



Suggestions for Advent Midweek, 2022

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 hymn “Once He Came in Blessing” and the theme of our Lord’s three advents: once in the flesh, continually in His Word and Sacraments, and at the end of the world for judgment and resurrection — all for us!

Services

The following propers have been selected for use with Vespers. If Evening Prayer is used, the first hymn may be omitted. The hymn “Once He Came in Blessing” is intentionally repeated each week and may be highlighted also by a choir or group of singing children. Other hymns connect to the season of Advent and to the feasts of the apostles that fall on Wednesday this year.

Daily Table Grace

This year’s daily table devotions for use in the home also focus around the hymn “Once He Came in Blessing.” Find this resource and more at lcms.org/advent.

November 30—St. Andrew

Opening: 517, “By All Your Saints,” st. 1, 5, 3

Psalm: 40 (*antiphon*, v. 7)

Office: 333, “Once He Came in Blessing”

Reading: John 1:35–42a

Closing: 548, “Thanks to Thee, O Christ”

December 7

Opening: 602, “The Gifts Christ Freely Gives”

Psalm: 63 (*antiphon*, v. 8)

Note: Psalm 63 is not in the LSB Pew Edition

Office: 333, “Once He Came in Blessing”

Reading: John 15:1–11

Closing: 340 or 341, “Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”

December 14

Opening: 508, “The Day Is Surely Drawing Near”

Psalm: 50 (*antiphon*, v. 4, 5 or 6)

Office: 333, “Once He Came in Blessing”

Reading: Daniel 7:9–18

Closing: 351, “Creator of the Stars of Night”

December 21—Thomas

Opening: 517, “By All Your Saints,” st. 1, 6, 3

Psalm: 70 (*antiphon*, v. 1)

Office: 333, “Once He Came in Blessing”

Reading: Revelation 22:13–21 (*or John 20:24–29*)

Closing: 348, “The King Shall Come”

Suggestions for Preaching

November 30—Christ's 1st Coming (St. Andrew)

- St. Andrew has long been connected with Advent. The first Sunday in Advent will always be the Sunday closest to his day. He “leads us” in this way to Christ each Church Year, in imitation of the Gospel for his feast, where he led his brother Peter to Jesus (1 John 1:42).
- The Gospel for the day fits well with the first stanza of “Once He Came in Blessing” and the theme of Christ’s first coming. Here John the Baptist announces in his brief sermon a summary of what Christ’s advent will consist in: God’s Lamb, sacrificed for the sins of the world. The Son of God takes up human flesh for this purpose and office (Messiah/Christ).
- It would be excellent to expand, from the title “Lamb of God,” the purpose and benefits of Christ’s first advent:
 - How He has taken up human flesh so that He may die.
 - How He is appointed by the Father so that all believe in Him, as the Old Testament foretold.
 - What “Christ” and “Messiah” mean, namely, that He is anointed for God’s divine purpose.
 - How Christ is a fulfillment of the sacrificial lambs of the tabernacle and temple, taking our sins away and making atonement by His blood.
- The sermon might borrow rhetorically on Andrew’s answer to Jesus, that he is seeking to stay with Him. So, our desire also is to stay with Him. In this sense, perhaps we are frustrated that Christ has ascended and is no longer “with us” as He was with the disciples. (Compare Mary Magdalene, John 20). But it was necessary that His first advent be a “**Once**” event from start to finish:
 - Once He became man (and has not ceased to be true God, true man);
 - Once-and-for-all He died, in contrast to other lambs (c.f. Hebrews);
 - Once He died and rose, never to die again (1 Cor. 15); and
 - Once He accomplished our salvation.
- Yet, the fruits of this “Once” advent are enduring. Note: Next week will consider His continual advent in the Word and Sacraments, so it may be wise to point ahead without taking too much from it.
- Psalm 40 speaks prophetically concerning Christ.
 - See the use of this psalm in Hebrews 10.
 - Christ comes (advent) to do the Lord’s will.
 - Sacrifice and offering not desired: This is a significant statement, given that God Himself commanded those sacrifices and offerings. They are not desired in themselves alone. The sacrifice of Christ must displace them, as a body is preferred to the shadow it casts (Heb. 10:1).
 - Christ is the Lamb of God who is desired, who fulfills the Law fully in our stead and who preaches His righteousness to faith.
 - Andrew may be seen in v. 16, that he has what he seeks in Jesus (lit. “the Lord saves”).
- The closing hymn was originally an Easter hymn. With the first stanza omitted in *LSB*, it becomes a summary thanksgiving for the Lord’s full ministry, and thus suitable for this first coming. It would not injure the coherence of the service to include that first stanza (*TLH* 207).

December 7—Christ in Word and Sacrament

- The second stanza of the hymn focuses on the continual coming of Christ in His Word and Sacraments, “**Now**...”
- John 15 has been chosen as a text to treat the Lord’s ongoing work and sustenance for our life and benefit (if you *abide* in me).
 - Note: While there is not one single passage that directly treats the Means of Grace in a general way, it will be helpful for the pastor to marshal the classic texts

on the Word/Gospel/Absolution (Rom. 10; Col. 3; Luke 24; John 20; etc.), Baptism (John 3; Titus 2; Rom. 6; etc.), and the Lord's Supper (the Gospels; 1 Cor. 10–11) to speak directly to what the Lord has given.

- The Lord describes Himself as a vine, which constantly continues to nourish and sustain His branches. His Word cleanses us and grafts us into Him.
- The fruit (good works and the new obedience) grows from this sustenance, not of itself on its own.
- See especially the Apology of the Augsburg Confession on love and fulfilling the Law (Ap V/III) and the Formula of Concord on good works (IV). Note the “inchoate/beginning” language and that these works are summarized as “love,” the fulfillment of the Law (John 15:9–10).
- In the second stanza of “Once He Came in Blessing,” it may be helpful to bring out the illustration from the stanza in *LSB*: While it certainly refers generally to the Lord's Word, it is especially vivid in describing His nourishment as “manna” and as a “pledge of peace” in the food from heaven, evocative of the Pax Domini, where the pastor presents the body and blood of Christ to the congregation as the distribution is about to begin. To such a pledge of peace we say, “Amen,” and sing our hymn of praise to the Lamb as we come forward to be nourished.
- The opening hymn (“The Gifts Christ Freely Gives”) is simple and catechetical on the Means of Grace.
- Psalm 63 puts the promise of the Lord's constant presence and blessing into the voice of faith that seeks it.
 - The sanctuary (temple/tabernacle), which for the New Testament is found in the Word of God where He gives His Spirit and truth (John 4), is the source of this continual mercy, by virtue of the atoning sacrifice.

- The steadfast love and mercy of God is better than life. It gives and sustains life now and into eternity.
- The Lord feeds, shelters and upholds us by His hand.
- Psalm 111 would be a suitable substitute available in the *LSB Pew Edition* (*antiphon*, v. 9).
- The closing hymn may be sung to whichever tune is familiar to the congregation.
 - Consider especially its ongoing “Now” focus in stanza 3: Where Christ is confessed, the King is coming continually with His joy to bless these homes.
 - The references to the heart are quite appropriate considering the theme. The preacher will want to show clearly the means of the Lord's entry into the heart. Faith is created and sustained by His Word and Sacraments, the very faith which receives their benefits (see *LSB* 580).
 - The fruits of such faith and constant grace are the beginnings of new life, which the Holy Spirit works in us by His means.

December 14—Christ's 2nd Coming for Judgment

- The third stanza of “Once He Came in Blessing” parallels our Lord's teaching in various places, where Christ's return for judgment “**Soon**” is both a warning to the wicked and a call of endurance and delight to the righteous.
- Daniel 7 is a fine text from which to preach a catechetical sermon on the return for judgment.
 - The Father's throne of judgment is seen, surrounded by myriad angels.
 - Fire is significant of holiness, purity and fear.
 - The books of judgment (records, truth) are open.
 - The Son of Man (Christ) is given authority and dominion, both for judgment and for reign.

- There is no limit to His kingdom, but all nations (Jews and Gentiles) are brought into His service. It is eternal and unending, since even death cannot conquer this Son of Man.
- There is judgment on the beasts (and those who would stand in their sway), but there is an encouragement and blessing pronounced for the “saints of the Most High,” that they will share the kingdom and dominion given to the Son.
- For detailed background and interpretation on the beasts and the identity of the “little horn” and the office of the Antichrist, consult the commentary on Daniel by Dr. Andrew Steinman from Concordia Publishing House, especially page 547ff.
- Also compare Revelation 20 and its context.
- The catechism’s simple explanation of the Last Day in the Third Article is useful in treating simply what some churches wish to make complex: “On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead [for judgment], and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.”
- The opening hymn (508) is the quintessential Lutheran chorale about the end times, and a fine summary of the teaching. It draws together many Scripture references to paint an accurate picture of the resurrection and judgment as well as the hope and confidence of the Christian: Christ’s righteousness, not our own. In the same way, the preacher should feel free to draw from the whole Bible in his sermon.
- Psalm 50 speaks of the Lord’s judgment not only at the last, but also in the present:
 - The Lord’s first coming to redeem and His continuing deliverance of that redemption cannot be mocked by indifference. Here is the negative example of the children of Israel, which is a warning to all: The Lord will not abide hypocrites forever.
 - We see that the judgment falls also on His own people, and so we are led to

repentance by this warning. “Mark this, you who forget God!”

- See also how the Lord gathers His faithful, who are set apart for Him by means of the testament made by means of a true sacrifice, namely, Christ’s.
- The closing hymn, like the hymn of the series, covers all the comings of Christ, but the penultimate stanza especially focuses on the return for judgment. A choir might sing this in alternation with the congregation, especially making use of unison singing. This hymn is remarkably calming in a quiet and dark evening church service.

December 21—Maranatha (St. Thomas)

- The final stanza of *LSB* 333 can be summed up in the single word from Revelation, “Maranatha,” which we translate most often as “**Come** [Lord Jesus].” Rather than teaching and admonishing one another (Col. 3), the final stanza is offered as a prayer directly to Christ, for the fulfillment of what He has promised and that He would keep us in the faith until we receive it at our death and on the Last Day.
- The Scripture from Revelation 22 is the final blessing of Jesus and of His apostle in Revelation — also the salient final words of the Bible. It is worth teaching and explaining in some detail.
 - How Christ is the Alpha and Omega.
 - The restoration to paradise (tree of life) through the blood that washes us clean.
 - Separation from unbelief, temptation and sin is our desire also.
 - The reply of the Church, speaking in the Holy Spirit and faith, looking eagerly to the Bridegroom’s return.
 - See Isaiah 55 and the free and gracious invitation to the Lord’s kingdom.
 - The warning of John, echoed in St. Paul: “[Don’t] go beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4). Likewise, that we contend for the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude).

- He is coming, and blessed are those whom the Master finds waiting (Luke 12; Matt. 24).
- Note: The preacher may wish to extend the reading back to v. 10 to address the attitude of a Christian who awaits Christ's coming: eager for His return to be free of sin and the world, but also at work in faith, prayer and good works. This is the life of faith, which the Son of Man wishes to find among His own (Luke 18).
- If it is preferred to observe St. Thomas Day at this service, the appointed Gospel from John 20 may be read.
 - Connection to the hymn of the series may be made in the confession of Thomas. We wish to believe and confess Christ our whole lives through. We are among those who have not seen and yet believe that Jesus is Lord and God.
 - Christ's wounds have made peace for us (Col. 1) and will be seen also at His coming (Rev. 7, *passim*). In the risen Christ's wounds, then, we see both the release from our sins, which is received by faith in the Gospel, and the promise that we will be released from sin's effects and power forever in the resurrection.
- Psalm 70 was included already in Psalm 40, used in the first week. It makes a fine bookend to the series.
- The well-known opening versicle can be understood in the context of Advent with the explanation of the Lord's Prayer's last petition: We pray, in summary, that God would deliver us from all evil both now and at the last.
- The deliverance from our enemies is reflected also in Revelation 22.
- We are eager to join the final victory song in eternal life and will sing psalms until then.
- "Do not delay" is the form our waiting takes, as Christ and the apostles say elsewhere: not a lazy or indifferent waiting, but eagerly and expectantly, like a mother expecting a child.
- With the Magnificat, the "O" Antiphon for December 21 may be used: Dayspring (See *LSB* 357).
 - A feature of the "O" Antiphons is their consistent petition in the last phrase: "Come."
 - These antiphons may be sung as they appear with simple psalm tones or used in other settings and translations, which competent church musicians will be able to identify.
- Note: Many other suitable Advent hymns may be substituted for this service.

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.