



# **Waiting for the Lord**

*An Advent Walk Through the Psalms*

**Advent Devotional 2017**

*for members and friends of the*  
North American Lutheran Church

*by*

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You will find the Advent devotions in this booklet a bit different from years past. Because we are observing the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, it seemed good — and maybe refreshing — to focus each day’s devotion on one of the psalms appointed for Advent in the daily lectionary. Why read the psalms?

In 2002, Susan and I participated in a tour in Germany focusing on the devotional lives of Martin Luther and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Surprisingly, the entire tour was about their love for the psalms and how they used them in their daily devotions — every day! In fact, Luther’s first lectures as a professor were on the Psalter and his first book was on the seven penitential psalms. He lectured regularly on the psalms, wrote commentaries on them, and considered the Psalter his daily prayer book.

Even more, it should be said that the Psalter was the prayer book of Jesus! He quotes the psalms more than any other Old Testament book. The psalms were sung and prayed in synagogue worship, so that our Lord would have been raised with the psalms in his heart and on his lips day by day. If for no other reason, we read and meditate upon the psalms because our Lord read, meditated upon and lived the psalms! Read Psalm 22 and you will understand how deeply the psalms reflect and connect with the life and mission of Jesus, and therefore our lives and the mission to which we’ve been called as his disciples and followers.

Luther wrote, “The Psalter ought to be a dear and beloved book, if only because it promises Christ’s death and resurrection so clearly and so depicts his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom that we may call it a little Bible... The Psalter is the book of all saints, and everyone, whatever his situation may be, finds psalms and words in it that fit his situation and apply to his case so exactly that it seems they were put in this way only for his sake...” (Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, St. Louis: Concordia, 1959)

In other words, the psalms present the full range of the human experience. The psalms express joy, suffering, thanksgiving, lament, frustration, grief, gladness and faith. In this way, Luther says, you will find in the psalms words which fit your situation and life so directly that you will believe they were written for you specifically! In every psalm, however, you will find Christ — foretold, explained, announced as the coming Son of God. While reading the psalms may be new for some, I trust you will give them a chance, in the hope that you will find new meaning in and appreciation for the Psalter, in private devotion but also in public worship as we read or sing the psalms every Sunday.

Each daily devotion begins with a few verses from the appointed psalm, with reflections, a brief prayer, and an Advent Action, usually related to the meditation. As we get to the week of Advent IV, which this year is only a single Sunday morning, there is a psalm for morning devotion and the appointed Gospel reading for Christmas Eve. The appointed Gospel for Christmas Day is our devotion on December 25<sup>th</sup>. God bless us as we walk, together, through Advent with the Psalter!

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## Sunday of the Week of Advent I

*Lift up your heads, O Gates; lift them high O everlasting doors;  
and the King of glory shall come in.*

*“Who is this King of glory?”*

*“The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle.”*

*Lift up your heads, O gates; lift them high, O everlasting doors;  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

*“Who is he, this King of glory?”*

*“The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.” Psalm 24*

Although the first Sunday in Advent doesn't find most of us ready for Christmas Eve, our culture has been pushing us toward the baby Jesus since Halloween! However, the church year — the cycle of readings appointed for worship and devotion — encourages us to hold off a while on Bethlehem, the stable, shepherds and the nativity. The first weeks of Advent, following Christ the King Sunday, remind us that Jesus, born as a baby in Judea, was born to be the “King of glory!”

This psalm is a proclamation of Jesus Christ, triumphantly approaching the eternal temple in heaven. The question is, “*Who can ascend the hill of the LORD? And who can stand in his holy place?*” Of course, the answer is, “*those who have clean hands and a pure heart...*” And who is that? Who has clean hands and a pure heart? No mere mortal. No sinful human being.

The psalm then, is a dialogue as heavenly beings question, “Who is this approaching the heavenly gates?” And the psalmist answers, “**Open up, and you'll see! The King of glory will come in — and the King of glory is Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords — Jesus, who by his death, resurrection and exaltation is LORD of the hosts of heaven!**” It is right that the everlasting doors of heaven should be opened for the Lord Jesus Christ, strong and mighty!

This psalm also calls on the kings of this world, all nations and peoples to open the “doors” of their hearts, homes and kingdoms, as well, to welcome the King of glory, the Lord of hosts. The prayer of Advent is, “Come, Lord Jesus!” Let us open ourselves and our lives to his coming!

*Prayer: O Lord of Hosts, you are King of glory! Thank you for your birth at Bethlehem, to be the savior and redeemer of the world — and of me! Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Begin the season of Advent by joining in Sunday worship!

## Monday of the Week of Advent I

*Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation;  
In you have I trusted all the day long.  
Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love, for they are from everlasting.  
Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;  
remember me according to your love and  
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD. Psalm 25*

Advent was once a penitential season. Like Lent, it was a time for reflection, repentance and renewal. The color was the same as Lent, purple. Part of the preparation for the coming of the Lord and the coming celebration of his birth was confession and repentance for the sake of hearing again the good news of forgiveness. **Observing Advent as a penitential season doesn't make it a "downer," negative or sad, but rather an opportunity for new freedom, joy and release as we lay down our burden of guilt and receive mercy and the chance to begin again and anew!**

Psalm 25 is a psalm that puts into proper perspective confession and absolution (forgiveness) for the sake of amendment of life and renewed commitment to obedience. We pray that the Lord will remember not my sins and transgressions, so that in compassion and love, he will show us his ways, teach us his paths, leading us in his truth. Later in the psalm, we read, "*Gracious and upright is the LORD; therefore he teaches sinners in his way. He guides the humble in doing right and teaches his way to the lowly.*"

It is all too often the case that Christians still believe that God forgives us *because* we try harder, sin less and make ourselves acceptable to him by our thoughts, words and deeds. This understanding has it backwards. Because God loves us and forgives us the sins of our youth and our sins of yesterday and today, we are free with each new day to trust in him, walk in his ways, and keep his covenant!

The joy of repentance in Advent is that we receive God's grace and mercy, to go and sin no more!

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, remember my sins no more, and teach me your ways! Amen.*

**Advent Action:** As the forgiven person you are, make a list of three ways you would like to follow Jesus more closely, and make that your Advent focus.

## Tuesday of the Week of Advent I

*Hallelujah! Praise God in his holy temple; praise him in the firmament of his power.*

*Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him for his excellent greatness.*

*Praise him with the blast of the ram's horn; praise him with lyre and harp.*

*Praise him with timbrel and dance; praise him with strings and pipe.*

*Praise him with resounding cymbals; praise him with loud-clanging cymbals.*

*Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Hallelujah! Psalm 150*

If there is one thing we have been learning from our Ethiopian brothers and sisters in the Mekane Yesus church, it's how ready they are to praise the Lord! They sing and dance, they raise their hands and clap, full of the joy that comes from being in the presence of the Lord God almighty in his holy temple!

This is not to say that all Lutherans should praise in the same way. Remember the movie, *White Men Can't Dance* (2012)? Maybe the title should be "White Men *Shouldn't* Dance"! (At least that's true with some of us men!) We all come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and need not think there is only one way to "*praise God in his holy temple.*" Some will praise God dancing and clapping. Others will praise God singing hymns from the 1500s. Some will praise God with organ and choir, while others will praise with guitars and tambourines. The call of the psalmist is for everything that has breath to praise the LORD!

While we spoke yesterday about Advent as a "penitential" season, today we are reminded that it ought, also, be a season of praise. Why do we sometimes forget to thank and praise God? We are occupied and sometimes overwhelmed by the burdens of the day. We take our focus off Jesus Christ and turn our hearts toward Santa Claus, gift-giving and holiday socializing. We become distracted by the many things, ignoring the one thing: God and his mighty acts, God and his excellent greatness!

**Let us not praise God only in his holy temple, but let our whole lives be filled with praise and thanksgiving, whenever and wherever we are. Let our every breath be praise to our God, who loves us and gave his only begotten Son for us!**

*Prayer: Lord God almighty, you are worthy of our thanks and praise — all day, every day!  
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Begin every day during Advent with Psalm 150.

## Wednesday of the Week of Advent I

*The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool.”*

*The LORD will send the scepter of your power out of Zion, saying,  
“Rule over your enemies round about you.*

*Princely state has been yours from the day of your birth; in the beauty of holiness  
have I begotten you, like dew from the womb of the morning.” Psalm 110*

If you began this Advent series thinking the Psalms wouldn't connect well with the coming of Jesus, I hope you have been convinced! This psalm is evidence that Christians dare not read the psalms without a Christo-centric (Christ-centered) eye! Martin Luther in *The Summaries on the Psalms*, 1531, wrote, “The 110<sup>th</sup> psalm is a prophecy of Christ, that He shall be an eternal king and priest, indeed, true God, sitting at the right hand of God the Father... It would be right to acknowledge it as the chief confirmation of the Christ faith.”

It is not only unfortunate, but tragic, that the last few generations of seminary professors taught future pastors that it is not acceptable to read the psalms as focused on Christ and foretelling the coming of Christ. This understanding of the Psalter would have been foreign to Martin Luther, who saw Jesus Christ on every page, in every psalm. For this reason, the Psalms are not only the hymn-book of Israel, but of the Church! **They are not Old Testament materials unrelated to the birth, death and resurrection of the Son of God, but hymns of praise, prophecy, and prayer pointing to Jesus, alone, as one whose “*princely state has been yours from the day of your birth; in the beauty of holiness*” God the Father had begotten the Son... “*like dew from the womb of the morning.*”**

In earlier times, no hymns or songs were sung in church other than those which were psalms or paraphrases of psalms. No other texts were allowed as worthy to be sung in the worship of the Church. Even choir anthems were from psalms or other Scriptural texts. I met a pastor in Colorado Springs once who told me his congregation had returned to singing only psalms as hymns in worship. This kept “bad theology” from creeping into the church, borne on albeit catchy tunes! Might that be a good practice to consider today?

*Prayer: O God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit — speak to us through the Holy Scriptures and open our hearts and minds to you! Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Monks would pray all 150 psalms in worship each week. Read through all 150 during Advent.

## Thursday of the Week of Advent I

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."  
Now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.  
Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity with itself;  
to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, the assembly of Israel,  
to praise the Name of the LORD. Psalm 122*

This psalm is known as a "Psalm of Ascent" or sometimes a "Pilgrim Song," as pilgrims would sing them as they approached Jerusalem, situated high on a hill. Some believe the Jewish priests would sing these songs as they ascended the steps to the temple. In this psalm, there is a prayer for the city of Jerusalem, the place of the temple and the location of the Lord's presence among his people. In this prayer the faithful prayed for unity and peace. Given the trials and tribulation of Israel through the ages, many Christians today continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

For Christians, however, this psalm/prayer focuses on the New Jerusalem, which is the Church — the Church triumphant (the heavenly city, New Jerusalem) but also the Church militant, the Church still on earth. And the Church militant is not a place or a building, although sometimes the Church inhabits buildings. Rather, the Church which is the Body of Christ exists wherever we hear the Word of God, receive the Sacraments and live our faith as disciples of Jesus Christ, baptized into his death and resurrection. The Church may be found in beautiful gothic structures, but also may be found in storefronts, meeting in school halls, gathered in homes or under a tree! The New Jerusalem may be found wherever two or three are gathered in his name! And does this New Jerusalem, the Church on earth need prayer in our day and age? Indeed! Truly!

At a recent meeting of area NALC pastors in North Carolina, we were discussing difficulties and tensions within congregations. Someone mentioned that Lutherans often are not aware that our Lord provided a process for repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation in Matthew 18. We noted that, sometimes, congregations can be the most unforgiving places in all the world! **Let us pray for the peace and unity of the Church on earth, and for every congregation, great and small, especially as we prepare for the coming of the Prince of peace!**

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us be at peace with each other. Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Offer a prayer request this Sunday for the peace and unity of the Church and all congregations.

## Friday of the Week of Advent I

*Let all who seek you rejoice in you and be glad;  
let those who love your salvation continually say, "Great is the LORD!"  
Though I am poor and afflicted, the Lord will have regard for me.  
You are my helper and my deliverer; do not tarry, O my God. Psalm 40*

This psalm begins, *"I waited patiently upon the LORD; he stooped to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the desolate pit..."* It continues, *"Be pleased O LORD to deliver me; O LORD make haste to help me."*

When reading the psalms, it is common to wonder, "Who is speaking here?" On the one hand, Psalm 40 could be the prayer of anyone in danger, struggling in life, beset by those *"who seek after my life to destroy it..."* Some hear Israel, as a people, speaking in this psalm, as the chosen people have often found themselves the object of scorn, attack and persecution.

Luther is clear, however, that this is a psalm giving voice to the coming life of Jesus. In the psalm, Luther hears Jesus saying, "In the roll of the book it is written concerning me: 'I love to do your will, O my God; your law is deep in my heart.'" In spite of his obedience and devotion, Jesus could say, "innumerable troubles have crowded upon me." When Jesus speaks of "his" sins having overtaken him, they are our sins which he has taken upon himself, which are a heavy burden for him to bear. Yet, the message of the psalm is Jesus' steadfastness in the face of opposition, suffering and death — that Jesus bears our sins on the cross.

**As we are even now thinking of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem, it is important for us to be mindful of the fact that God became human, that Jesus was born for us and for our salvation.** He knew from the beginning that this would be his fate — to give his life on the cross. But he also knew that he would have a deliverer — even as he prays in this psalm, *"Great is the LORD! Though I am poor and afflicted, the Lord will have regard for me. You are my helper and my deliverer; do not tarry, O my God."*

*Prayer: Father God, we thank you for delivering Jesus from the bonds of death, raising him to new life, that we too might have eternal life in him. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

**Advent Action:** If you place a nativity scene in your home, find (or make) a small cross to place in the stable, as a reminder of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

## Saturday of the Week of Advent I

*I will exalt you, O God my King, and bless your name forever and ever.*

*Every day will I bless you and praise your name for ever and ever.*

*Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; there is no end to his greatness....*

*The LORD is near to those who call upon him,  
to all who call upon him faithfully. Psalm 145*

This psalm is one of several which use an alphabetic device in Hebrew in which every line begins with the next letter of the alphabet. It doesn't translate, obviously, into English. The message is conveyed in the method — that the Lord is to be exalted and glorified in all things — from A to Z, we would say!

As we read/pray/sing this psalm, it is in recognition that Jesus Christ is our King — whose name we will bless forever and ever! It moves between praise for his majesty and greatness, while acknowledging that he gives us our food in due season, satisfying the needs of every living creature. It affirms that the LORD is righteous in all his ways, yet loving in all his works. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, yet he is near to those who call upon him.

It shouldn't go without notice that Advent follows immediately upon the Festival of Christ the King, the last Sunday of the church year. After we celebrate Jesus Christ who is our King, we enter into Advent, asking, "who is this King, Jesus — and what kind of a king is he?" Our psalm for today answers that question fully and richly!

What does it mean for us, living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in North America, to acknowledge Christ as our "King?" Many Christians today prefer not to use the title "King" or "Lord" for Jesus, partly because they are considered masculine terms, but surely because they would rather imagine Jesus as "friend," "buddy," or "kindly bachelor uncle bearing gifts." **But we dare not dismiss this biblical image too quickly, for "King" has to do with sovereignty, dominion over our lives and our total submission as we yield to Jesus' power and authority over us and all that we have and are.** As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, are we welcoming him as Christ, our King?

*Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus — come and be our King! Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Google, or look-up, "King" in a dictionary or encyclopedia. What does Christ, as King, mean for your life?

## Sunday of the Week of Advent II

*May God be merciful to us and bless us, show us the light of his countenance and come to us.*

*Let your ways be known upon earth, your saving health upon all nations.*

*Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.*

*Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations upon earth. Psalm 67*

Although there was a time when the Lord God walked with Adam and Eve, spoke personally with Abraham and Moses, was present with the Israelites in Ark and Temple, there became a perceived distance between God and his children. This was not God's intention, but as humanity's disobedience increased, they felt more and more apart from God. And rightly so.

**This psalm is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus, as it is a prayer for God to be merciful and bless us with his presence, sending the light of his countenance to us and all humankind. The prayer is, "God, come to us!" And God came in Jesus.**

No wonder one of the most beloved verses in Scripture is, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16, if you don't know it.) In Jesus, God became flesh to dwell with us — to live with us — to "pitch his tent with us," as some translate it. "In him was life and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:4-5)

In this psalm, the people were praying that God would come and bring light. And God, incarnate in Jesus, is that light — which is life. And don't we need that light in our world today? As we continue to live in a dark and crooked generation, God has come to us! One of the prophecies of the coming Messiah in Isaiah is in 60:1, where the prophet declares, "Arise, shine, for your light has come..." The good news of Christmas is that our Light has come, and it is now time for us to arise and shine — to share Christ's light, that the peoples will praise him and the nations will be glad and sing for joy!

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank you for being light amid the darkness of our world. Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Light a candle in your home today and read John 1-3.

## Monday of the Week of Advent II

*Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous; it is good for the just to sing praises.  
Praise the LORD with the harp; play to him upon the psaltery and lyre.  
Sing for him a new song; sound a fanfare with all your skill upon the trumpet.  
For the word of the LORD is right, and all his works are sure...  
By the word of the LORD were the heavens made,  
by the breath of his mouth all the heavenly hosts...  
Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD!  
Happy the people he has chosen to be his own! Psalm 33*

In the middle of Advent, there is an intentional turn towards Bethlehem and the baby Jesus. The first two weeks keep our attention on Christ, the King — Christ, the Word of God made flesh. It is important for the Church to ponder what it means that God became human, to keep Christmas and the nativity of our Lord in perspective. Today, our psalm reminds us of the power and the blessing that is the Word of God.

It is surprising how Christians in the last 50 years or so have so clearly moved away from commitment to the truth and authority of God’s Word. Even Lutherans, who should stand with Martin Luther on the text of the Bible with our consciences captive to the Word of God, no longer hear and heed the Bible as the norm for all faith and life. It is easy to point the finger at others, but the reality is that Lutherans (and Christians) are largely ignorant of the Scriptures these days, are not in the habit of reading and meditating deeply upon the Word and are not passing on biblical truth and knowledge to children and youth in home or in church.

As we observe the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, we are reminded that the Church is always in need of reform! The Church of Jesus Christ needs to be renewed and re-formed in the Word of God as much now as in Luther’s time. And as the Gospel is the power of God for salvation, it is also the power of God for reform and renewal. Isn’t that why the Church is to always be singing for God a “new song?” **The song we sing is “new” because the Body of Christ, and we as disciples of Jesus, are being continually renewed and re-formed through the Word, which is right and true.**

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, Word of God incarnate, come to us, dwell in us, renew us! Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Read the “new song” in Revelation 5:6-14

## Tuesday of the Week of Advent II

*Show us your mercy, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.  
I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, for he is speaking peace  
to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him.  
Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.  
Mercy and truth have met together;  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Psalm 85*

This psalm is a prayer for restoration because the LORD has forgiven the iniquity of his people and blotted out all their sins. Even more, it is a psalm of hope because in Jesus Christ, God has acted to grant mercy and salvation! Through Christ, God has spoken peace to those who turn their hearts to him — so that salvation is near to those who fear him. As the people pray for forgiveness and restoration, God makes reconciliation a reality through the gift of his incarnate Son, crucified and risen!

It might be a good thing for us to pray during Advent for restoration of homes, congregations and nations. It might be a good thing that we pray that all in our world would listen to what the Lord God is saying, as he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him. It is God's will that his glory dwell in every land, which is why he has made salvation near, in Jesus.

In these dark days of December, it may seem that restoration, peace and hope are far off. It is common to hear folks complain today about things being worse than ever before. Certainly, we have not known the persecution of Christians in our lives to match what has been happening these last few years. Tension between political parties, the drug abuse crisis, difficulties between nations and peoples all lead to what might be a hopeless world-view. **But that is not the perspective of we who have hope in Christ! In him, mercy and truth have met together! In him, righteousness and peace have united! God has shown us mercy and granted us salvation in Jesus Christ! Let us share that good news, as we proclaim light in the darkness!**

*Prayer: Lord God, through the good news of Jesus Christ your Son, turn every heart to you and restore every home, family, congregation and land! Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Today, pray for a person or family in need of restoration in Jesus.

## Wednesday of the Week of Advent II

*Hallelujah! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.*

*Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, for there is no help in them...  
The LORD sets the prisoners free, the LORD opens the eyes of the blind; the LORD lifts up  
those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous;  
The LORD cares for the stranger; he sustains the orphan and widow...  
The LORD shall reign forever, your God, O Zion, throughout all generations.*

*Hallelujah! Psalm 146*

Our reading for today reminds us of all the Messianic prophecies preparing the world for the coming of the Christ. Together with this psalm, we think of Isaiah 35, 49 and 61, and Jesus' own understanding of his ministry in Matthew 11 and Luke 4. What a blessing that we have prophecy in the Old Testament and fulfillment in the New! But even more, what a blessing that we have a Savior who is Christ the Lord who frees, gives sight, lifts up, loves, cares and sustains!

The message of the psalm is that we not put our trust or reliance in the wrong places or on the wrong persons. Few people in our North American context would place our ultimate trust in government, president or prime minister. It is surprising, at times, that people seem to trust too much in "children of earth," whether parents, spouses or others. At the same time, we trust too much in job, bank account, 401k, worldly treasures which, while important, can be lost in the blink of an eye or a turn of the economy. It's not that we shouldn't have a job or income, it's that we ought not ultimately place our trust and reliance in them.

Writing in the Large Catechism on the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2) Martin Luther wrote, "A god is that to which we look for all good and where we resort for help in every time of need; to have a god is simply to trust and believe in one with our whole heart...Now I say, whatever your heart clings to and confides in, that is your god."

**It is God who delivers us, through Jesus Christ, born of Mary, conceived of the Holy Spirit. Let us look to him for all good and to fulfill our every need!**

*Prayer: Hallelujah, Lord God! I will praise you as long as I live and place all my trust and confidence in Jesus Christ my Savior!*

**Advent Action:** Read the prophecies mentioned above: Isaiah 35, 49 and 61.

## Thursday of the Week of Advent II

*For the LORD will not abandon his people, nor will he forsake his own.  
For judgment will again be just, and all the true of heart will follow it...  
As often as I said, "My foot has slipped," your love, O LORD, upheld me.  
When many cares fill my mind, your consolations cheer my soul...  
But the LORD has become my stronghold, and my God the rock of my trust. Psalm 94*

In our reading for today, the psalmist is wrestling with the arrogant, the wicked and the evildoers who boast and bluster, crushing the Lord's people, afflicting his chosen people, murdering the widow, putting orphans to death. "Yet they say, 'The LORD does not see, the God of Jacob takes no notice.'" The writer cries out for the God of vengeance to show himself, for the Judge of the world to do something — anything — to give these people their just punishments.

Surely, there's a sense in which we share those sentiments! There are times in life when it appears the evil and wicked flourish while God's children suffer. This is especially true when we are in the midst of Advent, making preparation for Christmas, while the world seems to go on its way with no regard for the coming of the Lord of Light and Life, Jesus Christ. Still, drunk drivers assault the innocent and unaware. Thieves steal packages from mailboxes and porches. War, conflict and terrorism continue with no pause to sing "Silent Night" from the trenches. The realities of life can be burdensome and leave us wondering why God doesn't act to relieve suffering, pain and travail.

**The psalmist, in the midst of such questions, while acknowledging the reality of our human situation, is reassured by God's presence and activity in his life.** "*The LORD knows our human thoughts; how like a puff of wind they are. Happy are they whom you instruct, O Lord... For the LORD will not abandon his people, nor will he forsake his own.*" He continues, "*As often as I said, 'My foot has slipped,' your love, O LORD, upheld me. When many cares fill my mind, your consolations cheer my soul... But the LORD has become my stronghold and my God the rock of my trust.*"

*Prayer: O Lord, you have upheld me when I have slipped. Your consolations cheer my soul. You are my stronghold and my trustworthy rock! Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Sing "A Mighty Fortress" as a reminder that God is our stronghold.

## Friday of the Week of Advent II

*The LORD, the God of gods, has spoken; he has called the earth  
from the rising of the sun to its setting.*

*Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty, God reveals himself in glory...*

*“Gather before me my loyal followers, those who have made a covenant  
with me and sealed it with a sacrifice” ...*

*“Consider this well, you who forget God, lest I rend you  
and there be none to deliver you.*

*Whoever offers me the sacrifice of thanksgiving honors me; but to those who  
keep in my way will I show the salvation of God.” Psalm 50*

The Lord God makes it plain: Our God, the God of gods and the god of all creation, desires hearts and lives, not empty show, meaningless ritual or pointless, self-centered “chancel-prancing” as pastors call it. Yes, God has established, from the beginning, liturgies and ceremonies for worship. He instructed that the patriarchs offer sacrifices of grain and animals and he laid out extensive ceremonies for the Temple, even as the Lord Jesus himself participated in synagogue worship and instituted the Lord’s Supper. God commands that there be tithes and offerings and explains that they are to be “first-fruits.” But God does not command the offerings of flesh and grain and money because *he needs* such things. Why would the God of the universe need such things? They are to be part of the life of faith, as God’s created children respond and return to him a portion of what they have and are. They are part of our sacrifice, worship and devotion, and God desires that they be of the heart and life — not an outward show, not empty action. In the next psalm, 51, the cry of the believer is, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

For many Jews at the time of Jesus, making the proper sacrifice meant making a trip to Jerusalem at the prescribed time, on the right day, often purchasing the sacrifice on the Temple grounds, then handing it to the priest and walking away. This fulfilled the Law’s commands, but it was not at all the sacrifice desired by God. In this psalm, the LORD God does not accuse the people because of their sacrifices, because they were, truly, “going through the motions.” **What God desires are sacrifices of thanksgiving, born of grateful hearts and lives lived according to his statutes and commandments. This is our response to the gift of salvation given us freely, in Jesus Christ!**

*Prayer: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Every time you wash your hands today, pray the above prayer.

## Saturday of the Week of Advent II

*The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." All are corrupt and  
commit abominable acts; there is none who does any good.  
God looks down from heaven upon us all, to see if there is any who is wise,  
if there is one who seeks after God.  
Every one has proved faithless; all alike have turned bad;  
there is none who does good; no, not one...  
Oh, that Israel's deliverance would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of  
his people, Jacob will rejoice and Israel be glad. Psalm 53*

St. Paul paraphrases this psalm, when he writes in Romans 3:10-12, "as it is written, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one."

Reading Psalm 53 without the last verse is like a sermon that is all Law and never gets to the Gospel! It became clear while I was in seminary — and continues true today — that it is much easier for preachers to preach Law, so much so that some short-change the proclamation of the Gospel. At the same time, it is worth noting that some pastors preach only Gospel without the Law, making of the Gospel, as Luther calls it, "cheap jacks wares" — cheap grace.

**The psalmist and St. Paul are careful to preach both Law and Gospel, but you have to read all of the psalms to hear the balance even as you have to read all of Paul to hear the fullness of his message.** Both emphasize that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Both hold a mirror up to humanity to show us our sin and our need for a divinely appointed Savior. The psalm then looks forward to that deliverer who would come out of Zion (Jesus, son of David) as Paul proclaims, "since all have sinned...they are justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith." (Romans 3:23-25) This is why Lutherans, in particular, understand that Scripture is both Law and Gospel — command and promise. This is why it's also true that every sermon humbles us, reminding us that while we sinners cannot save ourselves, thanks be to God that we have a Savior who is Christ the Lord! It is this Savior whom we prepare for and will welcome anew on Christmas Eve. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given..." (Isaiah 9:6)

*Prayer: O God, we give thanks for the gift of your Son, Jesus our Savior. Amen*

**Advent Action:** In every sermon, listen for both Law and Gospel.

## Sunday of the Week of Advent III

*Hallelujah! How good it is to sing praises to our God!*

*How pleasant it is to honor him with praise!*

*The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles of Israel.*

*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds...*

*The LORD lifts up the lowly, but casts the wicked to the ground...*

*He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and his judgments to Israel...*

*Hallelujah! Psalm 147*

Having just spoken about the need to read all the psalms to hear Law and Gospel, we now have a psalm that is full of good news, praise and thanksgiving! Read the entire psalm, if you can make time today. It begins with praise, but praise because of the wonderful deeds the LORD God has done for his people. The LORD rebuilds, gathers, heals, binds up, lifts up, casts down, gives clouds and rain, grass and plants “to serve mankind.” He has protected his people, blesses our children, establishes peace, satisfies us with finest wheat. All of this he does because he is our God, and mighty in power, limitless in wisdom.

**Yet, for all this and even more, God declares his Word to us! Given first to Jacob/Israel, God has now given us his Word, Jesus, the Word made flesh to dwell among us full of grace and truth!** We have been given the “means of grace,” Word and Sacrament, the focus of our worship and the center of our lives, as we “feast” on Jesus present with us as the incarnate Word!

The old saying goes, “How odd of God to choose the Jews.” We might say, “how odd of God to choose you — and me!” Together, we are unworthy and undeserving, yet God has given us his Son, as a gift — the greatest Christmas gift of all!

The Virgin Mary was overwhelmed by being chosen, as well, as she offered her song of praise. She sang, “My soul now magnifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior. For he has regarded the lowly estate of his handmaiden...for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” (Luke 1:47-55)

Mary’s song sounds very much like our psalm for today, full of praise and thanksgiving and worship! We have God’s Word — Jesus Christ! We have the Holy Scriptures and the manger in which the Christ is laid! Hallelujah! Glory to God!

*Prayer: Lord God, may our lives be full of praise and thanksgiving, as we receive the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Read all of Psalm 147 and Luke 1 today.

## Monday of the Week of Advent III

*Hear my plea of innocence, O LORD; give heed to my cry;  
listen to my prayer, which does not come from lying lips.*

*Let my vindication come forth from your presence; let your eyes be fixed on justice.  
Weigh my heart, summon me by night, melt me down; you will find no impurity in me...  
My footsteps hold fast to the ways of your law; in your paths my feet shall not stumble.  
I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me; incline your ear to me and hear my words.*

Psalm 17

As we read this psalm, it sounds more like we are in the season of Lent than Advent. **It is clearly a psalm of Christ, the voice of Jesus crying out to the Father's ear. "Hear my plea of innocence; give heed to my cry, vindicate me."**

Jesus, alone, is innocent, pure, unwavering as his feet hold fast to the ways of the law, never stumbling on his way to Golgotha and the cross. Jesus, during his earthly life, passion and death, could rightly pray, "Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me under the shadow of your wings, from the wicked who assault me, from my deadly enemies who surround me... They press me hard, now they surround me, watching how they may cast me to the ground, like a lion, greedy for its prey, and like a young lion lurking in secret places."

This may be too much Lent and Holy Week for some, this third week of Advent, with Christmas fast approaching. Where is the star, Pastor Wendel? Where are the angels and shepherds and cattle lowing softly and lambs nuzzling the baby? **There is always this tension in Christianity, isn't there? Law and Gospel. Sin and Grace. Manger and Cross. Death and Resurrection.**

When we are journeying through Lent on the way to Good Friday, let us see the star of Bethlehem leading the way. Even as we see, now, the shape of the cross in the outstretched arms of the Christ child. The final words of the psalm give us hope, as Jesus says, "But at my vindication I shall see your face (O Father God); when I awake, I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness."

*Prayer: Lord, keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me under the shadow of your wings.  
Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Read Luke 23:1-56, the Passion of our Lord.

## Tuesday of the Week of Advent III

*I love you, O LORD my strength,  
O LORD my stronghold, my crag, and my haven.  
My God, my rock in whom I put my trust, my shield,  
the horn of my salvation, and my refuge: you are worthy of praise.  
I will call upon the LORD,  
and so shall I be saved from my enemies. Psalm 18:1-20*

Read the assigned verses of this psalm as you have time. It could be the script for a block-buster action movie! Don't miss it! "The breakers of death rolled over me... the cords of hell entangled me... I called upon the LORD... he heard my voice from his heavenly dwelling... smoke rose from his nostrils and a consuming fire out of his mouth... he parted the heavens and came down with a storm cloud under his feet. He mounted on cherubim and flew; he swooped on the wings of the wind. He wrapped darkness about him, he made dark waters and thick clouds his pavilion. From the brightness of his presence... burst hailstones and coals of fire. The LORD thundered out of heaven... He loosed his arrows and scattered them; he hurled thunderbolts and routed them... He reached down from on high and grasped me; he drew me out of great waters. He delivered me from my strong enemies and from those who hated me...but the LORD was my support!"

In this psalm, David writes of the deliverance he has received from the LORD. He speaks vividly of the challenge of his enemies, the attacks he endured, yet through it all, the LORD was his Savior. When we are facing challenges and difficulties in life, don't we wish it would be the same for us? We call out to the LORD who hears our cries, parts the heavens and comes down to help us with a storm cloud under his feet! As David was an earthly king, he expressed his deliverance in militaristic terms, with the LORD God attacking David's enemies with hailstones, arrows, thunderbolts and victory! **God delivers us in a different way, as he comes to us, not with smoke from his nostrils and fire from his mouth, but as a baby, conceived of his Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. God comes to help us as the Word made flesh, the Word which is sharper than a two-edged sword, the Word which will not return to God empty!**

*Prayer: I love you, O Lord, my strength, my stronghold, in whom I put my trust. Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Do you know someone who is struggling? Share this psalm with them, to give them courage and assurance.

## Wednesday of the Week of Advent III

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, then we were like those who dream.*

*Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy.*

*Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.”*

*The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed.*

*Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses of the Negev.*

*Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. Psalm 126*

In his introductions to the psalms mentioned previously, Luther writes, “The 126<sup>th</sup> is a psalm of thanks for the deliverance from the captivity in Babylon. Whether it was made following that captivity or prior to it (as a prophecy for the comfort and hope for the coming deliverance, so that they may not despair) is of no concern. **At the end the psalmist concludes that it happens — and always happens — to the saints that they first suffer before they can rejoice. Therefore, the saints sow with tears to reap afterward with joy.**”

It is a painful thing to know that during the season of Advent and Christmas, while many are singing songs of gladness and joy, others are weeping tears of sorrow and struggle. We dare not mute the rejoicing at the birth of Christ, neither should we ignore the tears of those who weep. Life is full of pain and grief, just as there is laughter and joy. The two are necessary to our existence as disciples and followers of Jesus — “saints,” as Luther calls us. And the two are necessary, for without the one we cannot fully experience the other. A life of only laughter, joy and gladness might soon become empty without the storms that one day break forth into sun!

Luther spoke of this from personal experience. He knew what it was to suffer at the hands of his enemies, knew what it was to struggle with a dark night of the soul, knew what it was to lose a child. His trials in life took a toll on him emotionally and physically. For all of that, we can say, “The Lord did great things for Martin Luther!” He knew joy and laughter in the midst of tears and grief.

This is true for all of us, “saints” redeemed by Christ. We sow with tears to reap afterward with joy. We remember the great things the Lord has done for us, which carries us through to joy, again.

*Prayer: Restore those, O Lord, who are weeping tears of grief, loss and struggle. Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Send an unexpected Christmas card to someone who is grieving.

## Thursday of the Week of Advent III

*For God alone my soul in silence waits; from him comes my salvation.*

*He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold,*

*so that I shall not be greatly shaken...*

*Put your trust in him always, O people, pour out your hearts before him,*

*for God is our refuge. Psalm 62*

The message of this psalm is straightforward and common enough throughout the psalms. **“For God alone my soul in silence waits...for God is our refuge.”**

Have you had time during Advent to wait for the Lord in silence? Have you had quiet time for studying God’s Word, praying and preparing yourself? This year, Christmas Eve is on a Sunday, so we are robbed of the week of Advent IV. Christmas Eve will be the fourth Sunday in Advent, so all of Advent is being shoved into three weeks! And most of us can’t complete our Christmas preparations without stress and anxiety when we have *four* weeks of Advent!

How has your Advent gone? Are you behind in your shopping? Have you completed your Christmas cards and mailed them, or are you at the point where something will have to give, so maybe there won’t be cards mailed this year? Are you at peace and going about your business this last week of Advent in a relaxed and intentional manner, or are you a CRAZY person, rushing here and there, making yourself and everyone else unhappy? Most of us are probably somewhere in-between — not CRAZY but not as “together” as we usually are a few days before Christmas.

**One of the “gifts” many have received through our NALC Life-to-Life Discipleship initiative is the recovery or discovery of “quiet time” with the Word of God, Jesus Christ and in the Word.** This is what is squeezed out of most lives when we believe we are overworked, over-scheduled and over-committed. Martin Luther is quoted as saying, “If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.” These last few days before Christmas, receive the gift of at least a few minutes in silence, waiting for the Lord, trusting in him, pouring out your heart before him!

*Prayer: Lord, in the midst of my busy life, my soul waits in silence for you. Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Give yourself the gift of a few moments of silent waiting for the Lord!

## Friday of the Week of Advent III

*I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope.  
My soul waits for the LORD, more than watchmen for the morning,  
more than watchmen for the morning.*

*O Israel, wait for the LORD, for with the Lord there is mercy;  
With him there is plenteous redemption,  
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins. Psalm 130*

There are times when our “waiting” involves sitting quietly, calmly, expectantly. A doctor’s office comes to mind, where we wait in silence, thumbing mindlessly through a well-worn magazine. Other times, our waiting is active. When our kids were young we waited busily for my parents to arrive for Christmas, making their bed with clean sheets, picking up the last of the toys off the floor, wrapping final gifts, making sure all was ready for the holiday!

At its best, Advent is both of those kinds of waiting. We spoke a several days ago about quiet time during Advent and the need for prayer, silence and time in the Word. Special Advent services also help us to stop in the midst of our busy-ness to hear the Word, be in the presence of God and offer him thanks and praise for the coming of his Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Having mid-week Advent Vespers was always a blessing for me and my family, as it was a willing, if forced, “pause” in our preparations.

We can also wait while busy! Waiting for the grandparents to come for Christmas, we often gave our kids tasks or chores to keep them busy so that the time would pass more quickly and waiting wouldn’t be such a burden for little ones. I’m guessing our kids do the same with their kids when we come for a visit! And now, our waiting for Christmas is surely filled with activity and preparation. There’s still time for last-minute shopping, baking, cleaning and “getting things done”! There’s also time for hurried prayers of exclamation! Martin Luther advocated, in the Large Catechism, the value of short, exclamatory prayers such as “Lord God, protect us! Help, dear Lord, Jesus! or the like.” **No matter how our last few days before Christmas shape up, we are waiting, together, for the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ — our only hope and salvation!**

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us! Amen!*

**Advent Action:** Fill your day with short, unceasing “bursts” of prayer: “Thank you, God!” “Lord, have mercy.” “Bless that person, Lord.” “Heal my loved one.”

## Saturday of the Week of Advent III

*I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at  
my right hand, I shall not fall.*

*My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices;  
my body also shall rest in hope.*

*For you will not abandon me to the grave, nor let your holy one see the Pit.  
You will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy,  
and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore. Psalm 16*

How powerful that in the first sermon preached by the disciples/apostles after Jesus' resurrection, Peter quotes the above verses of this psalm. He understood these words as giving voice to the Lord who — though he had been arrested, tortured and crucified — kept the will of God the Father always before him, finally being resurrected, with gladness and rejoicing, for the Father did not abandon the Son to the grave but raised him up on the third day!

Martin Luther declares that this psalm is a prophecy of the suffering and resurrection of Christ! In the same way it is a prophecy of our death and resurrection, as well! We keep the Lord always before us, because with him at our right hand, we shall not fall. Even in death, our heart is glad and our spirit rejoices — in death, our body rests in the hope of the resurrection! He does not abandon us to the grave, but shows us the path of life, so that in his presence, now and eternally, there is fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore!

These are deep, heavy thoughts the day before Christmas Eve. The last thing we may be contemplating today is our own mortality and the reality that one day we will die. And yet, this is our hope! This is our confidence! **Yes, this is why God became human — that when faced with our own suffering and death, we would see only a gateway, a transition. For we who have been baptized into his death have also been baptized into his life.** “We were therefore buried with him by baptism into his death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4) **This is the good news of great joy proclaimed by the angel host — not just that a child is born, but that this babe will be the Savior, Christ the Lord!**

*Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for showing me the path of life and giving me fullness of joy!  
Amen.*

**Advent Action:** Read Peter's sermon, the response of the converts and the description of life among the believers (Acts 2).

## Sunday of the Week of Advent IV

*“I will not allow my eyes to sleep, nor let my eyelids slumber;  
Until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob...”*

*“Let us go to God’s dwelling place;*

*let us fall upon our knees before his footstool....”*

*“A son, the fruit of your body will I set upon your throne.”* Psalm 132

King David was haunted by the fact that the Lord God resided in a tabernacle, a tent, which paled in comparison to David’s own lodging. This psalm is an expression of David’s desire to not rest until he found or built a suitable dwelling place for the LORD. This was not to be, however. It would be David’s son Solomon who would build the Temple in Jerusalem, in God’s own timing and at his direction.

That’s how it is with us humans — even we children of God. We are either looking for God in all the wrong places, or trying to put him in a box, a building, a temple or a basilica. **Who ever thought God would be found in a stable, in a manger, surrounded by ox and ass, his virgin mother and foster-father nearby?**

There are hints in this psalm of the miracle to come — of the birth of the Christ child. King David says, “Let us go to God’s dwelling place, let us fall upon our knees before his footstool,” yet he little realized that one day, in God’s own timing and according to his own plan, Magi would come to the stable and kneel at the manger. David heard the promise that his own son would be set upon his throne, never imagining that his “son” would be Jesus, of the house and lineage of David, born in Bethlehem, his throne a feed-trough!

The Messianic promise concludes this psalm, “There will I make the horn of David flourish; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. As for his enemies, I will clothe them with shame; but as for him, his crown will shine.” This evening, we will kneel again at the throne of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus, as his crown shines with the light of the star over the holy city. This evening, we will again hear the good news that God is with us — Emmanuel!

*Prayer: Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay; close by me forever, and love me, I pray. Amen. (Away in a Manger, vs. 3)*

**Advent Action:** Gather with fellow believers for Christmas worship! If you are home-bound, read Luke 2 and John 1:1-18.

## The Nativity of our Lord Christmas Eve, December 24<sup>th</sup>

*And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased.” Luke 2:1-14*

After days and weeks of anticipation, we are finally at Christmas Eve! We hear the good tidings of great joy from the angels. With the shepherds, we run to Bethlehem, to the manger, to the Christ child!

If nothing else, our hope is that spending Advent in the Psalter has broadened our perspective. Jesus doesn't arrive unexpectedly in the New Testament, nor is his birth in Bethlehem a change in God's thinking — a new direction. In Luke 24, on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, (Jesus) interpreted to (the two disciples) in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” For Jesus, the Scriptures were the Old Testament — and in the psalms, as in the prophets, we hear of God's plan for the coming of Jesus, the birth of God's own Son to be Savior and Christ. In the fullness of time, God sent his Son, and the psalms bear witness to it — as do all the Scriptures!

This should give us great comfort and assurance that what God promises, he fulfills! The Bible would be nothing to us if God had not sent his Son, as promised. With the birth of Jesus, every promise, every word, every verse of Holy Scripture is trustworthy and true. **As foretold, the King of kings, Lord of lords, Prince of peace has been born to us, and in that birth, we have hope for our future and the future of the world!** In the midst of darkness there is light; in the midst of violence, there is peace; in a world of grief and loss, there is life — and abundant life! Glory to God in the highest! Gloria in excelsis deo!

*Prayer: Almighty God, you made this night to shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus' presence and, in the last day, wake to the brightness of his glory, through your Son. Amen. (LBW)*

## The Nativity of our Lord Christmas Day, December 25<sup>th</sup>

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. John 1:1-14*

The appointed psalm for worship today, Psalm 2, says, *“I myself have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” Let me announce the decree of the LORD: he said to me, “You are my Son; this day have I begotten you.”*

Martin Luther writes this introduction, “Psalm 2 is a prophecy of Christ, that he would suffer, and through his suffering become King and Lord of the whole world. Within this psalm stands a warning against the kings and lords of this world: If, instead of honoring and serving this King, they seek to persecute and blot him out, they shall perish. This psalm also contains the promise that those who believe in the true King will be blessed.”

The good news in the reading from John is “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” In today’s world, not all have welcomed the Prince of peace. There are those who seek to persecute and blot out Jesus and his followers. It may seem that these opponents of Christ Jesus have the upper hand and that the darkness may be overpowering the Light. Nothing could be further from the truth! We have the hope and promise of resurrection! **Jesus is already victorious over sin, death and the devil! His kingdom has already come — and its fulfillment is sure! Those who believe in the true King will be blessed!**

It has been a pleasure to walk with you through Advent, mediating briefly on the psalms loved so deeply by Luther. I pray that you have gained a new appreciation for the Psalter, the song-book of Israel, Jesus and the early Church. I also pray that these Advent devotions might, in some small way, renew interest in praying the psalms in our homes and congregations today, as they are so important and intimately related to the birth, death and resurrection of our Lord!

*Prayer: Lord God, we give you thanks and praise for the Word made flesh, Jesus our Light and our Life! Amen.*

