

The First Sunday in Advent
Service of Daily Prayer -- Morning
November 29, 2020

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

P: In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice;

C: **In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for You and watch.**

Psalm 5:3

P: My mouth is filled with Your praise,

C: **and with Your glory all the day.**

Psalm 71:8

P: O Lord, open my lips,

C: **and my mouth will declare Your praise.**

Psalm 51:15

All: **Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 64:1-9

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence —
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil —
to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.
You meet him who joyfully works righteousness,
those who remember you in your ways.
Behold, you were angry, and we sinned;
in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?
We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.
But now, O Lord, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
Be not so terribly angry, O Lord,
and remember not iniquity forever.
Behold, please look, we are all your people.

Titus 1:1-4

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior; To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Mark 13:24-37

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore 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 – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Hymn: *LSB 332, Savior of the Nations, Come*



1 Sav - ior of the na - tions, come, Vir - gin's Son, make
2 Not by hu - man flesh and blood, By the Spir - it
3 Here a maid was found with child, Yet re - mained a
4 Then stepped forth the Lord of all From His pure and



here Your home! Mar - vel now, O heav'n and earth,
of our God, Was the Word of God made flesh—
vir - gin mild. In her womb this truth was shown:
king - ly hall; God of God, yet ful - ly man,



That the Lord chose such a birth.
Wom - an's off - spring, pure and fresh.
God was there up - on His throne.
His he - ro - ic course be - gan.

- 5 God the Father was His source,
Back to God He ran His course.
Into hell His road went down,
Back then to His throne and crown.
- 6 For You are the Father's Son
Who in flesh the vict'ry won.
By Your mighty pow'r make whole
All our ills of flesh and soul.
- 7 From the manger newborn light
Shines in glory through the night.
Darkness there no more resides;
In this light faith now abides.
- △ 8 Glory to the Father sing,
Glory to the Son, our king,
Glory to the Spirit be
Now and through eternity.

Sermon

This year, I'd like to do something a little different with our weekly readings in church. Remember, today being the first day of Advent, it's the beginning of the new church year. If you take every service during the year -- all the Sundays, plus all the midweeks in Advent and Lent, and other special days like Good Friday or Thanksgiving -- if you add up all those services, there are 66 of them. There are also exactly 66 books in the Old and New Testaments. We're not going to leave the other readings behind, but during this year of the church, today through next Thanksgiving, each service will include and each sermon will focus on a reading from a different book of the Bible.

I do love the way our lectionary tradition brings so many different passages of Scripture to us, but there's so much ground in the Bible that it can't cover everything. Over the three-year cycle, 9 books are never used and 12 more books are used only once. By the end, we definitely won't have read every word in the Bible, but we will have visited each of the books in the Scriptural library. My hope is that it will help us better appreciate the consistency and comprehensiveness of God's message to us, and help us better see how Christ and the Good News about him is at the center of Scripture from beginning to end. It is our conviction as Christians and specifically as Lutherans that the Bible is only being read correctly when it is read with Christ as the central, most fundamental message; only through that lens is it possible to truly understand it.

So this week we begin our Advent season with the beginning of Titus, as we just heard. It seems appropriate -- the beginning of the letter with Paul's greeting, for the beginning of our year. Advent is a season when we think about time: we're reminded of God's ancient promises of salvation through the prophets, about Christ fulfilling those promises at what Scripture calls "the proper time," at the exact right moment in history according to God's wisdom, and finally about the future return of Christ in glory. We're reminded that time had a beginning and that it will have an end. Advent brings all these things together in a big-picture overview for us, to see the entire arc and course of

history. And this greeting from Paul to Titus reminds us about that too: “promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word,” “in hope of eternal life.”

What is our attitude towards time, and its constant passing? We get reminders every year that time marches on -- every year, we have a birthday; every year, we have a New Year’s Day, another Christmas, another one of each of those annual holidays. When we’re young, we look forward to these every time they come around. But often, the older you get, the less you appreciate the reminder of the passing years. They remind us that the seasons turn, the year on the calendar flips forward, and time passes. Because that’s often our experience, we tend to think about time as a cycle, an endless turning of the wheel that doesn’t really go anywhere. We’re riding on the merry-go-round, constantly moving; we get older, but in the big picture nothing ever really seems to change.

I would suggest that this impression is a result of the Fall into sin. It’s hard to know what the world was like in Eden, but even without sin in the world, there’d probably still be seasons and years passing: the earth would rotate daily and move around the sun. But in the beginning, humanity lived in eternal harmony with the eternal God. The time only wears hard on us because we now lack that divine gift of eternal life. We’re caught on the merry-go-round, until (like kids at the park who want to always go faster and faster) we’re thrown off it. If the cycle seems to go anywhere at all, it’s headed down. As someone older than me once said, “Time marches on, and it marches across my face.”

That’s why today’s perspective from Titus is valuable. Who can deliver us? The Creator of time itself is the One who promises us salvation. And this, we read, this promise comes from God who never lies. We can trust that it’s true because of this long history, this long span of time that demonstrates His actions to us and our ancestors. He promised it before ages began -- his plan has always been for the salvation and the ultimate good of humanity, even in the face of our own rebellion and wickedness.

This promise was made over and over again. As soon as Adam and Eve fell into sin, there’s already a promise of the one who will crush the serpent. To Noah, there’s the promise of humanity’s future. To Abraham, the promise of a nation through which all the people of the world will be blessed. To Isaac and Jacob, more promises. To Joseph and the rest of Jacob’s sons, more promises. Four hundred years later, more promises to Moses and the Israelites who are brought out of Egypt. In the Promised Land, still more -- even as the Chosen People squander and waste their Promised Land for centuries, prophet after prophet brings the promise.

And God keeps all these promises. He saved them from the Egyptians; He gave them victory over the Canaanites; He saved them from the Philistines. He sent them into exile in Babylon, but brought them back to rebuild and preserve the promise of a Messiah. God saves His people; God keeps His promises. God never lies.

And at the proper time, at just the right time, it happened. In a way and a place that took just about everyone off guard, but it happened. The Greek language has two words for time: “*chronos*,” like the word chronological, and “*kairos*” -- the proper time that Jesus came was not *chronos*; it didn’t have anything to do with the date on the calendar. It was *kairos*, the critical moment, the perfect opportunity, to strike while the iron is hot. It is the appointed time in the purpose of God. Why was that the perfect moment in history? I don’t know; God is wiser than me or you. But that’s what he’s saying: God made many promises for many centuries, and when the time was just right he sent Jesus to keep all those promises.

No doubt you've heard it said, "God's timing is not our timing." Usually it's when we've been hoping and praying for something but it doesn't happen -- other Christians will try to make you feel better with a phrase like that, "God's ways are not our ways; God's times are not our times." And yes, that's true -- He's God, He knows better than we do, and sometimes an unanswered prayer can be a blessing. But it is truly a confession of our faith in Him. Christ came to fulfill His promise, and he was indeed born at the proper time to enter our history, so that within the history of the world he could fulfill the promise of a Savior.

God entered into time, into human history, at a specific point in order to provide us a hope entirely outside of time: eternal life. This hope of eternal life is found entirely in the promise of God, who never lies -- this hope isn't just a wishful feeling, like "Oh, I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow." This hope is a certain knowledge of something that hasn't happened yet, a certain knowledge of something we can't currently perceive with our senses. How can we have certain knowledge of something like that? Because the guarantee comes from God who keeps His promises and speaks to us truthfully.

Advent is, in the scheme of the church year, a time of in betweens. We look backwards to the first coming of Christ in Bethlehem just as we look forward to his second coming at a date that is still unknown to us. This reading, along with the season of Advent, help teach us how to properly think about the passing of time. It is all about eternity stepping into time, about the actions of God within our history for our redemption.

We're reminded about the distant past, and about the future (maybe distant, maybe not). And we are taught about the present, too: Paul writes about "knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in the hope of eternal life." As we wait for Christ, how do we live? Not impatiently, not twiddling our thumbs, but in knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. Knowing Christ, we imitate Christ. Waiting for Christ, we serve Christ in the ways and places he has called and prepared us for.

Advent speaks to the past promises of God and the future fulfillment in the return of Christ, but it also speaks to our present in the call to keep our eyes, our attention, fixed on Jesus and not get distracted by the priorities of this world. That word, "godliness," isn't one that talks about the details of our behavior -- Godly living and following the rules or that sort of thing. Rather, it's referring to the condition of one's heart, and how that flows out into our lives: the inner response we have to the things of God, the reaction of faith we have towards the promises of God, past, present, and future. Advent is about waiting; how do we wait? We wait in faith and devotion to God, acting in accordance with that faith, and trusting that it is God who will put everything right in the end.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,

Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

Born of the virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

Prayers

C: Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Prayers for the Church, our community and nation, the sick, etc.

P: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: Thanks be to God!

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.