



Suggestions for Advent Midweek, 2021

The practice of holding additional evening services on Wednesdays in Advent and Lent comes out of the Ember Days. One Wednesday, Friday and Saturday were set aside in each quarter of the year for a penitential and catechetical focus.ⁱ While two quarters have fallen from use, the days were expanded to the entire season of Advent and Lent. LCMS Worship offers the following suggestions for Advent Midweek services based on the theme “Behold.” This word is everywhere in the Scriptures, calling on us to straighten up our heads and pay attention. We lift up the eyes of faith at the beginning of a new Church Year, remembering Christ’s first advent among us and looking forward to His advent at the end of the world. Let us delight in His Word and “behold wondrous things out of your law” (Psalm 119:18).

Services:

The following propers have been selected for use with Vespers. If Evening Prayer is used, the first hymn may be omitted. The opening hymn is the Hymn of the Day from the previous Sunday. The Office Hymn for each week connects to the specific themes from the Old Testament reading. The other hymns connect to the season of Advent. Collects may be taken from the previous Sunday.

Media Kits Available:

Three new media kits are available from the LCMS, designed around the word “Behold.” Find the kits at lcms.org/worship/media-kit.

November 28

Opening: 332, “Savior of the Nations, Come”

Psalm: 89:1–8 or 98

Office: 340/341, “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”

Reading: Jeremiah 33:14–16

Closing: 350, “Come, Thou Precious Ransom, Come”

December 5

Opening: 344, “On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry”

Psalm: 50:1–15

Office: 334, “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You”

Reading: Malachi 3:1–7b

Closing: 513, “The Clouds of Judgment Gather”

December 12

Opening: 345, “Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding”

Psalm: 70

Office: 333, “Once He Came in Blessing”

Reading: Zephaniah 3:14–20

Closing: 515, “Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers”

December 19

Opening: 357, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Psalm: 147:1–14

Office: 342, “What Hope! An Eden Prophesied”

Reading: Micah 5:2–5a

Closing: 384, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten”

Suggestions for Preaching

November 28

- It is worth noting that we are to “behold” that God keeps His promises and is faithful to us. This stands in contrast to Israel’s unfaithfulness and inability to keep their covenant promises to God. It also stands in contrast to all other gods that we fear, love and trust — all of which will eventually fail and prove to be unfaithful.
- Contextually, the promise referred to here seems to be the promise made to David (2 Samuel 7), that God would raise up an offspring from David and establish His kingdom forever. This is a clear messianic promise. As such, God says that the promise is made not just to David but to “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer. 33:14).
- The righteous Branch will “execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer. 33:15). This also stands in direct contrast to the previous kings of Israel and Judah, as well as the rulers of our own land, who pervert justice and increase unrighteousness.
- Jesus executes justice (or judgment; the Hebrew word used is *mishpat*) and righteousness primarily by bearing God’s judgment against sinners on the cross and imputing His righteousness to all who believe in Him. This may be an opportunity to bring up the passive and active obedience of Christ.
- Therefore, “in those days” (Jer. 33:15) refers to the time of the New Testament, in which Christ reigns as King over the church by making many righteous through faith in Him (Rom. 5:19).
- The church dwells securely not because it is protected from earthly enemies by earthly rulers (as the OT people of Israel and Judah would have thought), but because Christ reigns as Lord, has reconciled us to the Father who “defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil,” and gives the peace which surpasses all understanding (Small Catechism, First Article).
- In Jeremiah 33:16, the Lord promises a new name for Himself. This is a big deal! No longer will He be known among them as “the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2), nor even as “the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them” (Jer. 16:15). When the righteous Branch comes, God wishes only to be known as “the LORD is our righteousness.”
- Both the old and new name focus on the deeds of salvation (cf. Acts 2:11). Formerly, God’s exodus was the content of our song as the great act of salvation; now, it is the perpetually new song (Psalm 98) of Christ, accomplished in His first coming. The name and our praise of that name are defined by God’s saving deeds in Christ.
- The name that God gives Himself is a clear teaching on the central article of the faith, namely that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. God alone makes us righteous.
- Psalm 89:1–8 speaks of the faithfulness of God and His promise to David to send His Holy One. Psalm 98 also extols the faithfulness of God and confesses the righteousness of God and the salvation that He reveals to His people. It ends by promising that the Lord will “judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity” (Psalm 98:9), a great connection to the Jeremiah reading.
- The Office Hymn connects to the Advent themes of beholding and Christ’s kingly reign. “Lift up your heads,” in other words, “look up,” “pay attention,” Christ is here (in Word and Sacrament) to reign as King with His salvation.

December 5

- There are two different messengers promised in verse 1. The first is John the Baptist (cf. Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27). John prepared the way for Christ by leading people to repentance and pointing them to Christ as the Lamb of God. The second messenger, “the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight” (Mal. 3:1), is certainly Jesus. He is the One in whom we must delight. This part of the promise is fulfilled in a general way in the incarnation. It is fulfilled in a more specific way when the newborn Christ is presented at the temple (Luke 2:22–38).
- While these promises were fulfilled at the time of the incarnation, they are also fulfilled today when Christ sends His messengers (pastors) to prepare people for His second coming by preaching that same message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name, as well as in His sacramental presence. We can understand that this promise will also be fulfilled when Christ returns on the Last Day in judgment.
- Therefore, there is much to “behold,” as this reading contains all three meanings of the Advent of Christ: He came, He comes today in Word and Sacrament, and He will come again.
- The rhetorical question in Malachi 3:2 deserves to be answered. “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” Those who repent and believe in Christ will be able to endure His coming and stand before Him without shame!
- The “sons of Levi” (Mal. 3:3) are the church. Christ refines and purifies His saints by bringing them to repentance and faith, and by giving them a new heart to love God and delight in His will (cf. Ezek. 1:19–20; Rom. 6 and 8). He does this through the preaching of His Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments. The fruits of this faith are the offerings that are brought to the Lord and are pleasing to Him (Mal. 3:4, cf. Rom. 12:1).
- We must remember that the judgment that Christ will execute on the Last Day will be against unbelief. However, unbelief manifests itself in the sinful fruits of the flesh such as are listed in Malachi 3:5. Compare this with Jesus’ words in Matthew 25:31–46. Refusal to repent and turn away from such sins is to reject Christ.
- On the other hand, the final judgment of Christ is good news for the church. Not only will we be delivered from our own sins, but we will also be vindicated and delivered from all those who sin against us and attack the church.
- Malachi notes that it is a good thing that God doesn’t change (3:6)! It is because God is unchanging in His steadfast love and mercy that we are delivered from sin and death. God’s unchanging love and mercy lead to His unchanging justice and hatred of sin, which lead Him to lay all sin and wrath on Christ.
- We can make a comparison between us and God. He changes not, but we have turned aside from Him (3:7). Yet, because of His unchanging nature, we can trust that if we return to Him, He will receive us in grace and mercy.
- This text offers the opportunity for catechetical preaching on the distinction between the Law and the Gospel and the different ways that God uses them to bring us to Christ, as well as on the nature of true repentance.
- The chosen Psalm and the Office Hymn connect the major themes of God coming in judgment, as well as repentance as turning toward God in faith.
- Verse 1 of the Office Hymn additionally connects to the question which Malachi asks in 3:2 about standing in God’s presence when He appears. The hymn answers this question for us by pointing us to Christ’s incarnation and subsequent Passion on our behalf.

December 12

- In the historic lectionary, the Third Sunday in Advent is “Gaudete” Sunday. This reading from Zephaniah carries on this theme of rejoicing. It also continues the Advent theme of the coming of Christ into our midst (Zeph. 3:15, 17) now through the Word and Sacrament, and again on the Last Day for judgment and restoration.
- Even as God has threatened the coming judgment of Babylon against Judah, He promises that He will take away their judgment (Zeph. 3:15). This is not simply a promise of return from exile but a promise of the coming Christ who will take away all judgment against sin and iniquity by bearing this judgment in Himself.
- Note especially the present tense of verse 15. Even though the exile is decades away, and the coming of Christ several centuries away, these promises stand as completed in the eyes of the Lord.
- We rejoice that Christ has come and taken God’s judgment from us, and that He continues to come into our midst (vv. 15, 17), granting us the remission of our sins.
- We are also called to cast away our fear (vv. 15, 16), because Christ is in our midst and has driven away our enemies by His death and resurrection. These enemies are sin, death and the devil (Small Catechism Second Article), “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).
- Not only are we called to rejoice, but God Himself rejoices and exults over us as we receive the salvation of Christ (vv. 17; cf. Luke 15:1–10).
- God gathers those who mourn under the weight of their sins to the festival wherein their reproach is taken away (v. 18). This promise is fulfilled in two ways. First, we are invited to the Supper, which is a “foretaste of the feast to come.” Second is the actual “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9ff) where all the redeemed will dwell with Christ forever.
- Verse 18 connects to the Week 2 reading from Malachi in the promise that on the Last Day God will bring judgment on those who oppress the church (see Mal. 3:5).
- “The lame and ... the outcast” can be understood both literally and metaphorically (Zeph. 3:19). Those who are physically lame will literally be restored in their flesh to walk, and those who are outcast will be gathered into the communion of the saints in the resurrection of all flesh. Metaphorically, every sinner is spiritually lame and cast out of the presence of God. At the coming of Christ, we will be restored to the image of God in both body and soul and gathered back to the perfect and full presence of God.
- The believer is hated and despised by the world in this life. Yet, on the Last Day the believers will be exalted before the eyes of the unbelieving world when God “[restores] your fortunes” (v. 20), that is, when He grants them the crown of eternal life (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10). The story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19ff) is a fine illustration of this.
- This week, we “behold” especially that Christ will come again and bring full restoration to the believer, while at the same time bringing judgment on those who reject Him and His church.
- Like Zephaniah, Psalm 70 anxiously anticipates the coming of Christ and connects to the themes of rejoicing over God’s coming salvation and deliverance, and the judgment and shaming of the unbelievers.
- The Office Hymn contains all the major themes of this reading from Zephaniah. The first coming of Christ, our current and future redemption, the feast of the Lord’s Supper, and the coming judgment are all included.

December 19

- While the word “behold” is not specifically used in this text, there is still much that should cause us to sit up and pay attention. Particularly, this reading from Micah reminds us that God not only keeps His promises, but He does so in remarkable and unexpected ways.
- Bethlehem was a small village and the clans of Judah who dwelt in the region of Ephrathah were of little significance. Yet, God chose this insignificant place and people to bring forth His greatest act of redemption, the birth of His Son. This theme points us to the humiliation of Christ (cf. Isaiah 53:2; Phil. 2:6–8); the foolishness of the Gospel; and the fact that God chooses to exalt those who are weak, insignificant and sinful (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–29).
- There is also the promise at the end of verse 2 that the coming ruler would be none other than God Himself. The notion that His “coming forth is from of old” (Micah 5:2) goes far past the promises to David or even to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15), to the understanding that the coming One has no beginning and no end (cf. John 1:1–3; Eph. 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8).
- As is in Week 1, there is a comparison being made between the kings of Judah, who have failed to shepherd the people of Israel in righteousness and truth and to keep them united in one fold. Unlike these false shepherds, Jesus has come as the true Shepherd of His people (cf. John 10). Ironically, the people of Israel followed the false shepherds but rejected the true

prophets whom God had sent. Just so, they would reject the Good Shepherd at His coming.

- We might note the connection to David. Not only is David from Bethlehem, but David was also a shepherd when God called him.
- Also, we remember that the name Bethlehem means “place of bread.” As the Good Shepherd, Christ feeds His people with living bread from heaven (cf. John 6).
- Christ is our peace because He makes peace by His blood (Col. 1:20).
- Verse 4 points us to the Last Day. While we currently dwell in the peace of the Lord, which surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7), we look forward to the day when we will dwell in the fullness of His security and be united in heaven.
- Psalm 147 contains many of the themes mentioned above. We are encouraged to sing our praises to God (v. 1) because Christ has come acting as the Good Shepherd who gathers the outcasts of Israel and cares for them (vv. 2–3). We praise Him because of His power, which He uses to exalt the humble and bring us peace (vv. 4–5, 14).
- The Office Hymn, especially verse 2, contains many of the same themes as the text. In addition to connecting us to Bethlehem, the hymn reminds us that the promise of Christ’s coming has been from the beginning, of the peace that Jesus brings, and the fact that He brings this peace through His humiliation.

ⁱ See *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, p. 21, for more information (Concordia Publishing House, 2008), cph.org/c-2863-treasury-of-daily-prayer.aspx. A simplified Latin mnemonic

for remembering the Ember Weeks is “*Lente, Pente, Luci, Cruci*” — the full weeks of Lent 1, Pentecost, St. Lucy Day (Advent) and Holy Cross Day.