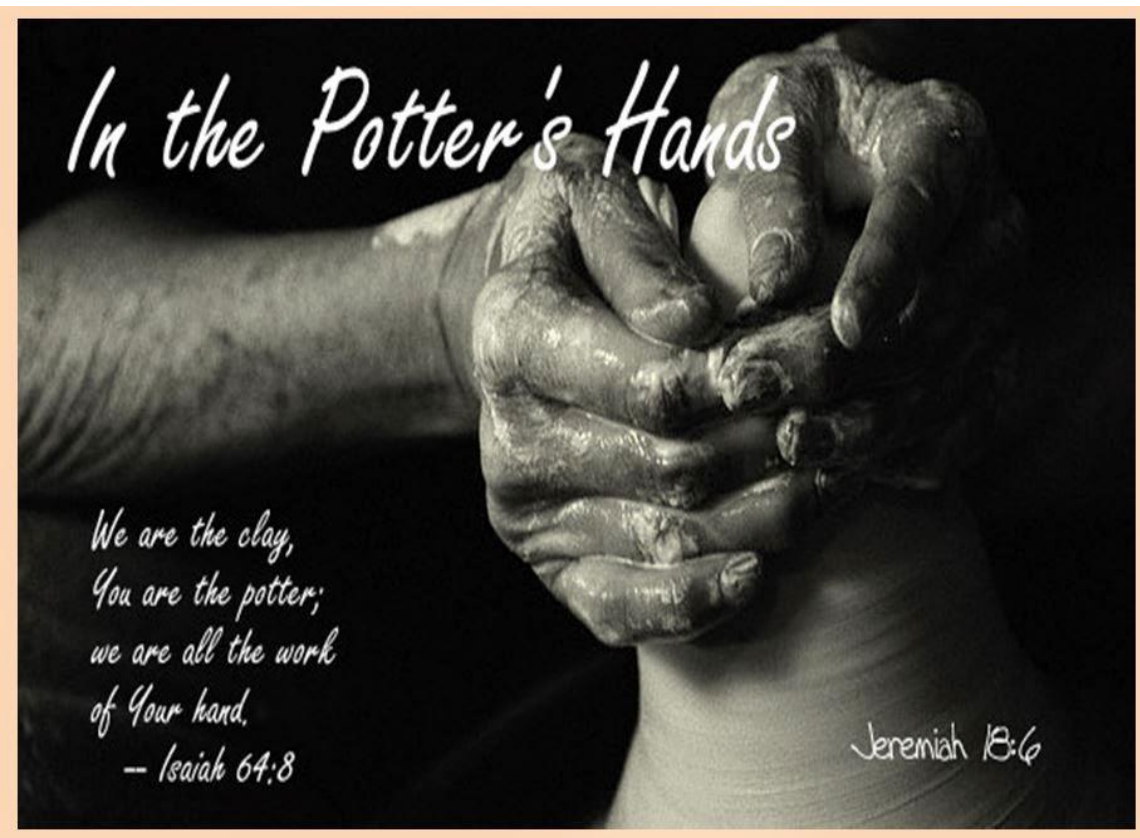


The Lutheran Church of the Covenant
“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”



First Sunday of Advent
November 29, 2020



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

First Sunday of Advent

Stir up your power, and come! The psalmist's plea in Psalm 80:2 has become familiar to us in the Advent prayers. Isaiah wants God to rip the heavens open. Both cry out for an apparently distant, angry God to show up, to save, to restore. When we hear Jesus describing the coming of the Son of Man with stars falling from heaven, it can sound dire and horrible, not like anything we would ever hope for. But when we really look at the suffering of people God loves, we can share the hope that God would tear open the heavens and come.

Prelude *Wachet Auf* (CALLAHAN)

*Confession & Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as we take time to recognize our shortcomings, while also remembering God's relentless grace.

Blessed be God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose forgiveness is sure
and whose steadfast love endures forever.

Amen.

Together let us honestly and humbly confess
that we have not lived as God desires.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Loving and forgiving God,
we confess that we are captive sin.
In spite of our best efforts, we have gone astray.
We have not welcomed the stranger;
we have not loved our neighbor;
we have not been Christ to one another.
Restore us, O God.
Wake us up and turn us from our sin.
Renew us each day in the light of Christ.

Amen.

People of God, hear this news of glad tidings:
by God's endless grace
your sins are forgiven, and you are free—
free from all that holds you back
and free to live in the peaceable realm of God.
May you be strengthened in God's love,
✠ comforted by Christ's peace,
and accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Gathering Hymn *Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying*

#436



1 Wake, a - wake, for night is fly - ing, the watch-men
2 Zi - on hears the watch-men sing - ing, and all her
3 Glo - ri - a! Let heav'n a - dore you! Let saints and



on the heights are cry - ing; a - wake, Je - ru - sa - lem, at last.
heart with joy is spring-ing. She wakes, she ris - es from her gloom.
an - gels sing be - fore you, with harp and cym-bal's clear-est tone.



Mid - night hears the wel - come voic - es, and at the
Her dear friend comes down, all glo - rious, the strong in
Gates of pearl, twelve por - tals gleam - ing, lead us to



thrill-ing cry re - joic - es; "Come forth, you maid-ens! Night is past.
grace, in truth vic - to - rious: her star is ris'n; her light is come.
bliss be - yond all dream - ing, with an - gel choirs a - round your throne.



The bride - groom comes! A - wake; your lamps with glad - ness take!"
Now come, O Bless - ed One, Lord Je - sus, God's own Son.
No eye has caught the light, no ear the thun - d'ring might



Al - le - lu - ia! Rise and pre - pare the feast to share;
Sing ho - san - na! Oh, hear the call! Come one, come all,
of such glo - ry. There we will go: what joy we'll know!



go, meet the bride - groom, who draws near.
and fol - low to the ban - quet hall.
There sweet de - light will ev - er flow.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Candle of Hope

The wreath and winter candle-lighting in the midst of growing darkness strengthen some of the Advent images found in the Bible. The unbroken circle of greens is clearly an image of everlasting life, a victory wreath, the crown of Christ, or the wheel of time itself. Christians use the wreath as a sign that Christ reaches into our time to lead us to the light of everlasting life. The four candles mark the progress of the four weeks of Advent and the growth of light. Its evergreen branches lead the household and the congregation to the evergreen Christmas tree.

Prayer

Blessed are you, God of Jacob, for you promise to transform weapons of war into implements of planting and harvest and to teach us your way of peace; you promise that our night of sin is far gone and that your day of salvation is dawning. As we light the first candle on this wreath, wake us from our sleep, wrap us in your light, empower us to live honorably, and guide us along your path of peace. O house of Jacob, come, **let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.**

Hymn *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

#257

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

6 O come, O Dayspring, come and cheer;
O Sun of justice, now draw near.
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadow put to flight. *Refrain*

7 O come, O King of nations, come,
O Cornerstone that binds in one:
refresh the hearts that long for you;
restore the broken, make us new. *Refrain*

First Lesson

Isaiah 64:1-9

This lament comes from a people who have had their hopes shattered. The visions of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a renewed people of God, spoken of in Isaiah 40–55, have not been realized. Instead, the people experience ruin, conflict, and famine. This lament calls God to account—to be the God who has brought deliverance in the past.

¹O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,
so that the mountains would quake at your presence—

²as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil—

to make your name known to your adversaries,
so that the nations might tremble at your presence!

³When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.

⁴From ages past no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,
no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.

⁵You meet those who gladly do right,
those who remember you in your ways.
But you were angry, and we sinned;
because you hid yourself we transgressed.

⁶We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.
We all fade like a leaf,
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

⁷There is no one who calls on your name,
or attempts to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity.

⁸Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;
we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

⁹Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,
and do not remember iniquity forever.
Now consider, we are all your people.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

¹Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock;
shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.

²In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,
stir up your strength and come to help us.

³Restore us, O God;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

⁴O LORD God of hosts,
how long will your anger fume when your people pray?

⁵You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have given them bowls of tears to drink.

⁶You have made us the derision of our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

⁷Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

¹⁷Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one you have made so strong for yourself.

¹⁸And so will we never turn away from you;
give us life, that we may call upon your name.

¹⁹Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

Second Lesson

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

As the Christians in Corinth await the advent of Jesus, Paul reminds them how the Lord has already enriched them through spiritual gifts and will continue to strengthen them until the coming day of the Lord.

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—⁶just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—⁷so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless

on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel

Mark 13:24-37

Jesus encourages his followers to look forward to the day when he returns in power and glory to end all suffering.

[Jesus said:] ²⁴“In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then 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.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *Change My Heart, O God*

#801



Change my heart, O God; make it ev - er true.

End



Change my heart, O God; may I be like you.



You are the pot - ter; I am the clay.



Refrain

Mold me and make me; this is what I pray.

Text: Eddie Espinosa, b. 1953
Music: CHANGE MY HEART, Eddie Espinosa
Text and music © 1982 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing, admin. Music Services

Prayers of Intercession

God of power and might, we long for the heavens to be opened upon this weary world.
Hear our prayers for everyone in need.

A brief silence.

Holy God, we give thanks for the universal ministry we share in Christ's name. Open our hearts to your call for justice, peace, and healing. Attune us to the needs of the world as you draw near. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, continue to care for this planet in need of restoration: for devastated habitats, polluted waters, thawing ice, blazing fires, swelling floods, and long-lasting droughts. Renew the face of the earth and our relationship to it. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Loving God, we lift up all people who care for others in our communities and around the world. Fill them with compassion and the power to respond with justice for those who are oppressed, with welcome for those who are excluded, and with relief for those who suffer. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Hopeful God, watch over your precious children who are in crisis as the seasons change: for those without homes facing severe weather, for those who are unemployed or underemployed, and for those in poverty or facing food insecurity. Relieve their burdens, sustain their bodies, and ease their minds. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Compassionate God, strengthen our loved ones in our families and congregation who live with depression, anxiety, chronic pain, addiction, and other invisible illnesses. Ease their suffering and support them when they struggle. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We give thanks for the lives and witness of those who died while waiting for justice, peace, or healing, those whose names we know and those whose names are known only to you. Sustain all who still yearn for the completion of your redeeming work. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Draw near to us, O God, and receive our prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Music Interlude *Reflection on "Veni Emmanuel"* (LASKY)

Please use this time to meditate or pray for those dear to your heart.

Thanksgiving for the Word

Holy God,
the Beginning and the Ending, our Hope as we wait,
we praise you for joining us to your people of old.
We bless you for your prophets who call us to righteousness
and promise a new earth with peace for all.

For the Word of your covenant, we thank you, O God.

We praise you for the coming of Jesus our Lord,
who lifts up the lowly, heals the suffering world,
and proclaims your way of mercy and truth.
For your Word who is Christ, we magnify you, O God.

Holy Spirit, enliven all who receive your Word.
Nurture our faith with your grace,
accompany us with your might,
and empower our zeal for your justice and joy.
For your Word through the church, we praise you, O God.

All praise to you, holy God,
today, tomorrow, and forever.
Amen.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

Blessing

May you find time for rest this season.
May you create space to prepare.
May the Lord our God fill you with hope.
May Jesus Christ be ever present in your heart.

May the Holy Spirit illuminate your way.

Amen.

Sending Hymn *Soon and Very Soon*

#439



1 Soon and ver - y soon
2 No more cry - in' there, we are goin' to see the King,
3 No more dy - in' there,
4 Soon and ver - y soon



soon and ver - y soon
no more cry - in' there, we are goin' to see the King,
no more dy - in' there,
soon and ver - y soon



soon and ver - y soon
no more cry - in' there, we are goin' to see the King.
no more dy - in' there,
soon and ver - y soon



Hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu - jah, we're goin' to see the King!

Coda after stanza 4



Hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu -



jah, hal - le - lu - jah, hal - le - lu - jah.

Text: Andraé Crouch, b. 1945

Music: VERY SOON, Andraé Crouch

Text and music © 1976 Bud John Songs, Inc./Crouch Music, admin. EMI Christian Music Publishing

Dismissal

Go in peace. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Postlude *People, Look East* (GIAMANCO)

Praying Together

... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating: Gayle Agg, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke, John Crawford, Nicole Crawford, Steve Dobush, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Alex Hohenstein, Judy Jones, Tom Juhasz, Ralph Kane, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Sara Mendes, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr., Arlene Stoltz, Tim Susaneck, Tom Susaneck, Phyllis Treichel, Phyllis Welker, Linda Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family

Lectionary Blog: Advent – A Confusing Beginning



Welcome to the year of the Gospel of Mark! I'll be honest, our first Gospel reading for this year out of Mark 13 has been confusing the faithful and scholars—me among them—since shortly after it was received. When Jesus talks about celestial bodies failing, figs

ripening and bondservants readying themselves, what is he talking about? And what does it have to do with our preparations to celebrate his incarnation in a few weeks?

Some scholars say Jesus was discussing the eschatological end of the age and the coming of the Day of the Lord. Others suggest that he was giving a coded anti-imperial encouragement to his followers. In my reading, I tend to see Jesus as being pastoral, helping his folk through difficult times that he knew they would face.

As always, it's important to start with context. What started the conversation into which our lectionary reading drops us? At the beginning of Mark 13, the disciples were remarking at the large stones that made up the temple complex (1). Jesus told them that all the impressive stones would be toppled over (2). Then, after walking up the next hill, a smaller group of disciples asked specifically about when the stone buildings of the temple complex would be destroyed and how they would know it was about to happen (3-4). It's the response to these questions that animates the rest of Mark 13.

Jesus answered their questions as well as he could. He warned them to watch out for false messiahs and to be ready for betrayal in their midst. Borrowing language of “the abomination that causes desolation” from the book of Daniel, Jesus seemed to foretell of the Roman general, Titus, entering the Holy of Holies in the temple and offering a pig sacrifice there (which he did, according to Josephus' *Jewish Wars* 6.4.7, 6.6.1). But Jesus' main concern was for the people, not for the stones or the sacredness of the space. He warned them to flee and fretted about how difficult the brutal Roman suppression of dissent would be for pregnant women and those nursing infants (17). Jesus again warned of false messiahs before ending his comments about the first Jewish War with Rome.

And now, finally, we arrive at this week's reading. People of goodwill may disagree, but I think Jesus continues the theme he's been discussing—persecution by the heavy hand of Rome. He gives a sort of historical disambiguation—“but in those days, following that distress ...” (24)—and then quotes two passages from Isaiah talking about the failure and fall of heavenly bodies (13:10 and 34:4). I'm convinced this is a reference to the Bar Kokhba (“Son of a Star”) revolt that fomented the Third Jewish-Roman War. The Jerusalem Talmud and *Seder Olam* both record that Simon Bar Kokhba was a false messiah, like the ones Jesus warned about (21-22), who maimed and murdered Jews as well as Romans. In fact, the rabbis called him “bar Kosiba” (Son of the Lie). This “star” fell dramatically and caused hundreds of thousands of deaths of both Jews and Romans.

Peter, James, John and Andrew ask, “What will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished” (5)? Jesus borrows language from Amos 8:1-2 to make a pun: when the fig ripens you know it is summer (28). The Hebrew word we translate as “summer” (רִיקָיִץ/qayitz) sounds very similar to the word we translate as “end” (אֵתֵץ/qaytz). When they saw these things happening—Romans and Jews fighting desperately hand-to-hand in cities and hundreds, if not thousands, of Jews being crucified by Romans just as Jesus had been, then they should know something was coming.

And what is that something? It’s Jesus, the Human One, who is very near and, in fact, at the door (29). Jesus is speaking of the fears and, frankly, horrors that his disciples and their children’s generation would see with their own eyes (30). Mere days before his arrest and murder at the hands of the Romans, Jesus takes the time to warn about the dangers to come. To be sure, Jesus is explicit that he doesn’t know exactly when or how those events will take place (32). But he knows that when they happen, he will be close at hand and right at the door. Jesus knows that terrible suffering will happen, but he tells the disciples that he will be close to them when it does.

The best news during uncertain and, frankly, scary times is that Jesus doesn’t abandon us. God is not caught unaware of tumult and unrest. God’s people have faced war, famine, persecution and illness before. As we enter the Advent season, and celebrate Jesus’ incarnation among us, let us remember his promise: to be “near, at the very gates” during all times of trouble.



Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.

Advent Wreath

Q J A P T F N T N E V D A E E K J
Z H T H J X E U U C W Z M I Q M F
S W G B S U P L D W H M H M G R G
D I V K N U A T D N A R H O C C L
L U E B E O W Z R N O Z I Q P R P
C I Z K E L D F U E A O P S E E B
H M I F R D Q E A P S C D E T E N
R Z Y V G D L S O N G H A I A S I
I C W M R B E T H L E H E M D V C
S R Y M E O E L E S U S E J N R E
T O A E V N S E R A P E R P E C L
M I D S E F S N A S A A J O E X E
A V N S W R E A T H N V V U R S B
S A U I B O J V G G N Z N T G O R
V S S A W V K E E D V Z A Z B L A
F V X H R K C L C I Y L P G O D T
I H M T B Y U V K G U L F H O Z E

emmanuel

light

god

celebrate

messiah

advent

jesse

hope

candle

savior

isaiah

bethlehem

green

wreath

christ

prepare

angel

evergreens

sunday

christmas

jesus