



Savior
of the
Nations,
Come

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2016



LUTHER
SEMINARY

Savior of the Nations, Come (ELW 263)

Savior of the nations, come;
virgin's son, make here your home.
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth:
God has chosen such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood,
but the mystic Breath of God,
was the Word of God made flesh,
fruit of woman, blossom fresh.

Wondrous birth—oh, wondrous child—
from his throne, a virgin mild!
Very God, and Mary's son,
eager now his race to run!

From God's heart the Savior speeds,
back to God his pathway leads;
out to vanquish death's command,
back to reign at God's right hand.

Now your manger, shining bright,
hallows night with newborn light.
Night cannot this light subdue;
let our faith shine ever new.

Praise we sing to Christ the Lord,
virgin's son, incarnate Word!
To the holy Trinity
praise we sing eternally!

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Sunday, Nov. 27

“Savior of the Nations, Come” (ELW 263)

The first verse of the ancient Advent hymn (and one of Martin Luther’s favorites) “Savior of the Nations, Come” sets the tone for Advent. “Savior of the Nations, come; virgin’s son, make here your home. Marvel now, O heav’n and earth: God has chosen such a birth.” We begin Advent with this deep affection: marvel. To marvel is first to be speechless or silent as we contemplate a new, wondrous, unexpected happening. We can’t comprehend in any known categories what is happening. Marvel fills our being as we contemplate the mystery of God who continually comes to us, in humble ways, in mercy, with immeasurable goodness. God’s presence is not always immediately seen or known. Some people miss it entirely yet God is never far away, God is in every and any moment. The mysterious-like melody of this Advent hymn both intrigues and reassures: it gives voice to our marvel.

O God, open our hearts to marvel, in silence and in joy that we may recognize the many ways in which you come to us. Amen.

Monday, Nov. 28

Isaiah 2:1-5

Isaiah already announces this marvelous happening! God’s word, that is God’s manner of being present with us, will come forth from Jerusalem, from the city of peace! And God’s word is peace. This presence is one not of fear or anxiety but of mercy. Even God’s word of judgment is not one of reprisal and punishment but a word that places all things in a right relationship to one another. One person does not triumph over another. One nation does not oppress another. Justice—equilibrium throughout creation and peoples—is established on earth. And our marvel is expressed by action: we lay down our weapons, our defenses. We tear down our walls, even those we build up within ourselves, and turn all things and all our energy towards building up community, tending the land and each other.

God of peace, let your face shine upon all humanity so that we seek the good for one another. Amen.

Tuesday, Nov. 29

Psalm 122

The city, the community, the gathering of God's people, is known as a city of peace. It is from this place of peace that God's word comes forth. And it is to this place of peace that our footsteps take us. This is not a place of fear. It is not a place of harsh words, back-biting, a place of lies or deceit. The city of peace, Jerusalem, is not a walled-in city that defends itself against outsiders and fiercely protects all its borders. All the tribes of the Lord—certainly here the twelve tribes of Israel, but representing the tribes, the nations, the peoples of the world—yearn and come towards this city, this community. The yearning of all peoples is security, justice, a good life for friends, family, for all people. Our Advent yearning and hope is one of peace.

O God of peace, envelop us, our friends and family in that peace which only you can give. Amen.

Wednesday, Nov. 30

Romans 13:11-14

In the midst of the city of peace, there, the thrones of judgment are set up, the thrones of justice. We can call them God's mercy seat. The judgment that is uttered is one of mercy. God's immeasurable goodness is revealed and shared with us, a goodness that completely transforms our lives. No longer are we lost in the ways of self-centered desire, in the pursuit of our own happiness, in drunkenness and addiction that make the world and the neighbor all about "me." God's mercy opens the door, breaks down the walls, calms our fear and says: now is the time, know that I am with you; in baptism you have been already clothed in Jesus Christ. Jesus is your life. Your identity is found in his abundant mercy that dispels the darkness.

God of peace, shape our life, hold us in your mercy that is stronger than any darkness. Amen.

Thursday, Dec. 1

Matthew 24:36-44

Advent is a time of refocusing. As we marvel at the wondrous act of God coming to us, our marvel silences us, silences our own expectations and opens our eyes to God's unexpected and surprising work in our midst. As we read the gospel for this week, our initial response may be of dismay. "About the day and the hour, no one knows..." God's judgment does not seem merciful at all but rather arbitrary and unfair. But perhaps we are looking at this passage from the perspective of our own anxiety: am "I" to be taken or left behind? The gospel however refocuses the question: this is not about God's judgment of which we can know nothing but about our own inability to judge. None of our communities are perfect, none of us are perfect (to know the hour). None of us are given the right to judge. Rather, as we wait, we are always humbly and simply neighbors one to another.

God, in our waiting, help us to let go of our own anxieties, knowing that you are ever merciful. Amen.

Friday, Dec. 2

Matthew 24:36-44

Apocalyptic texts for Advent certainly have their place in the cycle of our readings and in the formation of our spiritual life. They remind us that Christ has already come and that our waiting is for that unexpected advent of God in any moment—which really means in every moment. In every moment of our lives, God is. God appears, God can surprise us, whether we see God or not. Our faith is characterized by this vigilant waiting—not for some far off event, not for some horrific or catastrophic or dramatic second coming in the future but for a continual "second coming" in every moment of life, now. Every encounter, every event, every moment is full with God's presence. We need not fear because God's presence, which is described in our texts this week as God's judgment, is always one of compassion, of peace, leading us to leave behind works of darkness and be clothed in light.

God, make our hearts vigilant that we may discern your merciful presence in every moment of our life. Amen.

Saturday, Dec. 3

“Savior of the Nations, Come” (ELW 263)

During this first week of Advent, we have considered what it means to marvel with heaven and with earth at God’s coming. To marvel is to wake up and be vigilant. It is to see God at work in places and in persons we never expected. It is to have our usual categories of judgment (and self-justification) turned upside down and inside out. Our relationship to everyone and everything around us is different as we wait, for we know that we wait together, in community, and with all of creation. We leave behind the darkness of judgment, building walls and protecting ourselves from the unfamiliar. We take the risk of welcoming the neighbor no matter how different they may be from us. We take the risk of being surprised by God who comes to us in the unexpected at every moment.

Come, O God, make here your home. Transfigure our inclination to self-justification and surprise us with your goodness. Amen.

Sunday, Dec. 4

“Savior of the Nations, Come” (ELW 263)

The Advent hymn “Savior of the Nations, Come” throws us into the midst of a paradox in its second and third verses. Not of human flesh and blood but by the breath of God, yet fruit of woman, born of and in humanity. Very God and Mary’s son! This mystery is too deep to comprehend. Our own attempts at rationalization or understanding are suspended and an attitude of marvel once again becomes our only way of entering into what God is doing. God is doing something new. God is doing something unexpected in this wondrous birth, in this wondrous child who comes. Tradition has equated this child with the root of Jesse. This child now stands as a sign for how God acts in our midst. God comes to us not in majesty, not with fanfare, not with thunder and lightning and terrible works that leave the earth trembling and smoldering—as many apocalyptic dreams would have it—but humbly, in a child, in a human being; simply, without resources, in a manger; and then faithfully, on a cross. This is the sign God gives us.

O God, hold us in the spirit of the gospel: joy, simplicity and mercy. Amen.

Monday, Dec. 5

Isaiah 11:1-10

A reflection among biblical scholars ponders the meaning of “root of Jesse.” Some understand it literally as referring to the father of King David. The one who comes arises out of the royal branch. Other scholars ponder the significance of verse 1 and the “branch of” the root of Jesse. They argue that the community itself is an expression of the root. This second interpretation holds much potential and is certainly not in contradiction to the first. What does it mean for us today to consider the faith community itself as a sign, as an ongoing sign of God’s marvelous deed, God’s coming, God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ? In fact, our faith communities are called to be that witness, the living body of Christ in the world, for the neighbor. In this context, we repeat the prayer spoken at every baptism as we invoke the Holy Spirit on the newly baptized:

O God, sustain us with the gift of your Holy Spirit: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen.

Tuesday, Dec. 6

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

The verses from Psalm 72 give a frame to our hope for the one who comes. Here we find justice and judgment linked together, something that does not always happen in our court and judicial systems. God’s judgment, embodied in God’s son, brings justice for all, righteousness, which is not morally-right living but economic and social parity for all people. The poor are named, those left out by systems that see wealth belonging to some and not others. All of creation and all of humanity belong together. The resources of the earth are not owned by some and bought by others. Righteousness is all encompassing. It touches the spiritual, the realm of the heart, and it touches the physical, the realm of the body so that everyone lives justly. Martin Luther comments in the Large Catechism that God’s concern is a deeply physical concern for all human beings: that they all are fed and clothed.

Blessed be the Lord our God who alone does wondrous things, who makes righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more! Amen.

Wednesday, Dec. 7

Romans 15:4-13

A life of faith is a journey ever deeper into that righteousness of God that has been made known to us in Jesus. Our hope, as we light the Advent candles and perhaps open daily an Advent calendar, is to grow ever more in that righteousness, to experience it continually in our lives. This is the hope in which we live by faith. This is the hope that Paul writes about in Romans—a hope that expresses itself in reconciliation as the faithful community lives in harmony, not in judgment. Together in this hope, God is praised. “With one voice” we glorify God. This praise is not simply the praise of our songs but praise that is a shared hope. Our praise is also as specific as a shared welcome: welcome one another. This radical welcome knows no boundaries or color or class.

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thursday, Dec. 8

Matthew 3:1-12

Our shared hope is not dependent on ourselves, on our own goodness or ability, on our own community, no matter how good and cozy our faith community may feel to us. Our shared hope is not in our identity, just as John the Baptizer reminded the people of Israel: do not rely on the fact that you are children of Abraham. God in fact raises up children from what is lifeless, from the dead. Here we are reminded of our baptismal hope. In baptism we have died to the identities, the cultural and societal norms that we have created for ourselves or in which we find some solace or meaning. Baptism is first of all a death (literally immersion, a drowning!). A dead person can do nothing on their own! But God steps in and pulls us up out of the waters, raises us to new life, new identity, new creation. It is now in this new creation that we live and wait and hope and welcome and witness as community that completely belongs to Jesus Christ.

O God, continually make new what is dead in us. Enliven our hope that we may welcome and witness as those who belong to Christ. Amen.

Friday, Dec. 9

Matthew 3:1-12

In the gospel reading, we are reminded of the origin of the season of Advent as a penitential season. In some parishes and church communities, the color is still purple (repentance) rather than blue (hope). Yet both penance and hope are rooted in Jesus Christ. Self-examination and confession are a response to Christ's coming. Christ's merciful presence washes away all those things that hold us back, that keep us prisoners in ourselves. We confess those self-centered impulses. Hope defines our vigilant waiting: for the one who comes with the Holy Spirit and fire. That is, we wait for the one who continually renews our life, giving us ever-new beginnings. John the Baptist can only point to that one who is coming. Our whole lives desire to be like John the Baptist's witness: pointing to our deep hope in the one who comes, the little child leading the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion, the one in whom peace is embodied.

O God, may our lives be as John the Baptist, always pointing to the merciful love of Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, Dec. 10

"Savior of the Nations, Come" (ELW 263)

The third verse of the hymn "Savior of the Nations, Come" announces our hope—the one who stands on the morning horizon, contemplating the journey ahead. The imagery comes from Psalm 19, "In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and runs its course with joy." The sun's light and joy characterize this coming in Psalm 19, but this is not the only imagery in the psalm. It begins with the surprising lines, "day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech... their voice is not heard." The one who comes, the one who surprises us at every moment, holding and directing and leading and guiding us in every moment, is not seen or heard as we see and hear and hold ordinary things. The little child comes not to hurt or destroy but to quietly gather all humanity and all creation into one communion.

Gather us all in, O God, as one family around the manger. Amen.

Sunday, Dec. 11

“Savior of the Nations, Come” (ELW 263)

Our Advent hymn invites us into deeper contemplation of Christ’s journey. The English translation however misses a line found in the original German. In the English, Christ comes forth from God’s heart and speeds back, vanquishing death on the way. In the original, mention is also made of Christ’s descent into the realm of the dead (or hell) as part of this journey and then, from there, to God’s right hand. But what does the descent into hell have to do with Advent? God’s coming, the incarnation, touches all aspects of life. There is nothing that is left untouched, not even death, not even the realms that seem furthest away from God, not even those places inside us we dare not look at or enter ourselves. God touches all of life and death within us and our world and God touches it all without ever hurting or wounding. Only God can touch us in that way.

O God, turn our deserts into blossoming gardens. Touch all that is dead within us, raising up hope and life again. Amen.

Monday, Dec. 12

Isaiah 35:1-10

In Isaiah this week, the path or highway of God’s people is called a holy way. On this way no one shall go astray, no one will be lost, no one will be without a home; the burning sand under the feet will become a pool and there will be springs of water. God’s way, God’s holy way for which we hope is not an illusion or dream. This way expresses God’s own hope for us. God does not want human beings wandering helplessly, fleeing war, fleeing bombs and destruction, struggling to find a way even to the point of selling themselves into slavery simply for the possibility of crossing the Mediterranean in a clandestine ship. God does not want children washed up, drowned, on the shore. Hope in the one who comes is hope made active in seeking ways of peace, of welcome. Hope calls us into service so that the weak, the feeble, the homeless, sing for joy.

O God, pour out your joy upon all people that all sorrow and sighing and searching and wandering flee away. Grant everyone a home. Amen.

Tuesday, Dec. 13

Psalm 146:5-10

Psalm 146 strengthens the vision of what God is hoping for on this earth: justice for the oppressed and food for the hungry. The vision of Isaiah is also reiterated and intensified: announced in last week's reading with the wolf and lamb sleeping together and now in this week with the elimination of the roaring lion (not the elimination of creation but of violence). God is working in silent, quiet ways among us, liberating prisoners and watching over the stranger (the foreigner). But this work does not happen without us. In the giving of a glass of water, in the sharing of a meal, in the welcome to a refugee, in all these ways God is working with us towards what is our deepest Advent hope: the vision of a splendid universal communion, a vision Pope Francis has described in his encyclical "Praise be to You: In Care of our Common Home."

O God, praise be to you! Your name is holy, for you have lifted up the lowly, you fill the hungry with good things, you have looked upon us in mercy. Amen.

Wednesday, Dec. 14

James 5:7-10

James always reminds us, in no uncertain terms, that our faith and hope are nothing unless they are active in love. Faith will always bear good fruits. Martin Luther describes this connection as unrestrained. Good fruits flow from faith without us even realizing it! James describes our waiting for the coming of the Lord in very simple terms: vigilance is non-judgmental! Our life on earth is characterized by generosity as we wait. We do not judge our neighbor. We do not hold a grudge against our neighbor. We do not gossip about our neighbor behind their back. Rather, in all things, we seek the best for our neighbor. This does not mean being silent about deceit, about evil and injustice: the prophets are to be our example, James writes. But living out justice is always lived in mercy. This means finding new words, new language as we wait for the one who comes.

O God, come and water the earth of our hearts that it yields new crop, a new language that speaks of our mercy. Amen.

Thursday, Dec. 15

Matthew 11:2-11

What characterizes our hope? Our waiting and hope is twofold. It is long-term and it is immediate! Waiting for the child in a manger is waiting for the homeless one, waiting for the one who is poor and oppressed. But such a waiting cannot remain inactive! Waiting means giving a home, sharing resources, freeing from oppression. Look, Jesus tells the disciples of John the Baptist, “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.” Good news is immediate and very specific. Good news engages us here and now. But it is also long-term. Our hope is defined by God, who will make all things whole, who alone will bring all things to fulfillment. God does this on God’s own time. Our joy in believing, in hoping, in waiting is knowing that we are part of God’s plan.

Happy are they whose hope is in the Lord. Enkindle in us, O God, that deep down joy that sustains and nourishes us in this journey. Amen.

Friday, Dec. 16

Matthew 11:2-11

God relates to the world through mercy. This mercy is liberating. It frees us from all those moments when we condemn ourselves, when we allow the pressures and stresses of life to define who we are. God’s mercy enables us to see the many powers and influences and values in this world that dictate and control us. We can let go because God’s mercy is forever, God’s mercy dismantles and undoes all that binds us. God’s mercy is called good news. In these long days of waiting and worries and stress and work, filled with multiple demands on our time, let us take a moment and stop. Let’s catch our breath. God’s mercy prepares a way for us. It is not like any path we’ve traveled on: God’s mercy opens all our inner prisons and touches them with love. It holds us and brings us to a light in the middle of the night. Our own night cannot this light subdue (see verse 5 of Savior of the Nations, Come).

O God, take our darkness and through your mercy turn it into light. Amen.

Saturday, Dec. 17

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (ELW 257)

The last seven days of Advent are of a particular intensity. Many know the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” We sing it often, sometimes more than once, during Advent. Its roots are ancient. The text dates back perhaps to the 5th century. It was in regular use by the 8th century. The church has been singing this yearning cry for many centuries. Even before it was used as a hymn, the seven verses marked each of the last days before Christmas, like the first Advent season of seven days! Today, we sing and pray the second verse: O wisdom. This verse summarizes much of our meditation over the past three weeks. Wisdom comes from the mouth of the most high. Wisdom is the word, God’s word, Jesus Christ, who is coming and “ordering all things,” that is, gathering us all into himself, gathering all of creation, establishing peace and reconciliation, restoring all things. Christ does this certainly (“mightily”) and with mercy (“sweetly”). We do not fear for Christ is mercy.

O wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the most high, embracing all things far and nigh, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of wisdom.

Sunday, Dec. 18

“Savior of the Nations, Come” (ELW 263)

The original German of our Advent hymn has more verses than the six we usually sing. The sixth verse in the German text sings about restoration. As Christ is equal to the Father, we pray that his presence now in this world, in this life, in our body, brings us all back to wholeness. Restoration is cosmic! It touches not only our soul but our whole existence, spiritual and physical. In this last week of Advent, our hope and waiting are also broadened. We pray now for the restoration of all creation, for the well-being of all humanity and today especially for the physical well-being of all people, especially those who do not have enough to eat and those who are refugees, traveling the seas, seeking a new home, living in camps. The Advent litany for this day cries out, “O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel.” Calling upon Adonai or Lord, we cry out to the one who is sovereign and who alone can accomplish this restoration.

O Adonai, O Lord of might, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.

Monday, Dec. 19

Isaiah 7:10-16

Isaiah prophesies about God's surprising advent amongst us as a child. This prophecy occurs as an apparent confrontation with King Ahaz—who didn't have a very good reputation. God acts. God acts in a world that is turned in upon itself. God disrupts us in situations where we think more about ourselves and our own comfort rather than the good of our neighbor, where we build walls rather than bridges. God irrupts in our midst, not in a threatening way, not in condemnation, but as a child who is named God-with-us. The Advent Litany refers to this child as a sign who will shut the mouths of rulers, who will turn "business as usual" inside out, who will direct our gaze away from ourselves and towards the many humble, gentle, surprising ways God is already acting in the world. We are reminded again and again about that vigilant hope that marks a whole life of faith.

O root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you rulers will shut their mouths, to you all peoples make their prayer: Come and deliver us, and delay no longer! Amen.

Tuesday, Dec. 20

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Psalm 80 pleads that God come among us. This advent of God in our midst brings restoration. But as we have seen over these past few weeks, this restoration is not only a future hope, it is marvelously made manifest today: those who are blind can now see; those who are imprisoned are freed; those who could not walk now run. The psalm gives words to our deepest longing to see these acts of God, to know them in our lives, in the lives of our family and our community. Only God can bring restoration, only God can bring us back, only God can give life where death reigns. The psalm gives expression to our desire to be enveloped in the radiance of God's face: let your face shine on us.

O key of David, you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: come and lead the prisoners out, free those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death. Amen.

Wednesday, Dec. 21

Romans 1:1-7

We are called to belong to Jesus. In baptism God has claimed us as God's own. What does this mean? It means that our life is now clothed in Jesus. For centuries, clothing was an identity. We still see some vestiges of that today, including among some clergy who wear collars. Our identity, inner and outer, is Jesus Christ. Jesus is now the one who defines the shape of our life. During the Advent season, we highlight one aspect of this formation in faith: through hope. Our hope in Jesus, our hope is in God's mercy; this hope shapes the way we live in the world. It shapes us much differently than the hope for material possessions or personal advancement. Though we wait for Jesus, though we eagerly anticipate Christmas Eve, God is already with us as deep hope for a world restored, a humanity reconciled, for peace, for the dawning morning star.

O morning star, splendor of light eternal and sun of righteousness: disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadow put to flight. Amen.

Thursday, Dec. 22

Matthew 1:18-25

The Advent litany for today highlights another aspect of hope. We call upon Jesus, ruler of the nations, as cornerstone, as foundation, who makes all people one. The litany calls this deep hope desire. Our desire for Jesus is a desire for reconciliation; it is a desire for the nations and the religions in the world to lay down their arms and seek peace, a much more arduous task than going to war. We are called in our daily lives to do the same: to lay down our weapons, not forgetting but putting aside anger, disdain, hatred. Moving beyond our typical judgments—like Joseph was called by the angel to move beyond his own decision to repudiate Mary quietly—we enter into a plan, God's plan of restoration, that goes far beyond anything we ever could have hoped for or imagined.

O king of the nations, and their desire, come cornerstone that binds us in one: Restore the broken, make us new. Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay. Amen.

Friday, Dec. 23

Matthew 1:18-25

“She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” The restoration for which Psalm 80 cries out—“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved”—is now fulfilled in God’s promise, Jesus. Jesus saves from sin. We have so quickly interpreted sin as our personal failings or individual faults. But the Gospel of Matthew is not only referring to personal sin and the mending of a relationship between Jesus and “me.” Matthew writes about saving the people, the community. Sin is the breakdown of community. It is living in isolation, individually or as a self-sufficient group. God-with-us calls us out of our isolation into the beauty of a vast and splendid universal communion. May our Advent hope always throw us into the beautiful messiness of humanity, of an infant born on the road, in a crowded town, without a home, in a manger.

O Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, the hope of all peoples and their Savior: Come and save us, O Lord our God. Amen.

Saturday, Dec. 24

“Savior of the Nations, Come” (ELW 263)

Our eyes are turned to the one who is already with us. Prayer is living in the assurance that God is always with us, knowing our prayer, holding our prayer, guiding and shaping our prayer and our life. Just as Jesus is born in a little corner, a hidden away, dark corner of this world, passed over by thousands of people, so Jesus is continually born in those many dark, hidden, places of our heart, those places that even we don’t want to acknowledge, those places where we don’t want to look. Jesus touches our whole being, without exception, and without hurting. “Now your manger, shining bright, hallows night with newborn light. Night cannot this light subdue; let our faith shine ever new” (see verse 5 of Savior of the Nations, Come).

In the darkness of night, as we gather around the manger, touch us O God by your radiant light. Hold us in that communion of all those now gathered, with all those around the world and with all those who have gone before us. Amen.

Sunday, Dec. 25

John 1:1-14

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” On this festive day, we celebrate literally Christ’s mass (the old English origin of our word, Christmas). The word “mass” itself is an older word for worship in word and sacrament. Luther calls his major reform of the Sunday liturgy: The German Mass. Reflecting on this old expression helps us reframe the meaning of this day. Christ’s mass is Christ’s offering himself, God offering God’s self to the world. Christmas is the beginning of a journey, God’s own journey of giving to us, of opening a way of mercy, of immeasurable goodness. Yet, we know too, that this generosity is not always welcomed by us. Christ’s journey that begins in the manger ends on the cross. Luther notes that the wood of the manger is the wood of the cross. As a reminder of this truth, the liturgical calendar places the commemoration of the first Christian martyr the day after Christmas: Dec. 26 is St. Stephen’s Day. Today though we rejoice as we take deep into our heart this reality: the word became flesh. The word became a human being. Christ is present, born over and over again we might say, in the lives of our neighbor and within us.

Sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things. O God, raise up a new song every day, continually in our hearts. Amen.

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