

Dear Savior, may I never try to hide behind the fact that no one's perfect, thinking I'm as good as anyone. I am a sinner. Cover me with your perfect righteousness. Amen.

A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Mark 4:37-38

Don't You Care?

Mark, more than the other gospels, demonstrates that Jesus truly is the Son of God by the miracles He performed. The disciples had seen many miracles already. Jesus healed everyone who came to Him. He showed His power over the demons. Yet, when the disciples' lives were endangered by a violent storm on the sea, they showed they still didn't fully understand that Jesus was the Son of God. They cried out, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" What a harsh word against their Lord! Don't You care? We can understand their fear, their lives were in danger. But was there really anything to fear? They had the Creator of the universe right there in the boat with them.

They took the fact that He was sleeping to mean that He was oblivious to what was going on and didn't care about what happened to them. They should have taken that to mean there was nothing to fear. If our Savior God is not worried, we shouldn't be either!

When we are faced with some danger, or tragedy, we may be tempted to question whether God really cares about us. The Almighty Creator came down to earth and wore sandals. He became one of us, and lived like we do. He faced all our temptations and trials. He did it so that He could save us from our own sinfulness. Doesn't He care? Of course He cares! There is no one who cares more, and there is no one who is more capable to help in every need. He is the Creator, after all, walking among us in our shoes.

Dear Savior, we are sorry for ever questioning your love and care. When we are afraid, let us remember that you are always with us in the boat. Amen.

Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" Mark 4:39-40

Why Are You So Fearful?

Are you ever afraid or worried about anything? If so, and I think we all are at some point in life, then we do not fully grasp God's infinite power and love. Look at how Jesus has power even over the wind and the waves. He who created the wind and the waves with nothing but His word also commands them with His word, and they must obey.

Jesus asks us, "Why are you so fearful?" You have the same, Almighty Creator right here in the boat with you at all times. Wherever you are, whatever is happening, He is right there beside you. We all know that to be true. So why do we still fear and worry when the storms of life gather? There is a difference between believing something is true and actually trusting in it completely. As Jesus indicates, our fear is because of our lack of faith.

What are you afraid of? Jesus has power over it. When those disciples came to fully understand and believe that fact, they received incredible courage and boldness to face all the challenges and fears ahead of them. They were thrown in prison, but Jesus was with them and freed them. Eventually all but one of them were put to death, but even then Jesus was there to carry them to heaven. Whatever happened, they knew that their Almighty Creator, who is also their Loving Savior, was always with them in the boat.

Remember, Jesus not only is ABLE to control the wind and waves and all things in creation, He does control them ALL THE TIME! He was controlling that storm from the beginning. He still controls all things for our benefit.

Dear Lord, teach me not to fear anything that may happen in this world, but trust that you are the creator of all and control all for my benefit and my eternal good. Amen.

“And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.” Mark 5:22-23

The Creator Knows what YOU Need!

Timing is everything! And God’s timing is always perfect for the strengthening of your faith.

Jesus returned to Capernaum just when Jairus’ 12 year old daughter was in critical condition. Jairus ran to Jesus to plead for Him to heal his daughter. Jesus agreed and went with Jairus. Then a delay! A woman with a 12 year long flow of blood came to Jesus. Jesus loves all people and stopped to care for her. We can imagine Jairus getting impatient. Come on, hurry up Jesus! My daughter is dying! Then came the dreadful news. His daughter was dead. Jesus had taken too long. How devastating!

But this too was according to Jesus’ perfect timing. Jesus had something greater planned for Jairus than he even imagined. As soon as Jesus heard the word of the messenger, He said to Jairus, “Do not be afraid; only believe.” I know things look pretty dismal to you right now, but don’t worry, just believe. Trust me. What an amazing word of reassurance! Jesus indicated that even in death there is hope when you have the Creator at your side.

The Creator not only has power over every disease, over the demons and over the forces of nature, He also has power over death itself. He who created life in the beginning can restore life. The cause of death is not sickness or cancer or heart disease. The cause of death is sin and Jesus has taken away sin and conquered death. Rejoice in Hope! Jesus knows what you need and has provided it.

Dear Savior, thank you for walking in our shoes to be with us and to save us. Teach me to trust you fully even in the most desperate of times. Amen

Weekend Rest Journal

Read the first five chapters of Mark. Jesus proves that, even though He wore sandals and looked like every other helpless human being, He is truly the Son of God, the Creator of all things.

1. Note the progression in the magnitude of His miracles and list how Jesus shows His power in ever increasing ways.
2. Note also how the disciple's faith slowly increased as they experienced more of His power.
3. Mark proceeds to show how Jesus overcame all sin and death for us with His own death and resurrection. List any difficulties that are challenging your faith presently. Reflect on the resurrection. How does the resurrection of Jesus empower your faith in such times?

[illegible]

I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'" Psalm 122:1

O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing!

What a blessing we have in the Lutheran divine service. Every part of the service reminds us of sin and grace—that despite the guilt and shame we feel because of our sin, we have been forgiven. We stand clothed in the robes of our Redeemer Jesus' righteousness.

The most important part of the divine service is the Word presented. Every divine service includes two or three lessons read from the Bible, reminding us that "these (words) are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31). A little later, the pastor expounds upon a portion of Scripture, encouraging us when we recognize our hopeless state by reminding us of God's great mercy and grace towards us. We are the redeemed children of His kingdom—ensuring His care and comfort while we are on earth with an eternal future in heaven.

The liturgy is also an important part of the service. As we confess our sins, receive the absolution, confess our faith in the Apostles' or Nicene Creed—we are again reminded of God's mercy and grace in redeeming and bringing us into His kingdom. Finally, we sing several hymns—carefully chosen by the pastor to reinforce the message of the Word and liturgy—each emphasizing the glorious blessing we have as redeemed children of God.

We are indeed blessed to partake in the Lutheran divine service every Sunday where we hear, rehear, and then have repeated again the blessings we have as God's redeemed children. Upon hearing the benediction, we leave the service convinced of God's grace and mercy.

Over the next several days we will consider some hymns from the "Redeemer" section of *The Lutheran Hymnal*—each which reinforces our blessings as God's redeemed children.

Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!

The Lutheran Hymnal 360:1

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (The apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15)

Chief of Sinners Though I Be

The temptation is always there to compare ourselves to other people and find ourselves “not so bad”. It is easy to come to this conclusion when we see so many around us condoning sinful behaviors such as abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, etc. Our gossip, anger towards others and occasional harsh words seem minor compared to these other “major” sins against God’s Word. We can easily think “I thank you Lord that I am not as these others” (The Pharisee in Luke 18:11).

The apostle Paul, one of the most faithful of God’s missionaries in history, realized that his goodness should not be compared to that of other people, but to the righteousness of God—and found himself “the chief of sinners”. In his letter to the Romans he lamented “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:18-19)

A few verses later, Paul continues “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Therein lies our comfort also—Jesus has redeemed us from this body of death and brought us into His kingdom. Knowing of the salvation won for us encourages us as we face the trials and temptations of this world. We can face the troubles of this world with peace and confidence, secure in the knowledge that we are under God’s care as redeemed members of His kingdom on earth, and future inhabitants of the kingdom of heaven.

Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed His blood for me;
Died that I might live on high, Lived that I might never die.
As the branch is to the vine, I am His, and He is mine.

The Lutheran Hymnal 342:1

But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

1 Timothy 1:16

Awake My Heart to Joyful Lays

One of the great blessings of being an older man is recognizing the patience God has repeatedly shown to me—both in earthly as well as spiritual matters. Whether trying to hang-glide off a barn roof with a sheet of plywood (repeatedly), or questioning God’s plan for my life (even more repeatedly), God has patiently remained faithful and merciful to me.

I’m sure we can all relate to these foolish actions—both earthly and spiritual. We are indeed blessed that God has not angrily walked away saying “as you will”. Rather, God has patiently (and repeatedly) remained with us despite our foolishness and sinfulness. Through His holy Word, the Holy Spirit has reminded us of God’s faithfulness and urged us to sin no more. Despite our foolish and sinful natures, God devised the plan to redeem us from Satan’s clutches and bring us safely into His kingdom. Safe in His faithful and patient love, we look forward to the eternal bliss of heaven.

Awake, my soul, to joyful lays
And sing thy great Redeemer’s praise.
He justly claims a song from me—
His loving-kindness, oh, how free!

He saw me ruined in the Fall,
Yet loved me notwithstanding all.
He saved me from my lost estate—
His loving-kindness, oh, how great!

When I was Satan’s easy prey
And deep in debt and bondage lay,
He paid His life for my discharge—
His loving-kindness, oh, how large!

Through mighty hosts of cruel foes,
Where earth and hell my way oppose,
He safely leads my soul along—
His loving-kindness, oh, how strong!

The Lutheran Hymnal 340:1-4 (please read all of this hymn!)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds

Let's think for a moment about the phrase "The peace of God which surpasses all understanding." In this world of frustrations, temptations, expensive housing, debt, car and home appliance breakdowns, difficult people and such, being at peace is indeed something which seems impossible. For the Christian, however, it is our state of mind. Yes, we do occasionally get frustrated. We do worry about making ends meet, but deep down we are confident that the Lord will have everything work together for our good (Romans 8:28). This is the peace which surpasses all understanding.

We have this confidence, knowing that "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). We are redeemed children of God. We are protected members of His kingdom. God will provide for us.

"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?...And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you...?" (Matthew 6:26-30)

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, And drives away his fear.
It makes the wounded spirit whole And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul And to the weary, rest.

The Lutheran Hymnal 364:1-2 (please read all of this hymn!)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:14-15

One Thing's Needful

Pastors are fortunate—they are daily working with God's Word, preparing sermons and Bible classes, creating devotions for the hospitalized and downtrodden, etc. Not so for those working in secular jobs. A complete day can frequently go by without once thinking of God's great blessings for us. I am sure that many of you can identify with this. How blessed we are that God has set aside one day of the week dedicated to Him and the hearing of His Word.

Hearing God's Word—hearing of His forgiveness, ongoing love and patience is the perfect way to end a week (and start a new one) in this world filled with sin, frustrations and temptations. Permit me a reference to the one-time popular TV show "Star Trek", in which some episodes the starship Enterprise found itself in a losing battle with an alien ship. With the continual enemy missiles weakening the Enterprise's shield, Captain Kirk had a choice to stay and face certain destruction or "warp" away to restore its shields to full strength.

Every week you have that same choice. Having faced Satan's "missiles" of temptation and frustration throughout the week, your shield of faith will be weak. Only through the hearing of God's redeeming love, forgiveness, and patience the Holy Spirit will restore your shield of faith to full strength. Do not enter the next week's battle against Satan with a weak shield!

One thing's needful; Lord, this treasure
Teach me highly to regard;
All else, though it first give pleasure, Is a yoke that presses hard.
Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving,
No true, lasting happiness ever deriving.
The gain of this one thing all loss can requite
And teach me in all things to find true delight.

The Lutheran Hymnal 366:1 (please read all of this hymn!)

I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. Ecclesiastes 8:17 (Read 8:14-17)

Under the Sun

Why do “bad” things happen to good people? Abel was murdered in his youth. Jonathan died in battle. Jeremiah had to suffer in the miry pit. A Christian’s car gets vandalized. A Christian is suffering in the hospital. A Christian’s identity is stolen. Why? We struggle to understand, because our point of view is “under the sun;” it is earthly. Only God has the heavenly perspective. Unless He shows us what is happening “above the sun,” “a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it.”

Wouldn’t it be nice to be in on the decision-making process? This could never happen unless we stop sinning. Maybe then, God would seek our advice. But, of course, we don’t stop and sin distorts our judgment. After all, who would ever choose pain or sorrow to be a part of life? Yet, without such reminders of our sinfulness, we would stop fleeing to Jesus for forgiveness; we would stop longing for the eternal peace found in His blood. What should you do, then?

1. *Pray.*—Pray that God will not let you forget your need for the cleansing blood of Jesus every day. If suffering helps you to remember, pray that God will grant you the grace to endure it without complaint.

2. *Regard your status.*—You are a child of God on the road to eternal glory. Such confident knowledge will give you peace and contentment in the days of adversity.

3. *Enjoy.*—In this hope, enjoy the good things of life, “because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry.” God wants you to enjoy the fruit of your labor. So, live each day for itself and don’t worry about tomorrow. Leave that to the all-wise, all-loving, all-powerful God. Knowing that God governs our daily life will enable us to enjoy today and to trust that He will take care of tomorrow.

O God, grant that we may live today in faith and love, enjoying the fruit of our labor, and trusting in You to give us what we need tomorrow. Hear us for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it. Ecclesiastes 8:16-17

Life Is a Puzzle

Life is a puzzle. Every day, pieces are added: at home, at work, at play, at church. There are pieces of joy and pleasure as well as pieces of pain and sorrow. The pieces are scattered here and there. When we struggle to see how they fit together, we are at a loss. “A man cannot find out the work [of God] that is done under the sun.”

With artificial intelligence, one would think that we should be able to predict the big picture. However, this may be the most confused generation ever. Instead of solving the puzzle of life, modern technology only adds more disconnected pieces. Who can comprehend the interconnection between “the business that is done on earth” ...“the work that is done under the sun”?

God grant that we remain content in the knowledge that we have, while leaving the rest to God. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deut. 29:29 - law = instruction)

And what has He revealed? God gives us a clear picture of Jesus at the center of the puzzle. All the pieces of His birth, life, death, and resurrection fit perfectly together, revealing to us the beautiful picture of our salvation. By the Spirit, we trust that all the other pieces are falling into place. In the end, God assures that we will see and understand and rejoice.

Thy ways, O Lord, with wise design
Are framed upon Thy throne above,
And every dark and bending line
Meets in the center of Thy love.

The Lutheran Hymnal 530:1

This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. ... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.”
Ecclesiastes 9:3,10 (Read 9:1-10)

Do It With All Your Might

The brevity of life causes people to go crazy trying to get the things of this world. So-called “normal” people insanely reject what is good and right to pursue the evils of this world. Even though they know “the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, [they] not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” (Rom. 1:32) Don’t be lured in by them. “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Rom. 6:2)

What, then, should we do with our earthly lives? “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.” Take each opportunity that God sets before you and address it with your might. Then, you will be able to enjoy the fruit of your labor: bread, wine, and oil. Also, “live joyfully with the wife whom you love.” Content with the simple gifts of God, we will not madly pursue the worthless things of this world.

Such is our physical life on this planet. As for our spiritual life, Solomon later says, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” (Eccl. 12:7) Cleansed in Jesus’ blood, we will soar to the side of the Creator. There we will find peace and joy as we await the resurrection of our glorified bodies.

Lord God, help us to be careful how we walk, “not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of our time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15) Hear us for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

I returned and saw under the sun that—the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man also does not know his time: like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them. Ecclesiastes 9:11-12

My Times Are In Your Hands

Are we just victims of irrational forces: forces in nature, random illnesses, mechanical failures, etc.? Do these things come upon us merely by chance? This is the way it seems “under the sun,” that is, here on earth. A modern idiom puts it this way: “Stuff happens.” On this side of the sun, there appears to be no unwavering cause and effect. Strength does not guarantee victory. Understanding does not add up to riches. Having “know-how” doesn’t mean that you will solve every problem.

Based on the idiom, “stuff happens,” the world has come up with the theory of evolution. Our translation seems to agree: “Time and chance happen to them all.” However, a better translation would be “time and events happen to them all.” As Solomon said earlier: “To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.” (3:1)

Christians analyze times and events in the light of God’s Word and realize that we “do not know the works of God who makes everything” (Eccl. 11:5). But, we do know God has appointed the day of prosperity and the day of adversity (7:14). In the light of His Word, we learn that the greatest of these is the truth that God controlled time and events to bring about the birth of our Savior and, then, to bring about our rebirth through our Savior.

Heavenly Father, “my times are in Your hand” (Psalm 31:15). Help me to be at peace, content in the knowledge that You are the One who governs all times and events for my eternal good. Hear me for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me: there was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man. Then I said: “Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.” Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

Quiet Wisdom

Allow an application to the Reformation. The “little city” is the Holy Christian Church. The “great king” is the pope. The “poor, wise man” is Martin Luther. From 500 to 1500 AD, the pope attacked the little city (denying salvation by grace through faith), besieged it (persecuting all opposition), and set up snares around it (false teachings and lying wonders).

Then came the poor, wise man. Through the study of the Bible, Martin Luther was delivered from papal error and gained saving wisdom. Then, in the quiet chamber of his church, he preached “and by his wisdom delivered the city” from the papal grip. First in Wittenberg, then in Saxony, then across the planet Earth, poor, wise men have proclaimed Gospel wisdom and delivered many souls.

“Nevertheless, the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.” Today, some despise this wisdom. They “secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them” (2 Pet. 2:1). It may seem they have a louder voice across the nation, yet the “words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.”

Give ear, then, to the poor, wise man in your midst, whatever his name, and you, too, will be wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Lord God, send “poor, wise men” to deliver “the little city”.
Grant this for Jesus’ sake. Amen

Weekend Rest Journal

1. If God put you in charge of your future, how would you do? What are some future plans you are trying to control? Pray for humility and God's guidance to direct you into His plans.
2. Look up Matthew 6-7. Find a passage that tells us not to concern ourselves with the things of tomorrow.
3. As "stuff happens" in your life, how should you evaluate them? List some things that have happened for good or bad around you or in your life. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-14. Reflecting on these verses, how does this shape your view of these events?
4. Who is the "poor, wise man in your life? How should you regard him? Write down one or two names and pray for more wisdom in your life.

[illegible]

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (Also read the Transfiguration account in Luke 9:28-36)

Eternal Glory

We are drawn to glorious things. We love majestic mountains, ornate mansions, large firework displays, powerful militaries, and championship teams. Perhaps we are drawn to such glorious things because our lives often seem so inglorious and so common. We get up at the same time every morning to start the same coffee maker. We work in the same office with the same people as we have for the last decade. We eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch at school...again. We age, slow down, and see our death-day draw closer with each breath. We long for something more glorious than our seemingly common everyday life.

With that in mind, we are not surprised to hear Peter's reaction when he saw Jesus radiating in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." (Matthew 17:4) Peter had seen Jesus do many things: raising the dead, feeding the 5,000, calming a storm, and even walking on water. In all those things, though, Jesus looked like an average Jewish man in his early 30's. But here, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter saw glory—glory that he did not want to end.

As we see Jesus radiating in glory before making our way into the season of Lent, we want to meditate on "The Glory of Jesus." And the first thing we note is that the glory of which Peter was in awe on that mountain was glory that always belonged to Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus is the Word who was with God and was God from eternity. His glory is so great that angels cover their faces and their feet as they worship Him. May we be drawn to His glory and with the holy angels worship Him.

Dear Jesus, eternal Son of God, help us to see Your glory and worship You for Your great goodness in laying aside Your glory to save us. Amen.

“Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.” Philippians 2:6-7 (For further devotional study, read and discuss Philippians 2:1-16)

Glory Laid Aside

We are drawn to glory and long for glory for ourselves. We want to be the hero on the basketball team. We dream of hoisting the championship trophy. We want to climb the corporate ladder to the very top. And once we think we have that glory, we don't want to let it go. I suppose this desire for lasting glory can be traced back to the same temptation that deceived our first parents, “You too can be like God.”

Behold the glory of Jesus! He is the eternally glorious Son of God. The glory we see on the Mount of Transfiguration has always been His. Yet, what did Jesus do with His glory as the only begotten Son of God? He laid it aside. The Son of God took on the form of a servant and came in our likeness. His first bed was a feed trough, surrounded by the sounds and smells of barn animals. His disciples were uneducated men. He was despised and rejected by men, condemned to die on a cross as though He were the worst of criminals. What an inglorious life the glorious Son of God lived!

Even the moment of glory on the Mount of Transfiguration was humble. The Bible says “He was transfigured.” That's a passive verb! In His humility, Jesus did not glorify Himself but was transfigured by the Father.

Jesus lived this humble life to glorify His Father by saving you from your inglorious sins. “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) The glory of Jesus is seen in how far He was willing to go to earn the glories of heaven for you!

Praise be to You, Jesus, for Your great glory in coming to save us. Having served us, help us to imitate You by humbling ourselves to serve one another in love. Amen.

And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Luke 9:30-31

Cross-Minded

We know we are drawn to glorious things. But what about suffering? Do you enjoy going to hospitals, nursing homes, or hospice houses? While we long for glory, we want to flee suffering—we don't even want to think about it.

The suffering of the cross was always on Jesus' mind. Early in His ministry He told Nicodemus, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:14-15) In the days leading up to His crucifixion He said, "For this purpose I came to this hour." (John 12:27) The cross is why Jesus was born into the world.

Even in this glorious moment on the mountain, what was it Jesus was talking about with Moses and Elijah? What was occupying their heavenly conversation? They spoke of "His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." They were talking about the cross.

Of course they were! Christ crucified to reconcile us to God was the most glorious thing that has ever happened in the history of the world. It is so glorious that heaven continues to echo with this hymn of praise: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12)

Let us join this glorious conversation. Paul directs us: "We preach Christ crucified." (1 Corinthians 1:23) Jesus tells us, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Mark 8:34) Let us join Moses, Elijah, and the halls of heaven in glorifying Jesus who bore the cross for our salvation, even as we take up our own cross and follow Him.

In the cross of Christ I glory, Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story Gathers round its head sublime.
Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that through all time abide. Amen.

Lutheran Service Book 427:1,4

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.
Matthew 17:5-8

No One But Jesus Only

As we behold the glory of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, it culminates with the glory of God the Father descending on the mount and speaking words of approval for His beloved Son. What a glorious moment!

And then, just as quickly as it had begun, it was over. The cloud of glory passed away. Moses and Elijah returned to the glories of heaven. Peter, James, and John looked up to see "no one but Jesus only."

This is the way it had to be. Because the redemption of a soul is so costly (Psalm 49:7-8), no one else—not Moses, Elijah, or even Jesus' mother could offer a sacrifice valuable enough to God to ransom you. Only Jesus is the beloved Son in whom the Father is well-pleased. Only He could redeem you from your sins.

Isaiah records the mindset of Jesus, "I looked, but there was no one to help, And I wondered That there was no one to uphold; Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me." (Isaiah 63:5) This was the glory of Jesus as He went to the cross alone to suffer for your salvation.

And now Jesus comes to you in your fear and touches you in His Word, Baptism, and Holy Communion. He says to you, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine." (Isaiah 43:1)

Dear Jesus, I thank and praise You that You were willing to go to the cross alone in order to save me. Comfort me in my lonely and fearful moments with Your promised presence, reminding me of Your great love in redeeming me. Amen.

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. Mark 9:9

He Came Down

“The wedding reception was so great I didn’t want go home.” “I recorded the Super Bowl victory so I could watch it again and again.” “Those first hours as new parents, holding our baby, were so amazing we didn’t want them to end.” We don’t want glorious moments to end.

Peter didn’t want that glorious moment on the mountain to end. He wanted to build three tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah – possibly so others could come up and see this great glory.

Behold the great glory of Jesus as He came down from the mountain of glory to make His way to the cross. He came down from the heavenly conversation with Moses and Elijah to heal a demon possessed boy (read Mark 9:14-29). He came down from the voice of His Father’s approval to the voices of betrayal, denial, mockery, blasphemy, and condemnation. He came down from that mountain of glory to make His way to the gory mountain of Golgotha.

Let us follow Jesus into the season of Lent and see His great glory. See how He came down from the glories of heaven to endure suffering. He came down from His rainbow encircled throne (Revelation 4:3) to have His head crowned with thorns. Jesus did not come down for His sake, but for yours. The only way for you to be rescued from the eternal darkness and fires of hell, was for Him to take your place on the cross and suffer in your place for your sins. Praise be to great Jesus for His great glory in saving you!

All glory, thanks, and praise be to You, dear Jesus, for enduring the inglorious hell of the cross to win the glories of heaven for me. Help me to see Your great glory throughout the season of Lent. As I see You take up Your cross for me, help me to take up my own cross and follow You. Amen.

Weekend Rest Journal

- 1. Read 2 Peter 1:16-21. Mark (who may have interviewed Peter for his gospel account), writes of Peter’s offer to build three tents: “he did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid.” (Mark 9:6) Peter later wrote of this event in 2 Peter 1. While it would have been amazing to be with Peter on the mountain, reflect on the privileges we have to be with Christ today. Note anything the Holy Spirit is saying to you, and give thanks for His presence and Word.
- 2. Read Luke 9:23-27. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God the Father says to the disciples (and us), “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Mark 9:7) Of the things we have heard from Jesus this week is His call to take up our cross and follow Him. As you come down from the mountain with Jesus, describe what it is like to bear your own cross. Reflect on how the words “You are my beloved son,” “You are my beloved daughter” help you on the journey ahead.

Son of Adam, Son of heaven

Given as a ransom

Reconciling God and man

Christ, our mighty champion

What a Savior, what a Friend

What a glorious mystery

Once a babe in Bethlehem

Now the Lord of history

Gloria in excelsis Deo



Songwriters: Fionan Debarra / Keith Getty / Stuart
Townend / Jonathan Rea

Joy Has Dawned / Angels We Have Heard on High
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