

# THE UNSHAKEN *LIGHT*



ADVENT & CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL 2025

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*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).*

—Matthew 1:23 ESV

The coming of Christ into the first-century world feels distant in its history, yet near in its sorrow and need. In the age of the internet, we don’t have to search long to find news of war, rumors of war, famine, natural disasters, and so many other realities facing our brothers and sisters around the world.

Suffering, it seems, is always within reach. But so is the very real presence of Christ.

Immanuel—God with us. God’s light dwelling among us. God’s promise to be present with us in the darkness of this world and to come again in glory. Our God who entered our frailty and despair as the Christ child has not abandoned us in this age but continues to dwell with us *and* within us—a beacon in the darkness for all to see.

My prayer for you this Advent is that the sureness, the strength, the constancy, and the brilliance of God’s presence would pierce and overwhelm whatever darkness lies before you. May the unshakable and unchangeable truth stand firm within you—that we are more than those who simply remember Christ’s coming; we are those in whom His flame burns brightly.

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This year’s devotional—entitled *The Unshaken Light*—traces the movement of grace from Advent to Epiphany: from waiting in hope, to rejoicing in God-with-us, to bearing His light into the world. It begins in the shadows of a trembling world and leads us to the radiance of Christ’s coming—first in the manger and again in glory. Through Scripture and reflection, we are invited to behold the steadfast promise that *the Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

This devotional was created with contributions from 28 authors from the North American Lutheran Church (NALC), each bringing their own reflections and insights. The daily readings are based upon the lectionary provided in the NALC Devoted to Prayer daily prayer and reading guide, an adapted version of the daily lectionary in the Lutheran Book of Worship.

PDF copies of this devotional booklet are available for download from the NALC website for individual use or for distribution in congregations. Additionally, you may access the devotional electronically or sign up to receive it as a daily email or text message by visiting [thenalc.org/advent](http://thenalc.org/advent). May this devotional help awaken anticipation and deepen our spiritual journey in this season of preparation and joy.

*Ariel Wicker*

Associate Director of Communications  
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# THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

*Stir up your power, O Lord, and come.*

*Protect us by your strength and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins,  
for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

## November 30, 2025 | First Sunday in Advent

*Amos 1:1–5, 13–2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11; Luke 21:5–19; Psalms 24 & 150 (AM); Psalms 25 & 110 (PM)*

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<sup>21:5</sup> Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, <sup>6</sup>“As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.”

<sup>7</sup>“Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?”

<sup>8</sup>He replied: “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them. <sup>9</sup>When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.”

<sup>10</sup>Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. <sup>11</sup>There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

<sup>12</sup>“But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. <sup>13</sup>And so you will bear testimony to me. <sup>14</sup>But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. <sup>15</sup>For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. <sup>16</sup>You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. <sup>17</sup>Everyone will hate you because of me. <sup>18</sup>But not a hair of your head will perish. <sup>19</sup>Stand firm, and you will win life.”

– Luke 21:5–19 NIV1984



Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus as we begin a new year in the life of the Church. It has often struck me that as move into the season of Advent, looking forward to the celebration of our Lord’s birth, that we are also encouraged, if not challenged, to look forward to the day when He will return.

Today’s passage is one that does just that. It speaks of the destruction of everything in this life that is not of God, and of the kind of events that will take place as the world, as we know it, comes to an end.

Apocalyptic literature is what we often call it—passages that speak of cataclysmic events, ones that can only be seen as signs of the beginning of the end. Today’s passage is certainly apocalyptic. It speaks of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, of nations rising against nations, of wars, of earthquakes, of famines and plagues, and of how followers of Jesus will be persecuted and betrayed. Before the end is to come, Jesus says, all kinds of apocalyptic events will take place.

At the same time, our Lord also tells His disciples to never lose sight of the calling we have in Him, and to never forget the promises that belong to us through faith. When the world begins to fall apart, Jesus says, remember whose world it is. When life begins to turn upside down, use it as an opportunity to tell the world where to turn. More than anything, as we look forward to our Lord’s return, make sure you are building your life on a foundation that will last.

The disciples of Jesus were as vulnerable as people are today. They looked at the temple, they looked at the foundations set in stone. They could not imagine the possibility of anything being more solid and secure.

In our day, is it any different? Things like good health, a solid stock portfolio, job security, money in the bank? World history is filled with stories of people who have built their lives on the wrong foundations. People whose life's details are vastly different from one another, but whose stories end up in the same place. Jesus says, "Be careful where you are building. Do not forget what will last and what will not."

The lesson is clear. "If it is of this world," Jesus says, "then it is of this world. And if it is of this world, then it will not last." Not one stone in this life will be left upon another! Every one of them will be thrown down!

As we begin this season of Advent, take our Lord's words to heart. Build your life on the foundation of His word. Secure your life on a foundation that will last.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as we prepare to celebrate Your birth into this world and as we look forward to that day when You will return, help us to build our lives on foundations that are secure: Your Word, Your promises, the work You have accomplished for us on the cross and in the empty tomb. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Daniel W. Selbo (dselbo@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 1, 2025 | Monday of the First Week in Advent**

**Nicholas Ferrar, Deacon, 1637**

*Amos 2:6–16; 2 Peter 1:1–11; Matthew 21:1–11; Psalms 122 & 145 (AM); Psalms 40 & 67 (PM)*

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<sup>21:1</sup> Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

<sup>5</sup> "Say to the daughter of Zion,

'Behold, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.' "

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>10</sup> And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

– Matthew 21:1–11 ESV

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Advent is a time of waiting and watching for the Christ-child to be born in a stable as well as Christ's imminent return to our world where He will complete the process of making all things new. In Lutheran theology we talk about "the already and the not yet," which describes this process of waiting. Waiting for the Lord can be a peaceful experience, but it can also arouse some anxiousness within us. It's good to settle down and wait. We don't wait aimlessly, however. We wait with the hope of the promise that was given, that Christ will come again. As Jesus told his followers about the timing of his return, "No one knows but

God” (Matthew 24:36). So we wait with hope and great expectation, and we continue to worship and praise our Lord Jesus as we ponder His words and deeds.

One of our lessons for today is the Palm Sunday Gospel, Matthew 21. Jesus tells His disciples to go and fetch a donkey in the next town over. This donkey will be tied together with her offspring. Jesus tells the men, “Let them loose and bring them to me.”

Have you ever noticed this? In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus didn’t have only one donkey, there were two—a mother and her offspring. We typically see this image in art as one donkey with Jesus riding on its back.

It’s interesting to think about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem during the season of Advent. This is a Holy Week story! It is recounted in Advent because there is a strong connection between Jesus’ birth and His journey to Jerusalem where He will die for the sins of many. Birth and death. They are intricately tied together. We take our first breath when we are born and exhale our last breath at our death. You can’t have one event without the other.

These two events in Jesus’ life were intricately tied together, His birth and His impending death. Both accounts contain a donkey which seems like an interesting coincidence. But the donkeys are not the hinge, the hinge that holds the stories together are the two triumphal entries. Jesus’ birth was a triumphal entry into the world as God took on human flesh and dwelt among us, the ones He created in His own image. Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem was the beginning of the fulfilment of God’s plan for salvation for all humanity. It was a marvelous miracle that changed everything for humanity. At His miraculous birth, the angels sang and the shepherds worshipped.

At His triumphal entry into Jerusalem Jesus made His courageous march toward the cross of Calvary where He would defeat our last enemy, death, and rise from grave to live eternally. Songs of hosanna were shouted and prayers were said for the King of kings, the Son of David who would take away the sins of the world.

These two triumphal entries signify the Lord’s victory over sin and death. As we walk through the season of Advent, may we ponder anew the beginning of God’s plan for salvation at Christ’s nativity in Bethlehem and His final journey into Jerusalem. May we be reminded of His promise to come again in glory on the last day. Amen.

**Prayer:** Loving God, grant that we may patiently wait for the return of Your Son, Jesus, at the end of the age. In the meantime, help us to be ready for that day by living and serving in Your name. We ask Your blessing on all who are at the beginning or end of life, that Your grace and mercy would surround them and Your promises would be spoken to them. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Amy C. Little (alittle@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 2, 2025 | Tuesday of the First Week in Advent**

*Amos 3:1–11; 2 Peter 1:12–21; Matthew 21:12–22; Psalms 33 & 146 (AM); Psalms 85 & 94 (PM)*

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<sup>21:18</sup>In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. <sup>19</sup>And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once.

<sup>20</sup>When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” <sup>21</sup>And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been

done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. <sup>22</sup> And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”

– Matthew 21:18–22 ESV



When I read about the fig tree that withered under Jesus’ word, my mind often goes back to Iowa, where I served most of my ministry. Walking fields of corn and soybeans, you quickly learn the difference between healthy plants and empty stalks. Green leaves alone don’t mean much...what matters is whether there’s healthy corn under the husks or ripe soy beans in the pods. Jesus came to the fig tree looking for fruit, but there was none. It looked alive, but it was barren.

Now I live and serve in Fort Worth, TX, a very different setting, but the lesson still speaks. In Advent, I have to ask myself: am I just showing leaves—busy with Christmas activities, programs, and appearances—or am I bearing the fruit of repentance and faith? The *Augsburg Confession VI* says that good works don’t earn salvation, but they are necessary fruits of true faith. Without Christ, I’m as barren as that fig tree.

And yet, Advent isn’t about despair—it’s about celebration. Jesus came once in Bethlehem, He comes now in Word and Sacrament, and He will come again in glory. By faith, as the *Apology IV* says, we are counted righteous for Christ’s sake, and that faith bears fruit. What a joy that Christ comes to fill the empty branches of our lives with His life, His forgiveness, and His love.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, as You come this Advent, forgive our barren hearts. Root us in Your Word, and make our lives fruitful in faith and love, until the day we celebrate Your coming in glory. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Tony D. Ede (tede@thenalc.org)*

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## December 3, 2025 | Wednesday of the First Week in Advent

Francis Xavier, Missionary to Asia, 1552, Ordination of Jantine Auguste Haumersen, First Ordained Female Lutheran Pastor, 1929

*Amos 3:12–4:5; 2 Peter 3:1–10; Matthew 21:23–32; Psalms 50 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 53 & 17 (PM)*

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<sup>38</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

– 2 Peter 3:8–10 ESV



How long, O Lord? How long must we wait for You to return and fulfill all Your promises? It’s been over two thousand years already! When are You coming again?

St. Peter tells us that the delay in Jesus's return is not just because Jesus is taking his time, because time is different for Jesus. A thousand days is like one day...or one day is like a thousand. Jesus doesn't think about time. Instead, He is thinking about all those who are lost and need to be found; those who do not yet know about Him and how much He loves them.

Notice that our text says that the Lord is not slow, "but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." The Lord is patient toward you and me because we still have work to do—the work He gave us by commissioning us to go and proclaim His love to all the nations of the world.

This is a great passage for someone who works in missions as I do. One of the most powerful motivations for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have never heard it is love! Jesus's love for all people everywhere on this Earth. A love that is made manifest in His desire that no one should perish, but that every man, woman and child may be given the chance to know Him that they may turn to Him in faith and love. He desires that all those He loves may repent of the ways of this world and live instead according to His ways.

For you and me, this is a call to tell our neighbors, near and far, all about the amazing love of our Lord Jesus who came to dwell with us as a helpless infant at Christmas. And, though He was the Son of God, for our sake He was willing to become vulnerable like us, to suffer like we do, and to die just like us. By rising again beyond the grave, overcoming sin and death and all the forces of evil, He has opened the way for all people to have life in Him and with Him forever. Now, in the time we have left to us, Jesus send us all on a mission to help Him seek the lost and bring them home to Him, that none of His beloved children should perish.

In this season of Advent, we wait with hope and longing for the fulfillment of the promises that will come when Jesus returns. But we cannot wait in idleness, doing nothing. No, we must wait with purpose, with patience, and with love for all those who have not yet heard that Jesus has come for their sake too! Even so, come Lord Jesus!

**Prayer:** Stir up Your power, O Lord and come! Stir up Your Spirit in us and in all the baptized that we might faithfully carry out the mission You have sent us to do. Help us as we reach out to those who do not yet know You. Help us to teach them about Your great love. Make us the bearers of Your life-giving light in the midst of this dark world, so that all may know Your love and turn to You in repentance, and in faith. Help us to build up Your Church here on Earth even as we anticipate the coming of Your heavenly kingdom. Come, Lord Jesus, Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Carol E. A. Fryer (cfryer@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 4, 2025 | Thursday of the First Week in Advent**

**John of Damascus, Priest, c. 760**

*Amos 4:6–13; 2 Peter 3:11–18; Matthew 21:33–46; Psalms 18:1–20 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 62 (PM)*

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<sup>4:6</sup>I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities,  
and lack of bread in all your places,  
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.

<sup>7</sup>And I also withheld the rain from you  
when there were still three months to the harvest;  
I would send rain on one city,

and send no rain on another;  
one field would be rained upon,  
and the field on which it did not rain withered;  
<sup>8</sup>so two or three towns wandered to one town to drink water  
and were not satisfied;  
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.  
<sup>10</sup>I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt;  
I killed your young men with the sword;  
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.  
<sup>11</sup>I overthrew some of you,  
as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,  
and you were like a brand snatched from the fire;  
yet you did not return to me, says the Lord.  
<sup>12</sup>Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel;  
because I will do this to you,  
prepare to meet your God, O Israel!

– Amos 4:6–12 NRSV



Have you ever heard someone say, *“We need to talk”*? Your stomach drops. The room feels smaller. Those words rarely mean good news. They are the kind of words that stop you in your tracks, because something serious is about to be revealed.

That’s the same shock Amos delivers: *“Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”* (Amos 4:12). Israel had faced famine, drought, pestilence, even war. Each was a summons, a wake-up call woven into daily life. Yet the people would not return. Shadows thickened, but hearts grew stubborn.

Jesus tells the story again with a vineyard. God planted it with care, yet the tenants beat the servants and killed the son. It is Israel’s story. It is humanity’s story. It is our story too—we grasp at what belongs to God and live as if the vineyard were ours.

But then comes the surprise: *“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”* (Matthew 21:42). The very act of rejection becomes the foundation of salvation. The Son cast out becomes the bedrock of God’s new creation. The warning, *“Prepare to meet your God,”* is not erased. It is fulfilled. And in Christ, we do meet our God—and live.

Peter reminds us: the Lord is not slow but patient. He holds back judgment so that more may turn and find life. Advent is that pause, that merciful space. Shadows are real, but a candle is lit. Its flame burns steady, defying the night.

Today, we remember John of Damascus, who taught the church to confess Jesus as true God and true Man. His witness reminds us that in Christ, the invisible God has become visible. This is Advent’s hope: the Word made flesh, the Light unshaken, the darkness overcome.

Prepare to meet your God—and rejoice.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, prepare our hearts to meet You with faith and joy. Soften what is stubborn within us, awaken what is weary or asleep, and heal what is wounded. Teach us to live as children of light even when shadows linger. Renew in us the hope of Your coming, and let that hope steady our steps until the day we see You face to face. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Andrew S. Ames Fuller (aamesfuller@thenalc.org)*

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## December 5, 2025 | Friday of the First Week in Advent

Clement of Alexandria, Priest, c. 210

*Amos 5:1–17; Jude 1–16; Matthew 22:1–14; Psalms 102 & 148 (AM); Psalms 130 & 16 (PM)*

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<sup>22:1</sup> And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, <sup>3</sup>and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.

– Matthew 22:1–3 ESV



You’ve heard people say it, haven’t you? “Jesus is the reason for the season.” You might respond, “Yes, pastor, but aren’t you a little early? It’s not Christmas yet.” Well, that’s exactly the point. It *is* Advent—and Jesus is the reason for this season too. In fact, He gives us a parable to guide us as we await His return and the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven.

At the heart of His parable is the idea of **invitation**. There is the invitation of the king, the servants tasked with delivering that invitation, and the invitees who refuse to come. This strikes home for me because I was one of those “refusers,” yet by the grace of God I finally came to the feast.

I was raised in an unchurched home, and I was something of a loner in high school. I had been invited to church many times but never saw the point. Then one afternoon, a classmate unexpectedly invited me to a feast—a pizza party. I was thrilled to be included...until the adult leader gathered everyone together and began speaking about Jesus and His return. I realized I had been invited by Christians and was now stuck listening to them—trapped like a rat! But something took root that night. I started reading the Bible, eventually joined a youth group, and found deep friendships in Christ. They made a disciple of Jesus out of me. They also made me an *inviter*. We hosted more feasts and events and invited others, and the youth group grew. That is discipleship.

That’s Jesus—constantly shaping His followers through parables, equipping us to live differently in this world for the sake of the kingdom. And when you think about it, there is far too little true hospitality today. People might be invited to entertainment or a meal, but our invitation is something far greater: life in Christ and fellowship with His Church.

Yes—Jesus is the reason for the season. And Advent is the perfect time to invite others: into our homes, into our lives, and into our congregations. These are the marks of being—and making—disciples.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, we thank You that in this season we can have true joy in knowing that we will be gathered to Your feast in Your kingdom. We remember this each time we gather for Holy Communion in

our congregations. By Your Spirit, move us to invite others to follow You, that they too may enter into this feast of faith with joy. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Jesse J. Abbott (jabbott@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 6, 2025 | Saturday of the First Week in Advent**

**Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, c. 342**

*Amos 5:18–27; Jude 17–25; Matthew 22:15–22; Psalms 90 & 149 (AM); Psalms 80 & 72 (PM)*

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<sup>1:2</sup> May God give you more and more mercy, peace, and love.

<sup>1:20</sup> But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God's love.

<sup>22</sup> And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering.

– Jude 1:2, 20–22 NLT



For some families, St. Nicholas Day is a celebration with family traditions of gift giving, filled stockings with small tokens of love. December 6th is known as the feast day of St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra who lived from 270 to December 6, 343 A.D. He is known for his reputation of generosity and kindness. Serving as Bishop of Myra (located in modern-day Turkey) during the days of the Roman persecution of Diocletian, Nicholas had opportunity to give testimony to the saving of his life through the kindness and generous mercy of Jesus Christ. It is only fitting that his generous gifts of mercy for his parishioners were kindnesses shown to those in need. There are legends surrounding St. Nicholas that describe his generous gifts to help those in need. According to legend, in medieval times, Christian nuns in Belgium and France began to deposit baskets of food and clothes anonymously at the doorsteps of the needy, which gave rise to the practice of gift giving on St. Nicholas Day. This is the time of year when mitten trees go up at churches and schools to hang the ornaments of handmade hats, mittens, and scarves for children in the colder regions so they can go out for recess. And it is the time when Angel Trees are erected with tags of needed items for families in local communities, sometimes coats, boots, a small toy, warm socks. It is the time when we hear Salvation Army bell ringers reminding us that this is a season of giving to those in need. But the Lord reminds us that it is not only at this time of the year when we are to show mercy. You and I need Christ's mercy every day. He is the One who provides for our every need. He is the One who provides you with forgiveness and life through His sacrificial death and resurrection. So He, the Lord Jesus, invites you to acts of mercy and compassion for those throughout the year that need their snow shoveled, their leaves cleared, a few extra dollars to make the rent payment or the utility payment or gas money. Those small acts of kindness and compassion you do for others do not go unnoticed. They reflect Christ's mercy to you.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, in your love you gave your servant Nicholas of Myra a perpetual name for deeds of kindness both on land and sea: Grant, we pray, that your Church may never cease to work for the happiness of children, the safety of sailors, the relief of the poor, and the help of those tossed by tempests of doubt or grief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen. (Proper for the Commemoration of Nicholas, Bishop of Myra)

*Devotion written by the Rev. Shelly D. Schultz (sshultz@thenalc.org)*

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# THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

*Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son.  
By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and  
shed light on our path through the darkness of this world;  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.*

## December 7, 2025 | Second Sunday in Advent

Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, 397

*Amos 6:1–14; 2 Thessalonians 1:5–12; Luke 1:57–68; Psalms 24 & 150 (AM); Psalms 25 & 110 (PM)*

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<sup>1:57</sup> Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup> And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. <sup>59</sup> And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, <sup>60</sup> but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” <sup>61</sup> And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” <sup>62</sup> And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. <sup>63</sup> And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. <sup>64</sup> And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. <sup>65</sup> And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, <sup>66</sup> and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

<sup>67</sup> And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

<sup>68</sup> “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people.

– Luke 1:57–68 ESV



When my husband and I welcomed each of our three children, everyone in the family and our friends had opinions about what the babies should be named. Grandparents suggested family names, best friends made lists, even our cousins and coworkers chimed in with their favorites. But when the day came, my husband and I chose names that we prayed on throughout our pregnancies, names we felt would fit our children’s futures.

We got all sorts of questions and comments, “Why that name?” “No one in the family is called that!” “That’s a trendy name!” or “That’s an old fashion name!” depending on which child it was. But over time, as each of the children grew, their names seemed perfect, as if they had always belonged to them.

That is what happened with Zechariah and Elizabeth. Everyone expected them to name their son after his father as the text suggests was the norm for the time. But God had already chosen a name—John—meaning “The Lord is gracious.” The name was a sign that this child had a God-given mission, (we know that that mission was to call people to repentance and to get people ready for Jesus) and when Zechariah obeyed and wrote, “His name is John,” his tongue was loosed and he burst into praise.

This moment reminds us that God not only keeps His promises, but He also calls each of us by name. In Baptism, God writes His name on us ✠ Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and gives us a new identity as His beloved children. And just like John, we too are given a mission. Our mission is to live as His witnesses and to point others to Christ.

This Advent season as we prepare for Christmas, we are invited to remember our Baptism and the identity we’ve been given. God has called you by name. You belong to Him. And like Zechariah, our response is to open our mouths in praise, to rejoice in His mercy, and to share with others the good news that the Lord is gracious and that He has come to redeem His people.

**Prayer:** Gracious Lord, You have called each of us by name and claimed us as Your own in the waters of Baptism. Like Zechariah, open our lips that we may proclaim Your praise and share the good news that You are gracious and have come to redeem Your people. As we prepare our hearts this Advent season, strengthen our faith, remind us daily of our Baptismal identity, and give us courage to live out the mission You have given us—to point others to Jesus. Through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Teresa E. Peters (tpeters@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 8, 2025 | Monday of the Second Week in Advent**

*Amos 7:1–9; Revelation 1:1–8; Matthew 22:23–33; Psalms 122 & 145 (AM); Psalms 40 & 67 (PM)*

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<sup>22:23</sup>The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, <sup>24</sup>saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.’ <sup>25</sup>Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. <sup>26</sup>So too the second and third, down to the seventh. <sup>27</sup>After them all, the woman died. <sup>28</sup>In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.”

<sup>29</sup>But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. <sup>30</sup>For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. <sup>31</sup>And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: <sup>32</sup>‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” <sup>33</sup>And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

– Matthew 22:23–33 ESV



This passage we have today is from a challenge the Jewish sect of the Sadducees has presented Jesus. These Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead and thought they had crafted a scenario that would trap Jesus into showing the absurdity of believing there is. The law of Moses said the wife who lost her husband without having a son must go and become the wife of his brother to bear a son to take on the first husband’s name and property rights. They draw this process out to all seven brothers marrying this poor woman and never having an heir born. The Sadducees ask Jesus, “OK, if there is a resurrection, who is her husband.”

This is how the Sadducees argued. They put everything under the scrutiny of the first five books of the Bible, and that was front and center. Jesus would have none of it. He tells them, “You don’t know the Scriptures,” saying they read it as if it is an encyclopedia of written rules, not the Word of God. He tells them that they don’t know the power of God either, acting as if God is constrained to follow some law higher than Himself, not possessing the power to raise the dead. The Sadducees did not believe in angels, which Jesus quickly discards.

The thrust of the argument then comes to a head. The Sadducees didn’t believe in a life to come; it all ends with earthly death. Nothing to look forward to. But Jesus goes straight to Exodus 3 and God identifying Himself to Moses as “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” That is present tense. Men who went to the grave long ago are still in His care.

This is where Jesus speaks to us too. In Baptism, God in His profound grace becomes our everlasting Father. His promise to us is forever, now and in the life to come. The world believes as the Sadducees did, no hope after death. But we have the sure promises of Christ who rose from the grave to new life so that we might follow Him into eternity to be with Him forever (John 5:24, 10:28).

**Prayer:** Gracious Lord, Heavenly Father, I give You thanks for giving me what the world around me cannot fathom, the promise of eternal life with You. As it is with the forefathers in the faith, I trust in the certainty that Your grace and love—that was assured in the promise of Baptism—will go before me. I pray for that day when I will no longer see You with eyes of faith but be face to face with You. Until then protect and strengthen me to see the future not as the world sees it but as You proclaim it to be, world without end. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Marvin Combs (mcombs@thenalc.org)*

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### **December 9, 2025 | Tuesday of the Second Week in Advent**

*Amos 7:10–17; Revelation 1:9–16; Matthew 22:34–46; Psalms 33 & 146 (AM); Psalms 85 & 94 (PM)*

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<sup>22:34</sup> But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. <sup>35</sup> And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

– Matthew 22:34–40 ESV



There may be nothing more exciting than the mounting anticipation that begins to take shape this time of year. Parents have already begun putting up the lights and the trees. Children are already counting down the days and making final adjustments to their lists. The season of Advent is all about preparation for Christmas. Underneath all of this preparation is the desire to show our love to one another: to give, to share, and to receive. But this season has less to do with what is placed under the Christmas tree and more to do with preparing our hearts for who was born for us in a stable and to celebrate this time of year with those we love. Advent reminds us that this season has always been about love—God’s unfailing love entering into this world as a child, and our love reflecting the love He carried with Him.

In Matthew 22, Jesus was asked to name the greatest command. He replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Everything God has done for you, began with love.

A love that we did not have to work for or earn, but a love that bound itself to be fully received as a gift by grace through faith. And because we have been so deeply loved, we are free to share this same gift with others. We love our families. We love our neighbors. Even showing love and compassion to the wondering stranger because Christ has first loved us. A love that sought us out, too, when we were the stranger.

Love is not a gift to only be received once a year. Or a decoration that will be stored away after the season ends. It is the very life God has given for us to live by, every day, made real for us in the flesh of Immanuel.

By the birth of Jesus, God took on human flesh to dwell among us, to redeem us, to make His love known to us. By saving us so that He may offer us an even greater gift: the gift of salvation. So that now, out of the depths of His great love for us, we may love Him in return—like a child loving their father. Not because they are supposed to, but because they want to. Not halfheartedly or when it is convenient, but wholeheartedly, in mind, body, and soul.

That is why there may be nothing more exciting than the mounting anticipation that begins to take shape this time of year. When we will celebrate (with love) the greatest gift we could have ever received—not found on any list, or wrapped in paper; not even placed under the Christmas tree, but wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger for you and for me. A humble child, born through love to share His grace with you.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. Help us to prepare our hearts this Advent season to shine Your light on the love You have first given to us. Teach us to love because You have loved us first, and to rejoice in the celebration of Your love made flesh for the even greater gift of eternal life. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Hailey Halmstad (rhbenj6@icloud.com)*

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## **December 10, 2025 | Wednesday of the Second Week in Advent**

*Amos 8:1–14; Revelation 1:17—2:7; Matthew 23:1–12; Psalms 50 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 53 & 17 (PM)*

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<sup>2:1</sup>“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. <sup>2</sup>“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. <sup>3</sup>I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

– Revelation 2:1–4 ESV



All of our readings for today remind us that Advent is a penitential season, illustrating our need of a coming Saviour. They speak to our life as a nation, our religious leadership, and our congregational life together. While Lent, the other penitential season, focuses on a deeply personal confession and need of forgiveness, Advent’s penitential themes serve to point out our corporate need for forgiveness and repentance. This season, on the heels of Christ the King Sunday, reminds us that we have a Saviour and His name is Jesus.

The interesting background to the small-town, shepherd-turned-prophet, Amos, was that Israel was at the height of its territorial ambitions and national prosperity. The introduction to the prophet Amos in my New Oxford Annotated Bible (Brueggemann/Hicks) points out that “he denounced Israel, as well as its neighbours, for reliance upon military might, and for grave injustice in social dealings, abhorrent immorality, and shallow, meaningless piety.” It was a tough task for the prophet Amos during what we might think of as a ‘roaring stock market’ and a nation that believed their fortunes were a sign of God’s favour.

Our familiar Gospel reading picks up the theme of a piety that was primarily for show and personal advancement and chastises religious leaders who had forgotten the concept of servant leadership. Honour, comfort and security can easily become traps for all of us in pastoral and leadership roles distracting us from the urgent tasks of the kingdom.

The reading from the Revelation to John appointed for this day is the first letter to the seven churches. Most of the letters highlight something positive about the life of each congregation and then draw attention to what is lacking. The church in Ephesus is commended for attention to the truth and faithfulness in teaching, however, they have lost something in their pursuit to root out false teaching—the love that they had at first. It brings to mind a saying I have had occasion to use several times in congregational discussions, “just because you’re right, doesn’t mean you’re helpful.”

This season of Advent invites us to consider how our congregations might be like the church at Ephesus: commended for faithfulness to the apostolic witness and certainly wary of false teaching but having lost the foundation of what makes us caring and compassionate communities of faith, missionally driven, and places of healing and redemption—in a word, love. In the admirable quest for right thinking (orthodoxy) and right living (orthopraxis) we also must be wary not to “abandon the love you had at first.”

The whole of this season points us to the joy of divine love incarnate among us. As we prepare to gather at the manger and witness divine love take flesh in our very midst, how might that love also take flesh and be born in us again. How might the boundless love of God reframe our relations with our neighbours, empower our servant leadership, and revitalize our congregations as caring communities and beacons of redemption and hope.

**Prayer:** Love divine all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down! Fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art; visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart. In your holy name we pray. Amen. (*Lutheran Book of Worship*)

*Devotion written by the Rev. Kevin Ree (kree@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 11, 2025 | Thursday of the Second Week in Advent**

**Lars Olsen Skrefsrud, Missionary to India, 1910**

*Amos 9:1–10; Revelation 2:8–17; Matthew 23:13–26; Psalms 18:1–20 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 62 (PM)*

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<sup>2:8</sup>“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

<sup>9</sup>“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup>Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. <sup>11</sup>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

– Revelation 2:8–11 ESV



Beginning this past Monday, our second readings have come from the book of Revelation and will continue until December 21. Thus, we have the opportunity in the days ahead to read a significant portion of this fascinating book and consider what God is saying to us in these inspired words from sacred Scripture.

Revelation is a letter from Christ to seven specific churches in Asia Minor as recorded by John on the isle of Patmos. It is a challenging book to interpret in that much of it is filled with strange signs, allegories, angels, symbols and pictures. There are colors and numbers that have special meaning. There is much to be decoded and interpreted.

But Revelation is not just a letter to these seven churches. It is also a message of hope, encouragement, and promise to Christians and Christian churches of every time and place who are suffering persecution. And that message is clear: Hang on! Keep the faith! You are engaged in spiritual warfare: it is good vs. evil, God vs. Satan, Christ vs. Antichrist! Although your circumstances are such that it appears to you that the Christians are losing and that the Gospel is not true, hang on! Don't give up! Keep the faith because ultimately, God wins! In fact, God has already won! Trust the promises of Christ! He is the Lamb of God who was slain at the cross and is risen from the grave victorious over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who now reigns upon His throne! He is your Lord and Savior! So, keep the faith because the end of this story has already been written and God wins!

Today's reading is Christ's word to His church in Smyrna (2:8-11). Here we see Jesus knows the kinds of tribulation, poverty, and slander we suffer because we are practicing Christians. His word to us is do not be afraid, the faith with which I have graced you, will sustain you. When the final judgment comes you will inherit eternal life. Your hope is in Me: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death" (10b-11).

**Prayer:** Gracious God, when I am suffering and persecuted because of being Your faithful disciple, empower me by Your Spirit to cling to faith in Jesus and trust His promises. Help me to be faithful unto death and receive the crown of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. William E. White (bwhite@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 12, 2025 | Friday of the Second Week in Advent**

*Haggai 1:1-15; Revelation 2:18-29; Matthew 23:27-39; Psalms 102 & 148 (AM); Psalms 130 & 16 (PM)*

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<sup>23:27</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. <sup>28</sup> So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

<sup>29</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' <sup>31</sup> Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. <sup>32</sup> Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. <sup>33</sup> You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? <sup>34</sup> Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, <sup>35</sup> so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.

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As is true of many texts in this season of Advent, there is an overwhelming sobering note struck in our readings today. We have spent Advent thus far considering the unshaken Light that is the Lord of creation. We find again and again that this Truest of Constants, this unbroken, staggering ray of glory brings a shaking and a reckoning to all that is touched by it.

It is a shaking that troubles us, but it is a shaking that saves us, for sin likes to hide in the shadows. In the shadows of our pressures to “busy ourselves with our own houses” while the house of the Lord lies in ruins (Haggai 1). To abound in good works, in “love, faith, service, and patient endurance” yet tolerate hidden sin, the stuff that is difficult to address, hard to expunge (Revelation 2). It is so easy for us to slip into the role of the scribes and Pharisees—to clothe ourselves with the trappings of righteousness—and yet to be rotten inside, full of rotting flesh and bones devoid of the breath of God.

In the light of this Sun, all is laid bare and open. We are brought to ourselves, our true selves. Our attempts to whitewash with good works the sin that lies within, burns to ash in the unshakable light, and we are left with nothing except the prayer of the publican “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” And this is just the first step. Properly understood, the first and continuous, in the sense that we always come back to this posture of baptismal nakedness before the Lord. But first step in the sense that as we humble ourselves before the King, He cleanses us, renews us, transforms us, and sends us out to bear His glory, earthen vessels though we are, to be heralders of His kingdom and ministers of His grace throughout this broken world.

**Prayer:** Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;  
Lord, hear my voice...  
If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?  
But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.  
I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.  
I wait for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning...

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Shannon R. Ames Fuller (samesfuller@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 13, 2025 | Saturday of the Second Week in Advent**

**Lucy, Martyr at Syracuse, c. 304**

*Haggai 2:1–9; Revelation 3:1–6; Matthew 24:1–14; Psalms 90 & 149 (AM); Psalms 80 & 72 (PM)*

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<sup>24:6</sup> And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

– Matthew 24:6–8 ESV



“But the beginning of the birth pains...” For anyone who experienced giving birth or witnessed a loved one giving birth, when you hear that phrase it may bring up some vivid memories of pain, pressure, tears, maybe even some loud vocalizations before the happy conclusion when the baby finally arrived. Giving birth is no joke. It is a painful, bloody, and dangerous business.

So, when Jesus talks to His disciples about others trying to lead them astray or hearing of wars or rumors of war (more painful, bloody, and dangerous business), He equates it with labor and says these awful things must take place before the arrival of God’s kingdom on earth. But why?

To remind us that all of humankind and God’s creation must go through a type of labor before Jesus returns. Wars and persecutions, false prophets, continual sin—the world’s contractions—have been building for centuries. Earthquakes and famine, increasing lawlessness in our society... labor is progressing. We can all see it just by reading history or the daily news.

But the question is are we still in early labor? Or are we going into active labor? Only the Father knows. And Jesus warns us in Mark 13:35: “Stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning...” We cannot nap between contractions when things are peaceful but remain alert and ready to meet Jesus when He finally does return.

Mary went through labor and experienced increasing pain and pressure until the infant Jesus was born, a fact we will celebrate in a few short weeks. The world has been going through labor for centuries waiting for Jesus’ second arrival. Let us always remember that even though the world is groaning in its own birth pains, in the end we will see Jesus’ arrival, not as a helpless infant, but as our resurrected and living Savior who will return to bring us all home. Come, Lord Jesus!

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, although You alone know the time of Jesus’ second coming, we yearn for that day despite all the pain we feel while we wait. Give us patience, peace of mind, and the faith to remain alert to Your continued presence and Your guiding hands in our lives until that great Day when Your Son is revealed in His glory; through Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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*Devotion written by Robin Harris (rharris@thenalc.org)*

# THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

*Almighty God, you once called John the Baptist to give witness  
to the coming of your Son and to prepare his way.*

*Grant us, your people, the wisdom to see your purpose today and the openness to hear your will, that we may  
witness to Christ's coming and so prepare his way;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God now and forever. Amen.*

## December 14, 2025 | Third Sunday in Advent

John of the Cross, Renewer of the Church, 1591

*Amos 9:11–15; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3, 13–17; John 5:30–47; Psalms 24 & 150 (AM); Psalms 25 & 110 (PM)*

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<sup>5:32</sup> There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. <sup>33</sup> You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. <sup>34</sup> Not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. <sup>35</sup> He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. <sup>36</sup> But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.

– John 5:32–36 ESV



I have always found the backdrop of a flickering candle on a dark night a beautiful picture of Christ's presence with us. It reminds me of the countless processions to "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" I have seen—peaceful, hopeful, and full of wonder.

While that imagery is lovely, the more I sat with this passage, the more it struck me that our candles, as meaningful as they are, only *hint* at the reality of Christ's presence. In these verses, Jesus speaks about the testimony of John the Baptist: *"He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John."*

John's witness was like a lamp—bright, passionate, and purposeful—pointing toward the true Light coming into the world. His testimony gave people hope, yet even John could not see the fullness of what God was doing through Christ. **How much brighter, then, is Christ's presence with us? His light is not limited to a single flame but is the very radiance of God revealed in human form. It exposes what is hidden, heals what is broken, and draws us out of the shadows into His marvelous light.**

As I read our passage in John today, I'm reminded that Christ's light doesn't simply flicker in the darkness—it overwhelms it. And what a miracle that the same light now lives within us, bearing witness still.

**Prayer:** Ready our hearts, O God, to receive the glorious presence of Your Son. Fill us with wonder and awe at the mystery of Emmanuel—God with us, the Light of the world dwelling in the darkness.

*Devotion written by Ariel Wicker (awicker@thenalc.org)*

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## December 15, 2025 | Monday of the Third Week in Advent

*Zechariah 1:7–17; Revelation 3:7–13; Matthew 24:15–31; Psalms 122 & 145 (AM); Psalms 40 & 67 (PM)*

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<sup>1:7</sup> On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo. <sup>8</sup> During the night I had a vision, and there before me was a man mounted on a red horse. He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses. <sup>9</sup> I asked, "What are these, my lord?" The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are." <sup>10</sup> Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth." <sup>11</sup> And they reported to the angel of the Lord who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout

the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace.”<sup>12</sup> Then the angel of the Lord said, “Lord Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?”<sup>13</sup> So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. <sup>14</sup>Then the angel who was speaking to me said, “Proclaim this word: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion,<sup>15</sup> and I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they went too far with the punishment.’<sup>16</sup> “Therefore this is what the Lord says: ‘I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem,’ declares the Lord Almighty. <sup>17</sup>“Proclaim further: This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘My towns will again overflow with prosperity, and the Lord will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.’”

– Zechariah 1:7–17 NIV2011



The prophet Zechariah spoke to a people who were discouraged and uncertain. Jerusalem lay in ruins, the temple was not yet rebuilt, and the people wondered if God had abandoned them. Into that discouragement came a vision of hope: the Lord had not forgotten His people. He declared, *“I will return to Jerusalem with mercy...my house will be rebuilt.”*

These words must have sounded almost too good to be true. Restoration? Mercy? A city once again overflowing with life? Yet this is what God promised. His presence would return, His dwelling place would be rebuilt, and His people would flourish again.

Advent invites us to hear these same promises in our own seasons of waiting and uncertainty. We know what it feels like to live in a world marked by unrest, brokenness, and longing. We see places in our own lives where hope feels fragile, where disappointment has taken root, where the future feels uncertain. Yet the Word of the Lord speaks over all of this: *I will return with mercy. I am restoring what is broken. I am building something new.*

What is most comforting is that this rebuilding does not depend on us. God Himself takes the initiative. He comes near, not because we have made everything ready, but because of His mercy. In Christ, we see this promise fulfilled most fully. Jesus came to dwell among us, to make His home in the midst of our broken world, and to assure us that the story does not end in ruin. It ends in restoration.

This Advent, as we light candles and wait for Christmas, let us remember that God is still at work. His presence is among us, His Spirit is renewing His Church, and His mercy continues to overflow into our lives. The God who once promised, *“My house will be rebuilt,”* now promises to make His dwelling with us through Christ, until the day He comes again and makes all things new.

**Prayer:** Merciful Lord, thank You for being the God who restores what is broken and breathes life into what seems lost. Help us to trust in Your promises, to rest in Your presence, and to hold fast to the hope we have in Christ. As we wait in this Advent season, strengthen our faith that You are even now making all things new. Amen.

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*Devotion written by Jessica Spohr (jspohr@thenalc.org)*

## December 16, 2025 | Tuesday of the Third Week in Advent

*Zechariah 2:1–13; Revelation 3:14–22; Matthew 24:32–44; Psalms 33 & 146 (AM); Psalms 85 & 94 (PM)*

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<sup>24:36</sup>But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. <sup>37</sup>For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup>and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup>Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. <sup>41</sup>Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. <sup>42</sup>Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup>But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup>Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

– Matthew 24:36–44 ESV



“It’s gonna happen,” she said, quietly, like she’s sharing her bank account information. “It’s gonna happen October 2033.”

We were talking about the Second Coming of Jesus. And she is probably still convinced of that date.

False prophets rise and fall. Like the guy on TikBook (FaceTok? YouGram?) who said the rapture—that’s the taking up of Christians to meet Jesus in the air—yes, that rapture was going to happen on September 23rd or 24th. Well, it is well past that day, and we are all still here. And, I imagine, that come November of 2033, we will still be here. Unless, that is, Jesus returns before that.

No matter how we dissect the Bible, reading Hebrew and Greek words into numbers and signs and omens and earthquakes. No matter what cast bones say, or tea leaves, or augury—which is the reading of omens from bird flocks, or haruspicy or extispicy—which is fortunetelling by the examination of sheep innards—no matter what these say, we know this: we do not know when Jesus will return. Jesus said, “But concerning that day and hour no one knows.”

We know He will come again, because He promised He would in His Word. Just as we knew He would come the first time—by the Word.

Way back in Genesis 3, to the serpent God said the offspring of Eve “shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” And from Zechariah 2, God says He is coming: “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for behold, I come and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD.”

And the offspring, even the Lord who came? It’s God the Son. It’s Jesus, who came and dwelt among us. And He is coming again.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank You that You will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and Your kingdom will have no end. Remember us with the favour You bear for Your people. Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Peter Lurvey (peterlurvey@gmail.com)*

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## December 17, 2025 | Wednesday of the Third Week in Advent

O Sapientia/O Wisdom

*Zechariah 3:1–10; Revelation 4:1–8; Matthew 24:45–51; Psalms 50 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 53 & 17 (PM)*

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<sup>41</sup>After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”<sup>2</sup>At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne.<sup>3</sup>And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.<sup>4</sup>Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.<sup>5</sup>From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God,<sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind:<sup>7</sup> the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.<sup>8</sup>And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come!”

– Revelation 4:1–8 ESV



The book of Revelation is often misused as a decoder ring for the news. Verses and images are plucked out that assure us that more suffering is around the corner. But today, John’s prophecy provides us with an image unlikely to be found in any headline. In a room of singing angels and beasts, with crystalline seas and emerald rainbows, John stands before the Lord.

In front of God, whose presence rattles our bones like thunder, our despair is revealed. There is no hiding our grief for the absences around our tables. There is no swallowing our rage for the chaos of this world. There is no denying our own brokenness. We tremble as a voice like a trumpet invites us forward, that we may see “what must happen after.” We approach the throne, where we discover hope.

The Father, who settled on the Mount Sinai to give us His law while wrapped in a raging storm, sits upon the throne. The Son, who took on flesh to fulfill this law wrapped in swaddling clothes, sits upon the throne. The Spirit, who was poured out into us in Baptism, wrapping us in the grace of God so that we no longer fear the law, sits upon the throne. The world seeks to convince us that Herod or wealth or sin rules over our lives, but Revelation reminds us that this has never been and never will be true. It does not prompt us to see suffering as inevitable, but to rest in the promise that suffering will end in the outstretched arms of our Lord.

It is the proclamation of truth already revealed and longed for. The truth that from creation, to cradle, to crucifixion and resurrection, God is the ruler of all of time and creation, so even now while we await the Savior who will be laid in a manger and the Savior who will return to us upon a cloud, we join our voices to the choirs of angels and beasts and John and sing, “Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” Amen.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, who heals the brokenhearted and binds up our wounds, we ask that You free us from our despair and welcome us into Your presence. Allow us to sing of Your eternal reign with joy and anticipation as we await the final, triumphant entry of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Taylor M. Rister-Stempniak (ptmarie96@gmail.com)*

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**December 18, 2025 | Thursday of the Third Week in Advent**  
**O Adonai/O Lord of Might**

*Zechariah 4:1–14; Revelation 4:9—5:5; Matthew 25:1–13; Psalms 18:1–20 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 126 & 62 (PM)*

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<sup>25:1</sup>”Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup>Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup>For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup>but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup>As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup>But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ <sup>7</sup>Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup>And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup>But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ <sup>10</sup>And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. <sup>11</sup>Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ <sup>12</sup>But he answered, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ <sup>13</sup>Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

– Matthew 25:1–13 ESV



When I served a parish in rural Wisconsin, it was not uncommon if you were trying to get from one side of town to the other to have to wait at a train crossing for one of the freight trains to pass through our little town. Sometimes, the wait times were just a couple of minutes. Other times, for longer trains, or when the trains slow down, or stop on the tracks for whatever reason, your wait would be longer. Most of the time, you had no choice but to sit there and wait for the train to pass. But it wouldn’t be uncommon to see someone turn around and try to find another way to get from one side of town to the other, oftentimes unsuccessfully because there were few, if any, alternate routes in our little town for a motorist to use.

In today’s reading from Matthew, we meet 10 virgins who were chosen by the bride, to be part of a festive procession, using torches to escort the bridegroom from the home of the groom to the place of the wedding banquet. In this parable, Jesus tells us all ten were waiting for word that the promised arrival of the bridegroom was coming, but only five of them were finally ready and prepared to participate when the time came for the procession to actually begin, and they are the ones who are, in the end, participating in the joy-filled celebration of the wedding feast!

As we draw ever closer to Christmas, we are reminded of the reality that Jesus Christ is coming, both in the flesh at Christmas, and again at the end of time. Both are joyful events that tell us our Savior from sin, death, and the power of Satan are here! Today’s reading gives us the opportunity to ask the important question: are we ready? What must I do to be ready to celebrate the miracle of the Incarnation, of God taking on our human flesh that’s laid to rest in the wood of the Christmas manger, and crucified on the wood of Calvary’s cross for my salvation? What must I do to be ready for when our Lord returns on the last day to usher in the great marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom? We do so by staying in God’s Word

through weekly worship and daily Scripture reading and prayer. As we stay immersed in the Word and the Sacraments, we are strengthened to face those days when it seems that the coming of Christ is delayed, or we're tempted to believe it isn't coming at all. In these closing days of Advent, let's stay in the Scriptures, and find our joy, hope, and salvation in our coming Lord and Savior, Jesus!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank You for the gifts You freely give me through Your Word and the Sacraments that reveal to me that You came into the world in flesh and blood to deliver me from sin and death, and that You are coming again to bring me to the eternal wedding feast of Your kingdom that will have no end. Give me Your Holy Spirit, so that my faith may be strengthened, and I might share the joy of Your promised coming into our world with those in my life. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Christopher W. Martin (pastorcwmartin@gmail.com)*

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## December 19, 2025 | Friday of the Third Week in Advent

O Radix Jesse/O Root of Jesse

*Zechariah 7:8—8:8; Revelation 5:6—14; Matthew 25:14—30; Psalms 102 & 148 (AM); Psalms 130 & 16 (PM)*

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<sup>8:3</sup>Thus says the Lord: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. <sup>4</sup>Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. <sup>5</sup>And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. <sup>6</sup>Thus says the Lord of hosts: If it is marvelous in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in my sight, declares the Lord of hosts? <sup>7</sup>Thus says the Lord of hosts: Behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, <sup>8</sup>and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness.”

— Zechariah 8:3–8 ESV

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This passage from the Prophet Zechariah speaks of what God is one day going to do. It paints a beautiful image of God's desire for His people, and the future He has designed for them. As Christians, our great privilege is to bear witness to what God has already done through His Son, Jesus Christ. Without a doubt, the light of the world has made His appearance, and even now, even today, that light, Jesus, is shining through Word and Sacrament and is bringing about the fulfillment of this promise of God we find in Zechariah.

Jesus, as the light of the world, is guiding His people into the new Jerusalem. Through His atoning sacrifice on the cross, we have been made righteous before God through faith and have had citizenship in the New Jerusalem bestowed upon us. The light of Christ shines across the globe, and many are coming into the new and eternal kingdom of God. This gives us who believe reason for great joy.

This joy we experience is not a temporary feeling, but an abiding disposition resulting from the firm and sure promises of God. Everything promised by God in Zechariah, and elsewhere, will be accomplished, has been accomplished, and is yet to be accomplished in and through Jesus Christ. The exuberance that comes from our joy compels us to share this Gospel message, that is, to shine light into the darkness of lost souls, broken homes and families, hurting communities, and everywhere else the Holy Spirit leads us. Brothers

and sisters, do not be ashamed of this light, and certainly do not try to hide it, but let it shine with all its brightness, that the whole world would be illuminated by Christ and His Most Holy Spirit.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to bring light and life into the world. Grant us eyes to see this great light, and to hear the message of salvation through faith alone in the Scriptures which are a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path, as the Psalmist declares. Help us to share this light with others, and may we experience the joy that comes as benefactors of God's gracious promises. Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Roland Weisbrot (pastorroland@victorylutheran.ca)*

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## **December 20, 2025 | Saturday of the Third Week in Advent**

**Katherina von Bora Luther, 1552, O Clavis David/O Key of David**

*Zechariah 8:9–17; Revelation 6:1–17; Matthew 25:31–46; Psalms 90 & 149 (AM); Psalms 80 & 72 (PM)*

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<sup>5:7</sup> Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. <sup>8</sup> You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. <sup>9</sup> Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! <sup>10</sup> Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

– James 5:7-10 NIV1984



Five days before Christmas! We're almost there! But not yet.

Christmastime is a season when God offers us a very precious gift – the gift of patience. Yes, we know that at the end of the Advent season we celebrate the Christ Child's birth. But it is in the step-by-step process that the joy of the season is truly fueled.

In my youth, after Thanksgiving, the Advent wreath was placed on the television console as the first “decoration” of the season. The Sunday that followed was usually the First Sunday of Advent, and in the evening either my sister or I would light that first candle. During the week that followed, Mom would put up the living-room decorations, which included colored lights around the window. On the evening of the Second Sunday of Advent, we'd light the second candle, have pieces of peppermint, and watch a Christmas show.

That week, Mom and Dad would prepare the Christmas tree, which would eventually be filled with hundreds of lights and Mom's handmade ornaments. On the evening of the Third Sunday of Advent, three candles would be lit, and again, we'd share in eating a peppermint stick and watch another television special, or perhaps go to church for the evening Christmas program. That third week usually included the senior-choir caroling party as well as the high-school Christmas program.

That Saturday was the day of baking cookies — lots of cookies — many of which went to neighbors and friends. And, depending on the date of Christmas, that Saturday was a thorough-cleaning day, again in preparation for the big day ahead. On the evening of the Fourth Sunday of Advent, four candles were lit. That candlelight now filled the living room with its warm glow.

And then, a day or just a few more, it was Christmas Eve. Presents would be placed under the tree during the day. Uncle George would come in the evening for a sloppy-joe supper. Presents would be opened one at a time at first, then just a free-for-all. And then it was time. It was time for all of us to go to church—three of us in a final choir practice, one of us preparing the ushers, my uncle finding his seat in the sanctuary.

The decorations, the tree, the presents, the time for family—all led up to the moment when we shared with our larger family—our church family—the purpose of all the preparation: the coming of the Christ Child.

**Prayer:** Thank You for the season we call Advent and for teaching us, in varied ways, the gift of patience. Through this gift, teach us to stand firm in the Christian faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. David Schweppe (dlschweppe@outlook.com)*

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# THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

*Stir up your power, O Lord, and come.*

*Take away the hindrance of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth,  
that we may receive you in joy and serve you always;  
for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.*

## December 21, 2025 | Fourth Sunday in Advent

St. Thomas, Apostle, O Oriens/O Dayspring

*Genesis 3:8–15; Revelation 12:1–10; John 3:16–21; Psalms 126, 117 & 150 (AM); Psalms 25 & 110 (PM)*

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<sup>3:17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

– John 3:17–21 ESV



Today is the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. Where I live, the sun rises at 8:42 a.m. and will set at 4:24 p.m. for just 7 hours and 41 minutes of daylight. Since I live in a valley with large hills to the west, the darkness will creep in even earlier. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Advent traditions around candles and the biblical metaphor of light in John’s Gospel has so powerfully captured the religious sensibilities of residents of the north.

When we speak of the longing of the season of Advent, it is easy to associate that longing with the coming of light, the lengthening of days that lies beyond the celebration of the Advent of this child who is the light of the world. I remember visiting my daughter in the winter while she was working on her masters in Fairbanks, Alaska, and wondering how anyone, for any length of time, could “love darkness rather than light.” One’s whole being leans into the hope of light “coming into the world.” Cold December cannot fly away soon enough and yet we will have to wait for the world to waken when “April’s crowning glory breaks.” Winter in the north brings its own kind of already-not-yet. The light comes into the world, but the warmth of it takes time. Yet the full assurance of hope is there, even as we wait for the bud to come to bloom and the lily’s sweet perfume delightful!

This for me is the message of the 12th chapter of the Revelation to John, our other reading for today. The light has come into the world, but the warmth of it, the sweet perfume delightful has yet to awaken. The heavens rejoice at the birth of the Son beloved of heaven, but “the devil has come to you with great wrath, because he knows his time is short” (Rev. 12:12). Unfortunately, we get all our cold weather after December flies away. And yet on a still day, a day perhaps of rest, one can find a sunny spot out of the wind and feel the warmth on your face, even though the ground is still stone cold.

Many will sing or chant a common hymn or canticle on this Fourth Sunday in Advent, “Oh, Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel,” which is based on the O Antiphons and captures this longing, and especially today the longing for light. “*Oh, come, blest Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by your advent here. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death’s dark shadows put to flight.*” There is perhaps no better hymn that captures the longing of Advent, invoking the Messianic titles of Jesus to come quickly. And yet, it is not just a prayer for the coming or advent of the Christ-child, but the coming of Christ again. “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel” recognizes an already-not-yet character of hope.

In fact, try the verses going forward to anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus this week, and then work the verses backwards to pray for Christ to come again. Even better, there is a hidden message in the acronym formed by the first letter of the Latin messianic titles of each O Antiphon if you start with the last and move back to the first (the hymn has the actual Antiphons out of order) so here they are, already in reverse order:

O Emmanuel (God with us), O Rex Gentium (King of Nations), O Oriens (Dayspring—and today's antiphon), O Clavis David (Key of David), O Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse), O Adonai (Lord), and O Sapientia (Wisdom)

The acronym spells ERO CRAS, which in Latin means, "Tomorrow I will come!"

**Prayer:** O Dayspring, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness: come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Lead us to walk the length of our days in Your light. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Kevin Ree (kree@thenalc.org)*

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## **December 22, 2025 | Monday of the Fourth Week in Advent**

### **O Rex Gentium/O King of Nations**

*Zephaniah 3:14–20; Titus 1:1–16; Luke 1:1–25; Psalms 122 & 145 (AM); Psalms 40 & 67 (PM)*

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<sup>3:14</sup> Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;  
shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter of Jerusalem!

<sup>15</sup> The Lord has taken away the judgments against you;  
he has cleared away your enemies.

The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;  
you shall never again fear evil.

<sup>16</sup> On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

"Fear not, O Zion;  
let not your hands grow weak.

<sup>17</sup> The Lord your God is in your midst,  
a mighty one who will save;

he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will quiet you by his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing.

<sup>18</sup> I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,  
so that you will no longer suffer reproach.

<sup>19</sup> Behold, at that time I will deal  
with all your oppressors.

And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.

<sup>20</sup> At that time I will bring you in,  
at the time when I gather you together;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,

when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes,” says the Lord.

– Zephaniah 3:14–20 ESV



One of the most stunning pictures in all of Scripture is here in Zephaniah: God Himself singing over His people. It is hard to grasp, isn't it? We are used to singing about God and to Him: hymns of praise, psalms of lament, carols of joy. But here the roles are reversed. The Lord sings over us.

And what a beautiful picture this is, for we know ourselves too well. We know our sins, our failures, our lukewarm hearts. Left to ourselves, we expect God's voice to thunder with judgment or disappointment. And yet, because of Christ, His voice breaks forth in song. He quiets us with His love, not our accomplishments. He rejoices over us because of His mercy, not our merit.

This is exactly what Advent is about. We prepare to celebrate the astonishing reality that the “mighty One who will save” has entered our world, Emmanuel, God with us. Not just “up there” or “out there,” but here, in the midst of His people. Born of Mary, laid in a manger, walking our dusty roads, dying our death, rising to give us life.

As Lutherans, we confess that our God comes not just in history long ago, and not only in glory at the end of time, but also now, present and active through His Word and Sacraments. In Baptism, He claims us. In His Supper, He feeds us. In the preached Word, He speaks His promises again and again. The Lord your God is still in your midst.

And this changes everything. We are not a church that clings to sentiment or nostalgia. We are a people who cling to the living God who is with us, who saves us, and who rejoices over us with gladness. That is the cornerstone we need as individuals and as His Church.

So, in these last days before Christmas, when the noise of the season threatens to drown out hope, pause and listen. Hear His song: a song of mercy, a song of joy, a song of salvation. The King of the nations has come, and even now He is singing over you.

**Prayer:** O Rex Gentium, O King of the nations, cornerstone who unites all peoples, come and reign in our hearts. Quiet our fears with Your love, and teach us to rejoice as those who are redeemed. Turn us from anxious striving to joyful trust, and make us a people who live in Your truth and show forth Your goodness. As You once came in humility and will come again in glory, dwell with us now in mercy and peace; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Ryan Henkel (pastorhenkel@gmail.com)*

December 23, 2025 | Tuesday of the Fourth Week in Advent

O Emmanuel/O Come, Emmanuel, Thorlak, Bishop of Skalholt, 1193

*1 Samuel 2:1b–10; Titus 2:1–10; Luke 1:26–38; Psalms 33 & 146 (AM); Psalms 85 & 94 (PM)*

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<sup>2:1</sup> And Hannah prayed and said,  
“My heart exults in the Lord;  
my horn is exalted in the Lord.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in your salvation. <sup>2:5</sup> Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,  
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.  
The barren has borne seven,  
but she who has many children is forlorn.  
<sup>6</sup> The Lord kills and brings to life;  
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
<sup>7</sup> The Lord makes poor and makes rich;  
he brings low and he exalts.  
<sup>8</sup> He raises up the poor from the dust;  
he lifts the needy from the ash heap  
to make them sit with princes  
and inherit a seat of honor.  
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,  
and on them he has set the world.  
<sup>9</sup>” He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,  
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,  
for not by might shall a man prevail.  
<sup>10</sup> The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;  
against them he will thunder in heaven.  
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;  
he will give strength to his king  
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

– 1 Samuel 2:1, 5–10 ESV



We are usually quick to notice what has been added to a room; complimenting the new furniture, banners, or tree ornaments. We’re less likely to look for what’s missing; the chair that remains empty, the photo or certificate that was taken down. Maybe we try to ignore the place where the ache of something missing leaves a hollow space. In Advent, maybe it is especially appropriate to take a moment to meditate on these places of absence and need in our lives and in our world, so that we may ask God to enter in and transform the places our hearts ache.

Hannah’s song of anticipated victory reminds me that God shows up in those places where we feel the pain of something not yet fulfilled. Hannah could not simply fill up her grief and shame with new dreams. She could not ignore what was missing, so she brought this tender place within her life to God and in faithful lament asked for Him to enter. In her son Samuel’s birth, she received more than what she had asked for. God had not only given her a son, but the door to humanity’s hope cracks open a little more for us to see a

redeemer King is coming. Hannah sings prophetically, “he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed” (1 Samuel 2:10).

Hannah’s hope will be fulfilled in King David and one day the Messiah King. One thousand years before Mary will sing her own “Magnificat,” Hannah is already singing its first verse! In these women’s prophetic songs, perhaps we are invited to join our voices as we ask God into the empty places of our lives where we long for His presence. And we will find we do not sing alone or in vain, for God’s plan has culminated in a victory cry from a manger in Bethlehem that once laid empty, born from Mary’s empty womb. God’s answer is the final verse to humanity’s song of hope. It is better than we could have ever prayed for. God places His love in the person of His Son, who enters in to the place of our greatest need. Our hope is alive, and His name is Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.

**Prayer:** O Come, Emmanuel, transform our hearts into ready mangers, that even the places of emptiness in our lives may be places that You are exalted. In that place where the groaning of our hearts is too deep for words, bring us the hope of Hannah and Mary, that we may pray in faith “Let it be” in anticipation that You will enter in. Our hope is in You alone, O Lord, our Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Alliyah Blakeley (revalliyah@gmail.com)*

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# THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND THE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

*Almighty God, you made this holy night 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 only Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

## December 24, 2025 | Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Advent / The Nativity of Our Lord

*2 Samuel 7:1–17; Titus 2:11—3:8a; Luke 1:39–56; Psalms 50 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 132 & 114 (PM)*

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<sup>1:46</sup> My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
<sup>47</sup> my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed.  
<sup>49</sup> The almighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
<sup>50</sup> He has mercy on those who fear him  
in ev'ry generation.  
<sup>51</sup> He has shown the strength of his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.  
<sup>52</sup> He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has lifted up the lowly.  
<sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
<sup>54</sup> He has come to the help of his servant Israel,  
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,  
<sup>55</sup> the promise to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his children forever.”

– Luke 1:46–55 (from Luke 1:39–56) LBW

And Mary said...and the words that ushered from her lips have filled lives for centuries. Her proclamation has given God's people hope, for she knew the Lord in ways that no other human being could know Him.

Unseen, in the depths of her womb, a promise grows. Her fear is vanquished, for despite any outward circumstances she trusts in the goodness of God. His Word comes to His people not by their will, but by His. So she sings of the ancient promises made to Abraham and his children forever.

She will bear this Holy One into the brokenness caused by human sin, the hunger caused by hoarding, the enslavement caused by grasping for wealth, the brutality caused by human arrogance. She will bear the Holy One, a defenseless babe, and He will bring the mighty down from their thrones. He will do it all, she sings, by mercy, by insisting on using human beings as His temples, tabernacles of His holiness. He will do it, so not only will all generations call her blessed, but all generations will be blessed as they come to life in the womb of the Church.

In the song of this faithful young woman, we hear the story of God's salvation. He comes to life for us. His life will only speak that which is true. He will fill the starving and forgotten with all good things. He will bring healing to families and nations. His death will be the death of all our false illusions about our right to force others to do our will. And, at last, His resurrection will reveal the promise the angel made to Mary, “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High...[and] He will reign over the house of Jacob forever...” In the coming of God in human flesh our destiny is changed, for “of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33).

Sing it for us Mary, sing it for all the world to hear—a world that is drowning in its own opulence, a world that is starving in its desert famine. For the Word that you will bear is our only hope. And the Word that you sing is not only your song, but His, the promised Saviour for whom all the world awaits.

**Prayer:** Fill us, O Lord, that we, too, may sing Mary's song.  
Fill us, O Lord, that our hearts will overflow with joy.  
Fill us, O Lord, that we may always remember Your mercy.  
Fill us, O Lord, that we will forever proclaim the holiness of Your name,  
Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Amy C. Schiffrin (acschiffrin@gmail.com)*

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## December 25, 2025 | The Nativity of Our Lord

*Micah 4:1–5; 5:2–4; 1 John 4:7–16; John 3:31–36; Psalms 2 & 147:13–21 (AM); Psalms 98 & 96 (PM)*

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<sup>5:2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to be ruler in Israel,  
whose coming forth is from of old,  
from ancient days.  
<sup>3</sup> Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in labor has given birth;  
then the rest of his brothers shall return  
to the people of Israel.  
<sup>4</sup> And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,  
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth.  
<sup>5</sup> And he shall be their peace.

– Micah 5:2–5 ESV

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We know and recognize the world into which Christ is born. It is an old world where nothing fundamental ever seems to change. It is an ambiguous world where the future is ever uncertain. It is a dark world where one is never quite fully safe. Yes, we know that world well. We know it from the inside out. We know it from the dreadful things we discover at work within our very selves; the wearying strains of anxiety which drain our energy, and the scars of conscience which torment our souls.

But God has done a new thing in our old world. The canopy of darkness is pierced by the light of Bethlehem.

In the birth of Jesus Christ, God inaugurates a kingdom among us, and in our very midst. It is not like the fragile and fractious kingdoms of the earth which moth and rust destroy. It represents the incursion of a

new order of things, an everlasting kingdom of blessedness, a dominion of imperturbable peace ruled and made secure by the One who bears the might and authority of divine majesty (5:4).

The agitations of the old world sputter on, of course, and are occasions for the exercise of faith, hope, and love in the meantime as we wait for the final unveiling of things to come. But such things do not speak the final word for those who belong already even now to God's new and coming kingdom. By the grace of God, the struggles and disappointments of this earthly sojourn are no longer a source of ultimate concern and consternation, for those who abide within the "house of the God of Jacob" (4:2) "shall dwell secure," the prophet insists, and the Lord Himself "shall be their peace" (5:5).

It is possible the angelic multitude had this very passage from Micah in mind while singing forth its mirthful promise of "peace on earth" before the shepherds on that bleak midwinter's night so long ago. Whether then or now, the only suitable response to the announcement of such unthinkable glad tidings as these is to join our voices to that eternal chorus of joy and wonder which fills the heavenly throne room even now, and thus with angels and archangels to offer our praise and thanksgiving without delay to the one who makes all things new.

As a means of doing precisely this, I want to conclude this devotional by encouraging you first slowly to read ([thenalc.org/read](http://thenalc.org/read)) and then meditatively to listen ([thenalc.org/listen](http://thenalc.org/listen)) to the joyous words of Paul Gerhardt's wonderful Christmas hymn, "All This Night My Heart Rejoices." I pray that you will be richly blessed in doing so. Praise be to the God who has "called [each of us] out of darkness" and "into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

**Prayer:** "Dearest Lord, Thee will [we] cherish.  
Though [our] breath  
Fail in death,  
Yet [we] shall not perish,  
But with Thee abide forever  
There on high,  
In that joy  
Which can vanish never."

(Paul Gerhardt, "All This Night My Heart Rejoices," *The Lutheran Hymnal*, 77.)

*Devotion written by Dr. David J. Luy (dluy@thenals.org)*

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## December 26, 2025 | Second Day of Christmas

St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr

*Jeremiah 26:1–9, 12–15, 2 Chronicles 24:17–22; Acts 6:8–7:2a, 51–60; Matthew 10:17–22, Matthew 23:34–39; Psalms 31 & 148 (AM); Psalms 119:1–24 & 27 (PM)*

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<sup>7:54</sup>When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup>But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup>"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." <sup>57</sup>At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup>dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup>While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup>Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. <sup>8:1</sup>And Saul approved of their killing him.



December 26 is the day that the Church remembers St. Stephen, the first martyr for the Christian faith.

Christian martyrs have been a topic of discussion in recent months as we have witnessed the assassination of Charlie Kirk and the killing of Catholic schoolchildren Fletcher Merkel and Harper Moyski in Minneapolis. Christians from many traditions recently gathered in Rome to remember more than 1,600 martyrs during the first quarter of the 21st century. A similar gathering was held in 2000 to remember the 35 million Christian martyrs of the 20th century—the greatest number of Christians to die for their faith in any century.

Our first response to the killing of Christians because of their faith is sadness. It is a good and right emotion as we grieve the loss of fellow believers. We think about all that they could have done if they had lived. Another emotion we feel is disgust for those who kill those who bear witness to Christ and for those who celebrate their deaths.

But the story of Stephen's death does not let us stay in our sadness or disgust. The story of Stephen's death points us to the redemption and transformation that are possible in Jesus. Stephen's last words were words of forgiveness: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Stephen was given a vision of Jesus in glory right before his death, and he echoed the words of our Lord: "Father, forgive them."

Luke tells us that Saul was there as Stephen was stoned to death and that Saul approved of Stephen's death. Our first response to that could be disgust. But we know the rest of the story. Saul, one of the greatest enemies of those first Christians, was chosen by Jesus and transformed from being an enemy of Christians into St. Paul, one of the greatest proclaimers of the Christian faith.

We know how our Lord transformed Saul into Paul—from enemy to apostle. We know that our Lord can transform those who hate Christians into people who love and serve Him and His Church. We trust that even in our time as people show hatred toward our fellow believers that no one is beyond the reach of God's transforming love. We can join with Stephen in following our Lord's difficult command to love and pray for our enemies. We can even live in hope not just of the heavenly glory that Stephen saw but also of the possibility that even those who hate us might one day become our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Prayer:** Grant us grace, O Lord, that like Stephen we may learn to love even our enemies and seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (*Lutheran Book of Worship*)

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. David Baer (djbaer@rushmore.com)*

## December 27, 2025 | Third Day of Christmas

St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

*“Genesis 1:1–5, 26–31”; 1 John 1:1—2:2; John 21:20–25; Psalms 116:10–17 & 149 (AM); Psalms 19 & 121 (PM)*

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<sup>1</sup>In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

– Genesis 1:1–5 ESV



While you are reading this devotion, you may still see the lights on your Christmas tree or colorful lights covering your neighbor’s front yard. It’s almost impossible to imagine Christmas without these lights, even though they give little clue as to what Christmas is truly about.

Those lights are most visible and beautiful at night when darkness covers the land. This somehow reminds me of God’s creation on the first day—especially if your Christmas lights are set to turn on automatically at a certain time by a timer. It’s like a miniature echo of that majestic moment: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light... And God separated the light from the darkness.”

While those flashing, twinkling, and dazzling Christmas lights brighten the most celebrated holiday of the year, they cannot enlighten the lives of millions who still dwell in spiritual darkness. Only Jesus Christ our Lord can do that, for He is the light of the world—the transcendent light that far surpasses all the transient lights we see in this world.

He became flesh and came into this world. He shines in the darkness. And to all who receive Him, believe in Him, and are baptized, He gives the right to become children of God. Jesus comes into us and dwells among us. As Psalm 46:5 declares, “God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved.” This truth applies to an individual, the Church, a city, or even an entire nation.

We once lived in darkness, like jars of clay without purpose. But praise the Lord! The great light of Jesus now shines upon us and within us, becoming the light of our lives. He illuminates us from the inside out and transforms our lives. Because Jesus is in us, we can stand firm and not be shaken in this turbulent world. Because He is with us, we—though fragile vessels—can shine as lights in this dark world.

May the Lord shine His light upon each of us and use us to bring light and blessing to those around us—to our families, our communities, our cities, and even our nation.

**Prayer:** Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for choosing us to be Your children and for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to us. Lord Jesus, help us to walk in Your light as Your disciples and to bring many to You, the true Light. Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Ray Zhu (ray.zhu@clch.org)*

# THE FIRST WEEK AFTER CHRISTMAS

*Almighty God, you wonderfully created  
and yet more wonderfully restored  
the dignity of human nature.*

*In your mercy, let us share the divine life of Jesus Christ  
who came to share our humanity,  
and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.*

December 28, 2025 | First Sunday after Christmas

The Holy Innocents, Martyrs

*Jonah 2:2–9; Ephesians 6:10–20; John 11:17–27, 38–44; Psalms 124 & 150 (AM); Psalms & (PM)*

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<sup>2:2</sup> He said:

“In my distress I called to the Lord,  
and he answered me.

From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,  
and you listened to my cry.

<sup>3</sup>You hurled me into the depths,  
into the very heart of the seas,  
and the currents swirled about me;  
all your waves and breakers  
swept over me.

<sup>4</sup>I said, ‘I have been banished  
from your sight;  
yet I will look again  
toward your holy temple.’

<sup>5</sup>The engulfing waters threatened me,  
the deep surrounded me;  
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

<sup>6</sup>To the roots of the mountains I sank down;  
the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you, Lord my God,  
brought my life up from the pit.

<sup>7</sup>“When my life was ebbing away,  
I remembered you, Lord,  
and my prayer rose to you,  
to your holy temple.

<sup>8</sup>“Those who cling to worthless idols  
turn away from God’s love for them.

<sup>9</sup>But I, with shouts of grateful praise,  
will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.  
I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”

– Jonah 2:2–9 NIV1984



Dear friends, greetings in the name of our Triune God as we continue our celebration of God’s entrance into this world in human flesh in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The passage we read today, in some ways, feels a bit out of place during this Christmas season. It’s the prayer of a man named Jonah who had been called by God to preach a message of warning to the people of Nineveh, who refused to answer the Lord’s call, and who, as a result, boarded a ship heading in the opposite direction toward the city of Tarshish, in an attempt to run away from the Lord.

Perhaps you know the story and what happened. In the midst of a violent storm, Jonah was thrown overboard, swallowed by a great fish, and from the belly of that great fish, prayed the prayer we just read. It was a prayer of repentance, a prayer crying for the Lord's help, and a prayer that acknowledged that without the help of the Lord, he was lost and without hope.

In one of the most graphic verses in all of Scripture, the one following immediately after the prayer Jonah prayed, it says, after three days in the belly of this great fish, "the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto the shore. And it did." And this time, instead of running away from the Lord, Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh.

I'm not sure how it happens in life, but you see it happening in the lives of people all the time. It doesn't matter if it's three days or three weeks or three years or three decades. If you run away from God, from the calling given to us in Jesus, the results of that running end up much the same. Dead end dreams, empty and never-realized promises, paths filled with hope and assurance at the beginning that are never finally and fully fulfilled. And even if they are, they inevitably fall short of offering assurance and purpose in life that lasts.

The good news of Christmas is that God has a way of doing whatever it takes to offer us a second chance and, with that second chance, the opportunity to listen and respond to His call.

Not only that, but God also has a way of helping us to see that even if we're not running from Him, He is running to us. Not to control us, not to confine us, not to force us to live in ways we would not choose for ourselves to live, but to love us and to care for us and to set us free to live in ways and for purposes that will carry us into eternity.

Far too many people, as they look back on their life experience and decisions made along the way, wish they could turn back the clock and do it all again. They're not sure how it happened. They don't know exactly what went wrong and why. But they find themselves in a position where they finally realize that their way of doing things in this life is not working and are in desperate need of a second chance.

If that describes, in even a small way, what's happened or happening in your life, the Christmas season is the perfect time to turn it around. Jesus came into the world, not to condemn it but to save it. Not to call out your sin and your failings and the things in your life you've tried that have not worked. In contrast, He came into this life to show us how to live, to offer His life on a cross for the forgiveness of our sin, and to give us, like was given to Jonah, a second chance.

My prayer for you and for all of us is that this Christmas season might be one in which we stop running, living life our own way and on our own terms, and start listening to the Good News of second chances given to us as a gift in Jesus.

**Prayer:** Lord God, we thank You for these days following Christmas and for the ongoing celebration and promise that are given to us in Christ. Help us to trust in Your Word, listen to Your calling, and respond in faith, that our lives might be used for purposes that will be, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Daniel W. Selbo (dselbo@thenalc.org)*

December 29, 2025 | Fifth Day of Christmas

Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr, 1170

2 Samuel 23:13–17b; 2 John 1–13; John 2:1–11; Psalms 96 & 145 (AM); Psalms 132 & 97 (PM)

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<sup>19:1</sup>The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.  
<sup>2</sup>Day to day pours out speech,  
and night to night reveals knowledge.  
<sup>3</sup>There is no speech, nor are there words,  
whose voice is not heard.  
<sup>4</sup>Their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.  
In them he has set a tent for the sun,  
<sup>5</sup>which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,  
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.  
<sup>6</sup>Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them,  
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.  
<sup>7</sup>The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the Lord is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
<sup>8</sup>the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;  
<sup>9</sup>the fear of the Lord is clean,  
enduring forever;  
the rules of the Lord are true,  
and righteous altogether.  
<sup>10</sup>More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.  
<sup>11</sup>Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.  
<sup>12</sup>Who can discern his errors?  
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.  
<sup>13</sup>Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;  
let them not have dominion over me!  
Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.  
<sup>14</sup>Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable in your sight,  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

– Psalm 19 ESV



Sing to the Lord, bless His name; tell of His salvation from day to day.

Did you know that singing is good for you? Perhaps you've experienced rolling out of bed on a Sunday morning and dragging your feet into church, only to cast away the doldrums with a good hymn! "How Great Thou Art," "The King of Love My Shepherd Is," or "Shall We Gather at the River"; it doesn't matter, all of them create happiness and a sense of wellbeing just by singing.

It sure does seem like God had that in mind when He created us! As Israel sang the psalms and passed them on to generation after generation, singing continues as God's people worship Him.

It's really a creative thing God did with our voices. When we sing, our brain and endocrine system release a hormone called oxytocin. It's called the "love hormone." Oxytocin combats stress and gives that good feeling, like a big hug which you can also get from the endorphin.

Obviously, that's not why we sing. We sing because we want to praise the Lord and tell others about our love for Him and His love for us. The psalmist has given us 150 songs to sing. Some aren't quite as joyful as this one, Psalm 96: "Sing to the Lord a new song: sing to the Lord all the earth!" But all of them lead us into a deeper conversation with God. The psalms give us words to communicate with the Lord. Whether we are happy, and want to communicate our faith, like this one: "Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods," (Psalm 96). Or if we are sad or feel forsaken, like this one, "Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help," (Psalm 22).

I can almost hear what some of you are saying, "I can't sing." To that I say, "Yes you can." Don't worry about having perfect pitch because only 1 in 10,000 have it anyway. Just open your heart and your mouth and sing! Sing a song to the Lord! Make it up if you want to, but just sing for Him and communicate with Him. And, feel the peace descend upon you, because God created us to sing and He created our bodies to feel better when we sing.

"Joy to the world, the Lord has come!" Amen.

**Prayer:** Make us glad, O God, in recounting Your mercies and adoring Your holiness, and let it be our chief joy to glorify Your holy name. Almighty and everlasting God, the brightness of faithful souls, who brought the Gentiles to Your light and made known to them Him who is the true Light, and the bright and morning Star: fill, we ask You, the world with Your glory, and show Yourself by the radiance of Your light to all nations. (*The Gregorian Sacramentary*)

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Amy C. Little (alittle@thenalc.org)*

## December 30, 2025 | Sixth Day of Christmas

*1 Kings 17:17–24; 3 John 1–15; John 4:46–54; Psalms 93 & 146 (AM); Psalms 89:1–18 & 89:19–52 (PM)*

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<sup>44</sup>So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. <sup>47</sup>When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. <sup>48</sup>So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." <sup>49</sup>The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." <sup>50</sup>Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. <sup>51</sup>As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. <sup>52</sup>So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." <sup>53</sup>The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. <sup>54</sup>This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

– John 4:46–54 ESV

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John tells us about an official who came to Jesus in desperation. His son was gravely ill, near the point of death. Any parent can imagine the fear that drove him to Christ. He begged Jesus to come and heal His child. But Jesus does not go with him. Instead, He speaks a word: "Go; your son will live."

This is the moment of faith. The man had no proof, no sign, no visible evidence...only the promise of Jesus. Yet John tells us, "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way." When he returned home, he discovered his boy was healed at the very hour Jesus had spoken. His faith became joy, and his whole household came to believe.

Having served most of my ministry in rural Iowa, I've stood with families praying in hospital rooms when all they could do was cling to God's promise. Medicine is a gift, but it cannot take the place of Christ's Word of life. Faith holds fast to what He says, even before the outcome is seen.

The Large Catechism puts it this way: "For where there is to be a heart that trusts God alone, such trust and faith must spring from the Word of God, not from our own imaginations" (Large Catechism, First Commandment, 26). The official believed not in a feeling, but in Jesus' Word. That Word gave life.

This Christmas season, we celebrate that the eternal Word became flesh. Christ does not leave us uncertain. He speaks forgiveness, healing, and salvation, and by His Word, we live.

**Prayer:** Gracious Lord Jesus, You are the Word made flesh who brings life and healing. As You once spoke to the official and restored his son, speak Your promises into our lives today. Strengthen our faith to trust Your Word even when we cannot see. Turn our fear into joy, and let our households be filled with the hope of Your coming. Keep us steadfast until the day we see You face to face. Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Tony D. Ede (tede@thenalc.org)*

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## December 31, 2025 | Seventh Day of Christmas

*1 Kings 3:5–14; James 4:13–17; 5:7–11; John 5:1–15; Psalms 98 & 147:1–12 (AM); Psalms 45 & 96 (PM)*

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<sup>4:13</sup> Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—<sup>14</sup> yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

—James 4:13–17 ESV

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I am writing this devotion on September 11th, the day before I leave to go to East Africa for the Global Confessional and Missional Lutheran Forum conference in Nairobi. December 31st seems a long way away right now, but I know it will be here soon! The end of another year—2025.

This reading from James always reminds me of my first visit to East Africa in 2002, not long after that terrible day we remember as 9/11. Particularly this phrase: “If the Lord wills...” makes me think of the people I met in Africa. I noticed that my Tanzanian friends would often say that they would do such and such, “If the Lord wills.”

There is some wisdom, it seems to me, in not making promises that we can’t keep. My friends in Africa knew very well that life is uncertain. Their awareness of the fragility of life was much more prominent than it is here in North America. Malaria, AIDS, and other illnesses were prevalent, and good medical care was not available or affordable for many people. Car accidents happened all the time. Death could come at any time. The Tanzanians knew that they were in the Lord’s hands and that the Lord’s will was far more dependable than theirs.

Nevertheless, we make promises all the time—promises about what we will do in the future. And yet the future is not guaranteed to any of us. It may be the Lord’s will to call us home at any moment. When we boast about what we plan to do, we assume that we are in control of our future. We forget that we are, as James says, “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” We think that we have all the time in the world, and so we may be inclined to put things off, to not recognize the preciousness of each and every moment we have.

There is one, however, whose promises are absolutely reliable because the future is in His hands. That is our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When our God promises us a Savior, we can depend upon it! When Jesus promises us eternal life in His kingdom, we know He is capable of fulfilling that promise. Why? Because there is nothing that can stand in His way, nothing can stop Him, not even death, for He has defeated death once and for all. Indeed, for you and me.

We have just celebrated Christmas and are about to ring in the new year. The long awaited and promised Savior has come to us. Time goes marching on, but one thing never changes. That is that our Lord Jesus is the one in charge! He is the one we can count on. He is the one who can and will fulfill all God’s promises. And because we know that He loves us, we can always rest securely in His hands, no matter what. Maybe we too should get into the habit of saying, “If the Lord wills...” to indicate to ourselves and to others that our hope ultimately lies, not in ourselves, but only in Jesus Christ our newborn King.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, as we come once more to the end of another year, we give You thanks for all that You have provided for us in 2025. We ask for Your blessing on this new year—may it be a time of growing peace and harmony among peoples and nations. May it be a year in which Your Church grows and prospers in every corner of the world. Bring an end to persecution and discrimination against those who believe in Jesus. We thank You for sending Your Son to save us and we pray that, by the power of Your Spirit, we may always seek to do His will. In His name we pray. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Carol E. A. Fryer (cfryer@thenalc.org)*

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## January 1, 2026 | Eighth Day of Christmas

### The Circumcision and Holy Name of Jesus

*Numbers 6:22–27, Exodus 34:1–8; Galatians 4:4–7, Philippians 2:9–13; Luke 2:15–21; Psalms 8 & 147:13–21 (AM);  
Psalms 99 & 8 (PM)*

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<sup>6:22</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>23</sup>Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them,

<sup>24</sup>The LORD bless you and keep you;

<sup>25</sup>the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

<sup>26</sup>the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

<sup>27</sup>So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

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<sup>2:21</sup>After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

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<sup>2:9</sup>Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

– Numbers 6:22–27; Luke 2:21; Philippians 2:9–11 NRSV



Have you ever had your full name called out in a way that stopped you cold? Maybe by a parent, maybe over a loudspeaker, maybe in a crowd. Names carry power. They can make us laugh, squirm, or even tremble.

In the Bible, names aren't just labels—they reveal essence, character, destiny. At Sinai, God proclaimed His Name: “The LORD, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love” (Exodus 34:6). Later, He told Aaron to place that Name upon Israel in blessing: “The LORD bless you and keep you...” (Numbers 6:24–26). God's Name meant presence, mercy, and peace.

But Israel kept chasing other names—idols, kings, powers. And so do we. We attach our trust to fragile names: reputations, political slogans, brand names, even our own. They tremble, and when they fall, we fall with them.

Then comes Luke 2:21. On the eighth day—the day of covenant and new creation—the Child is circumcised, His first blood shed, and He is given the Name: Jesus. Yeshua. “The LORD saves.” Here, at

last, the blessing becomes flesh. The Name is no longer thunder from a cloud or words spoken by a priest; it is embodied in a Person.

Paul tells us that God has “highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the Name above every name” (Philippians 2:9). Every rival power must bow. Every fragile name must yield. And in Baptism, that saving Name has been placed upon you.

So as a new year begins, lay down the trembling names that cannot hold you. Hear again the blessing fulfilled: The LORD bless you and keep you...and in Jesus, He has.

His Name is mercy. His Name is peace. His Name is yours.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, holy Name above every name, we thank You that Your mercy is written upon our lives. Where our own names tremble and fail, You have spoken blessing. Where other powers rise and fall, Your Name endures forever. Place Your Name upon us again today—over our fears, over our families, over the year ahead. Make us bold to trust in You, quick to call upon You, and eager to carry Your light into the world. In Your saving Name we pray. Amen.

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*Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Andrew S. Ames Fuller (aamesfuller@thenalc.org)*

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## **January 2, 2026 | Ninth Day of Christmas**

*Isaiah 62:1–5, 10–12; Revelation 19:11–16; Matthew 1:18–25; Psalms 48 & 148 (AM); Psalms 9 & 29 (PM)*

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<sup>62:1</sup>For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be quiet,  
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,  
and her salvation as a burning torch.  
<sup>2</sup>The nations shall see your righteousness,  
and all the kings your glory,  
and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the Lord will give.  
<sup>3</sup>You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.  
<sup>4</sup>You shall no more be termed Forsaken,  
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate,  
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,  
and your land Married;  
for the Lord delights in you,  
and your land shall be married. <sup>62:11</sup>Behold, the Lord has proclaimed  
to the end of the earth:  
Say to the daughter of Zion,  
“Behold, your salvation comes;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.”  
<sup>12</sup>And they shall be called The Holy People,  
The Redeemed of the Lord;  
and you shall be called Sought Out,  
A City Not Forsaken.

– Isaiah 62:1–4, 11–12 ESV



The light of His dawning is so glorious, it comes as a comet beaming back into the atmosphere, exploding into a meteor, shattering the molecules of things as they were, into the bright glory of things as they ought to be. No more called Forsaken or Desolate but now My Delight is in Her, Sought Out, a City Not Forsaken, a crown of beauty—married to our Bridegroom who also is our Savior. How much changes in His presence!

This prophecy of desolation to consolation came hundreds of years before the coming of that promise. And even as the promised one was entering the world, His coming was accompanied by a forsakenness and desolation in this world that touched many. And yet...the Creator was at work, enacting the beautiful mystery of His grace, through sweat, blood, and tears, in the laughter and fears of His created children.

Oh, the great mystery, that a creature, formed in His very image, from dust and dirty things and then gloriously filled with God-breath, could carry His very self! Created carrying Creator in the miraculous mass of cells, muscle and skin that itself emanated from an overflow of Trinity love.

The stuff of dirt.

The stuff of glory.

And as she gazes into the bloodied face of the tiny human who has shared her body for these many months, she gazes too into the face of the salvation of all humankind. This one who seeks out His bride, redeems this daughter of Zion in a manner at once forever mysterious and glorious.

**Prayer:** O God, who wonderfully created the dignity of human nature and still more wonderfully restored it, grant, we pray, that we may be clothed in the divinity of Christ, who humbled Himself to share in our humanity, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Dcn. Shannon R. Ames Fuller (samesfuller@thenalc.org)*

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## January 3, 2026 | Tenth Day of Christmas

*1 Kings 19:1–8; Ephesians 4:1–16; John 6:1–14; Psalms 111 & 149 (AM); Psalms 107 & 15 (PM)*

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<sup>107:1</sup> Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His faithful love endures forever.

<sup>2</sup> Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out!

Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.

<sup>3</sup> For he has gathered the exiles from many lands,

from east and west,

from north and south.

<sup>4</sup> Some wandered in the wilderness,

lost and homeless.

<sup>5</sup> Hungry and thirsty,

they nearly died.

<sup>6</sup> “Lord, help!” they cried in their trouble,

and he rescued them from their distress.

<sup>7</sup>He led them straight to safety,  
to a city where they could live.  
<sup>8</sup>Let them praise the Lord for his great love  
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.  
<sup>9</sup>For he satisfies the thirsty  
and fills the hungry with good things.  
<sup>10</sup>Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom,  
imprisoned in iron chains of misery.  
<sup>11</sup>They rebelled against the words of God,  
scorning the counsel of the Most High.  
<sup>12</sup>That is why he broke them with hard labor;  
they fell, and no one was there to help them.  
<sup>13</sup>"Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress.  
<sup>14</sup>He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom;  
he snapped their chains.  
<sup>15</sup>Let them praise the Lord for his great love  
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.  
<sup>16</sup>For he broke down their prison gates of bronze;  
he cut apart their bars of iron.  
<sup>17</sup>Some were fools; they rebelled  
and suffered for their sins.  
<sup>18</sup>They couldn't stand the thought of food,  
and they were knocking on death's door.  
<sup>19</sup>"Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress.  
<sup>20</sup>He sent out his word and healed them,  
snatching them from the door of death.  
<sup>21</sup>Let them praise the Lord for his great love  
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.  
<sup>22</sup>Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving  
and sing joyfully about his glorious acts.  
<sup>23</sup>Some went off to sea in ships,  
plying the trade routes of the world.  
<sup>24</sup>They, too, observed the Lord's power in action,  
his impressive works on the deepest seas.  
<sup>25</sup>He spoke, and the winds rose,  
stirring up the waves.  
<sup>26</sup>Their ships were tossed to the heavens  
and plunged again to the depths;  
the sailors cringed in terror.  
<sup>27</sup>They reeled and staggered like drunkards  
and were at their wits' end.  
<sup>28</sup>"Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress.  
<sup>29</sup>He calmed the storm to a whisper  
and stilled the waves.  
<sup>30</sup>What a blessing was that stillness  
as he brought them safely into harbor!

<sup>31</sup> Let them praise the Lord for his great love  
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.  
<sup>32</sup> Let them exalt him publicly before the congregation  
and before the leaders of the nation.  
<sup>33</sup> He changes rivers into deserts,  
and springs of water into dry, thirsty land.  
<sup>34</sup> He turns the fruitful land into salty wastelands,  
because of the wickedness of those who live there.  
<sup>35</sup> But he also turns deserts into pools of water,  
the dry land into springs of water.  
<sup>36</sup> He brings the hungry to settle there  
and to build their cities.  
<sup>37</sup> They sow their fields, plant their vineyards,  
and harvest their bumper crops.  
<sup>38</sup> How he blesses them!  
They raise large families there,  
and their herds of livestock increase.  
<sup>39</sup> When they decrease in number and become impoverished  
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,  
<sup>40</sup> the Lord pours contempt on their princes,  
causing them to wander in trackless wastelands.  
<sup>41</sup> But he rescues the poor from trouble  
and increases their families like flocks of sheep.  
<sup>42</sup> The godly will see these things and be glad,  
while the wicked are struck silent.  
<sup>43</sup> Those who are wise will take all this to heart;  
they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord.

– Psalm 107 NLT



New year, new you. For me, this is a great time of year! I have a new calendar, mostly blank. I still have to fill in the important birthdays and anniversaries of those I love. But as I turn those pages of a new calendar it is also time to reflect on new routines that may be needed in my life. The daylight hours are shorter, and the evening hours are longer. It invites more rest and more reflection on the past year and what the Lord Jesus might need me to do or be in the coming year. Turning the calendar to the new year gives opportunity to look back and look ahead. It is a good time for review and to ask questions of what God has done in your life in the past year. Since I keep a gratitude journal every evening throughout the year, it is a reminder of all that the Lord has provided every single day. I have a list of what God has done and how the Lord has worked, answered prayers, and been with me in the storms and challenges of life. I would invite you to, like the Psalm writer, make a list of all the ways in which the Lord has provided for you, protected you, saved you, forgiven you, reconciled you with someone, and walked with you in your stormy days. How have you seen God at work in your life in the past year? I would invite you to write those down.

The new year is also a time when we traditionally set a few goals for ourselves. Perhaps it is shedding a few pounds, walking more, living a more balanced life, decluttering the stuff taking up space (either physical,

emotional, or mental). Spending time with the Lord each day in His Word, in prayer, in reflection on His Word shows you how God will direct you in the way you are to go. Then this next season of your year ends, and you reflect and see what the Lord has done. What will He do with you in this next season, this next year?

Do you have a word or intention that forms your life for the day or for your week or this next season? It could be “calm,” “peace,” “no fear,” “joy,” “thankfulness,” “faithfulness,” “trust.” You listen for the word the Lord Jesus provides for you.

**Prayer:** Lord God, You fill the hungry with good things and break the sinner’s chains. Hear Your people who call to You in their need and lead Your Church from the shadows of death. Gather us from sunset to sunrise, that we may grow together in faith and love, and may give thanks for Your kindness in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Shelly D. Schultz (sschultz@thenalc.org)*

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# THE SECOND WEEK AFTER CHRISTMAS

*Almighty God, you have filled us with  
the new light of the Word  
who became flesh and lived among us.  
Let the light of our faith shine in all that we do;  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.*

## January 4, 2026 | Second Sunday after Christmas

*1 Kings 3:5–14; Colossians 3:12–17; John 6:41–47; Psalms 20 & 150 (AM); Psalms & (PM)*

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<sup>3:12</sup>Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

– Colossians 3:12–17 ESV

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I want you to imagine the most beautiful quilt you have ever seen. We all know a quilt is made of many different pieces, shapes, and colors. On their own, they might not look like much, but when they are stitched together with strong thread, they form something beautiful and warm.

Paul says love is the thread that “binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Without love, the pieces would just fall apart. But in Christ, our lives even with all their differences are woven together into something that tells a story of God's grace.

Just as a quilt holds together because of the thread running through it, our lives hold together when love runs through everything we say and do. Instead of letting anger, fear, or bitterness take charge, something beautiful happens—Christ's peace becomes the unifying force that keeps the quilt of our lives from unraveling.

“Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” Love is what makes the Christian life coherent. Without love, even the most “Christian” acts can become hollow or prideful.

Paul then urges us to “let” two things happen.

First, “let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts.” This means actively surrendering control, allowing His Word to have the final say over our emotions, our decisions, and our relationships. This peace does not come from perfect circumstances but from knowing that we are reconciled to God through the cross.

Second, “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” This happens as we hear God's Word proclaimed, as we gather around the Lord's Table, and as we teach and admonish one another in truth. Our lives of faith overflow into worship—singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude.

Finally, Paul wraps it all up: “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” This means every part of life—work, school, conversations, decisions—is an opportunity to bear Christ's name and reflect His love.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You that You have chosen us, made us holy, and called us beloved in Christ. Help us to put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and above all, love. Let Your Word

dwell richly in us, that we may forgive as we have been forgiven, live in peace with one another, and give thanks in all things. May everything we say and do be in the name of Jesus, bringing glory to You. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Teresa E. Peters (tpeters@thenalc.org)*

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## January 5, 2026 | Twelfth Day of Christmas

*Joshua 3:14—4:7; Ephesians 5:1–20; John 9:1–12, 35–38; Psalms 99 & 145 (AM); Psalms 96 & 110 (PM)*

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<sup>9:1</sup> As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup> And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup> We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” <sup>6</sup> Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud <sup>7</sup> and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

<sup>8</sup> The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” <sup>9</sup> Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” <sup>10</sup> So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” <sup>11</sup> He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” <sup>12</sup> They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

<sup>9:35</sup> Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” <sup>36</sup> He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” <sup>38</sup> He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

– John 9:1–12, 35–38 ESV



When hearing this passage, I can’t help but think of the famous hymn, “Amazing Grace.” Written by John Newton, we sing “I once was lost, but now am found” (Luke 15:32); “was blind but now I see” (John 9:25). In the Scripture for today, we hear a man born blind confessing those very words later in the reading. We might be tempted to see the point of this passage as asking the question, “can you ‘see’ Jesus for who he truly is?” But it seems it’s actually the opposite. Is Jesus actually asking, “can you ‘see’ who you truly are?”

In our passage, we hear that the man born blind was ‘cast out’ of the synagogue by the Pharisees. The Pharisees cannot see who Jesus is. Even though they should have a full view of who He is, the promised one, the Alpha and the Omega, the Messiah, they refuse and reject Him. They are far more blind than the man born blind because they have seen the light of the world and turned from it. The man born blind rejoices in receiving his sight while the Pharisees have no desire to have their spiritual eyes opened. They are the blind ones.

Early in his life, our hymn writer John Newton was a foul-mouthed sailor, a blasphemer, a slave trader. He eventually became a pastor though. God claimed him at a very young age in Baptism. God set his path there. God later opened his eyes because of His grace.

We all have up-and-down lives. Sometimes we see God right there before us and sometimes He seems so far away. Some days we can see God guiding our lives and other times see ourselves wandering off under

the temptation of the world around us. We call out, “God, where are you?” He answers, “I’m right here, where are you?” No matter where we see ourselves, God, seeing us at our Baptism, calls us His own.

**Prayer:** Gracious Lord, Heavenly Father, thank You for gifting me with sight to be able to see You through the eyes of faith. When I wander, please guide me back to You. When I am distressed, comfort me. When I lose sight of the hope that is in You, remind me that Christ’s death and resurrection was for my sake and is Your sure promise. Fix my gaze upon You, O Lord, with the full assurance that nothing will be able to separate me from Your love. In Christ’s name, Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Marvin Combs (mcombs@thenalc.org)*

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# THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

*Lord God, on this day you revealed your Son  
to the nations by the leading of a star.  
Lead us now by faith to know your presence in our lives,  
and bring us at last to the full vision of your glory,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. Amen.*

## January 6, 2026 | The Epiphany of Our Lord

*Isaiah 49:1–7; Revelation 21:22–27; Matthew 12:14–21; Psalms 72 & 146 (AM); Psalms 100 & 67 (PM)*

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<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup> When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup> and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup> They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” <sup>9</sup> After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. <sup>11</sup> And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

– Matthew 2:1-12 ESV

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Today we recall the Magi coming to pay homage to Jesus, the Light of the world. The Christ light, born as a small flicker in an insignificant corner of the world, has ignited a blazing flame. With great passion, the Church’s missionary movement has taken this Gospel light to every continent and almost every corner of the world, including the Chinese-speaking world.

Mandarin Chinese provides intriguing insight into Epiphany and Christian witness today. In Taiwan, friendly convenience store clerks have an interesting practice. When a customer walks in, the clerk greets her by shouting enthusiastically, “welcome, light!” Can you imagine walking into Sheetz for a soda and the clerk greeting you with, “welcome, light!”?

While I doubt the earliest Jesuit missionaries to China received such a warm welcome, their courageous witness brought the light and power of Christ’s Gospel to a new culture. Today, centuries later, the Protestant church in China is the fastest growing church body in the world!

For someone to greet you with, “welcome, light!” is a profound theological truth. Because Christ lives in us, we are, literally, light-bearers. This is true of you, no matter how you feel, whether you are an active layperson, volunteer, lay leader, pastor, or deacon. Jesus urges his followers, “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

In this new year, may you be equipped to share your light by joining others—a fellowship group, a Bible study, a service team. Just as a log in a campfire can’t keep burning unless it is close to other logs, take the

time to nurture your Gospel light by joining others. And don't forget to pray for the unreached, both in North America and elsewhere, that the Gospel light might shine upon them!

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, Light of the world, as disciples called to Your service, we pray for the salvation of all. Lead us to bear witness to friends and neighbors. Fill our words and manner of life with the convincing power of Your Spirit. Grant that Your Church may always grow in grace and in numbers. Bring multitudes from every people to bow and confess that You are Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

*Devotion written by the Rev. Dr. Jukka Käriäinen (jkaariainen@thenalc.org)*

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