



## Midweek Advent Service Suggestions – 2023

*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.<sup>1</sup> 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.*

*This year's services focus on the life and ministry of St. John the Baptist, the one appointed by God to prepare the way for the promised Messiah by calling sinners to repentance, even to the point of martyrdom. For those congregations following the One-Year Lectionary, the Third Sunday in Advent, wherein the account of John the Baptist in prison is read, falls in sequence with these three midweek readings.*

*When Christmas Eve occurs on a Sunday, there is traditionally a special opportunity to observe the Vigil of Christmas on Sunday morning, in place of the customary Fourth Sunday in Advent. (Many of the propers appointed in Lutheran Service Book for Christmas Eve are derived from these propers for the Vigil of Christmas, the last service of Advent. Where the Sunday morning service is observed as the Vigil of Christmas, it is still a service of Advent, while the first evening service begins the church's celebration of the Lord's Nativity.)*

*Service propers and sermon suggestions for observing the Vigil of Christmas at the morning service on Sunday, December 24 are provided for those who wish to take advantage of this option.*

### 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 each week is the ancient Office Hymn for Advent: "Creator of the Stars of Night." Collects may be taken from the previous Sunday.

### December 6

**Opening:** 351, "Creator of the Stars of Night"

**Psalm:** 113

**Office:** 936, "Sing Praise to the God of Israel"

**Readings:** Malachi 4:1–6  
Luke 1:57–80

**Closing:** 346, "When All the World Was Cursed"

### December 13

**Opening:** 351, "Creator of the Stars of Night"

**Psalm:** 112

**Office:** 344, "On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry"

**Readings:** Malachi 3:1–4  
Luke 3:1–20

**Closing:** 345, "Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding"

### December 20

**Opening:** 351, "Creator of the Stars of Night"

**Psalm:** 71:1–8

**Office:** 337, "The Night Will Soon Be Ending"

**Readings:** 1 Kings 19:1–8  
Mark 6:14–29

**Closing:** 518, "By All Your Saints in Warfare," stanzas 1, 24, 3

## Vigil of Christmas, Sunday, December 24

### Introit

At evening you shall know the LORD will come  
and | save us,\*

and in the morning you shall see the glory | of the  
LORD.

The earth is the LORD's and the full- | ness thereof,\*  
the world and those who | dwell therein,  
Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O |  
ancient doors,\*

that the King of glory | may come in.

Who is this King of | glory?\*

The LORD of hosts, He is the King of | glory!

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son \***

**and to the Holy | Spirit;**

**as it was in the be- | ginning,\***

**is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

At evening you shall know the LORD will come  
and | save us,\*

and in the morning you shall see the glory | of the  
LORD.

*(Antiphon: Exodus 16:6–7; Psalm 24:1, 7, 10)*

### Collect of the Day

O God, You make us glad with the yearly  
remembrance of the birth of Your only-begotten  
Son, Jesus Christ. Grant that as we joyfully receive  
Him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence  
behold Him when He comes to be our Judge;  
through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives  
and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God,  
now and forever. (L05)

### Old Testament

Isaiah 7:10–14

### Gradual

At evening you shall know the LORD will come  
and | save us,\*

and in the morning you shall see the glory | of the  
LORD.

Give ear, O Shepherd of | Israel,\*

You who lead Joseph | like a flock!

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, | shine  
forth

before Ephraim and Benjamin and Ma- | nasseh.\*  
*(Exodus 16:6–7; Psalm 80:1–2a)*

### Psalm 24

### Epistle

Romans 1:1–6

### Verse

Tomorrow shall the iniquity of the earth be a- |  
bolished,\*

And the Savior of the world shall reign | over us.  
*(Liturgical Text)*

### Gospel

Matthew 1:18–21

### Hymns

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

**Of the Day:** 359, “Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming”

**Distribution:**

621, “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”

357, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

356, “The Angel Gabriel”

**Closing:** 352, “Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord”

### Preface

Advent (*LSB Altar Book*, p. 225)

## Suggestions for Preaching

### December 6

- The Old Testament ends with God's promise to send Elijah the prophet to "turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6). This is the very passage referenced by the archangel Gabriel at the annunciation to Zechariah (Luke 1:16) as he offered the daily prayers for Israel, including the hope for God to send the promised Messiah.
- John's task of calling sinners to repentance and faith in the coming Christ is further seen in the closing phrase of Malachi 4:6. The day of "utter destruction" will come upon all who refuse to repent and trust in the righteousness of God that is revealed in Christ. This is part of the basis of what is prayed in the proper preface of Advent, which speaks of John the Baptist's preparation of the way of the Lord by "calling sinners to repentance that they might escape from the wrath to be revealed when He comes again in glory."
- While Zechariah was rendered mute for his unbelief of the angel's words, it is at his direction to name the child "John" that his lips are loosed to sing the praises of God. With John's birth and naming, he already begins his work as his father's heart is turned in repentant faith to recognize what God has now begun to accomplish.
- The very meaning of John's name ("Yahweh is Gracious") indicates his role as the herald of God's grace in the Messiah.
- The people who heard the news of John's birth and naming said, "What then will this child be?" We do not need to wonder, for his identity and role has already been set forth for him (see Mal. 4:5–6; Luke 1:15–17).
- Zechariah sings the *Benedictus* by direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit and in recognition that what was promised in Malachi's prophecy is now coming to fulfillment. With the birth of the Forerunner, the coming of the Messiah will soon follow.
- The *Benedictus* looks back over Israel's history to the promises concerning the Christ that God made to David (v. 69) and Abraham (v. 73), and through all the utterances of the prophets (v. 70). It then looks forward to what John will do to prepare the way of the Lord, chiefly by giving "knowledge of salvation ... in the forgiveness of sins" (v. 77), speaking of John's preaching of repentance and his baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3).
- The basis of all God's activity — in Israel's past, the events of Luke 1 and our own day — is His "tender compassion," (*splagchna eleous*). This is not His ordinary mercy by which He grants and sustains all things as creating Father, but His intimate, profound and limitless mercy from His innermost part, seen in the Sunrise (or Dayspring) that dawns from on high. This is a reference to Mal. 4:2, which speaks of the Messiah as the Sun of Righteousness. He is the revelation of God's deepest mercy and compassion.
- John's childhood, summarized in v. 80, ends in the harsh wilderness, which is where he next appears in Luke 3.
- The appointed Psalm, 113, anticipates Zechariah's *Benedictus*. They both speak of the blessedness of the Lord for His work for His people. The Hebrew word used in v. 2 (*brk*) is equivalent to the Greek word used in Luke 1:68 (*eulogeo*).<sup>ii</sup>
- Stanza 3 of the opening hymn sings of Christ as "the Bridegroom of the bride." John speaks of himself as the "friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice" (John 3:29). This happened already before the births of John and Jesus, when Mary greeted Elizabeth, and the child John leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb (Luke 1:44). With John's birth, the way is about to be prepared for Christ, the Bridegroom, to claim His Bride, the holy Church.
- In the Office Hymn the congregation sings Zechariah's hymn of praise as their own.
- The closing hymn begins by speaking of the preparatory task of John the Baptist, seen even in his leaping as an unborn child over the presence of the Lord. Also mentioned in the hymn is John as the "new Elijah," who was tasked with testifying to the Christ. It ends with the prayer that we, too, would receive John's call to repentance and to follow in the Savior's way.

## December 13

- Malachi 3 prophesies of John the Baptist as the messenger who will prepare the way of God Himself, who will then come as “the messenger of the covenant” which will be the cause of delight for His people. This is the very message of the angel to the shepherds at Jesus’ birth: “I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10).
- John preaches repentance, but in so doing prepares the way for God to establish the new covenant that is not a covenant of death through the inevitable condemnation of the Law, but rather is a testament of the forgiveness of sins, established in Christ’s blood. By His sacrifice, the people of God are purified, able to offer the pleasing and pure sacrifices and fruits of faith.
- Just as Luke locates Christ’s birth in the context of ancient history (2:1), John’s ministry happens in a real time and place.
- While Matthew and Mark describe John’s famous Elijah-esque appearance and strange diet (see Matt. 3:4; Mark 1:6), Luke makes no mention of John’s dress or food. Front and center is John’s preaching, which he cries out in the wilderness. Though we call him “John the Baptist,” what defines John is his preaching. He only baptizes because he is first and foremost a preacher whose words lead many of his hearers to baptism.
- To those who will not repent, whether because of trust in their genealogy as in John’s day, or for any other reason, John speaks the word of warning to the impenitent. John and all Scripture call out: “If you think that you are a saint in and of yourself, repent! If you know that you are a sinner, repent!” There is no escape from the wrath of God and eternal fire than through Christ alone.
- John’s preaching of repentance fulfills the prophecies not only of Malachi, but also Isaiah (40:3–5), quoted by Luke. The vivid geographic descriptions illustrate the radical degree of repentance that is worked by God. Those who once saw themselves as lofty and exalted are brought low in humility. Those who are lowly and weak, oppressed, and under the fearful burden of condemnation for their sins are raised up by the forgiveness of sins. The preacher is given an excellent occasion here to treat the topic of repentance, not as a work or emotional feeling manufactured in us, but wrought by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Law. John provides a model for the preacher in showing hearers that the ultimate warning against sin is the wrath of God and eternal fire.
- John’s preaching also gives clear examples of the fruits of repentance that directly relate to the life of the Christian in the world. The openness to a new life flows out of baptism, and yet the knowledge of what to do in every situation, how to walk in the way of repentance and faith, is not automatically known. Here is great opportunity for the preacher to treat the topic of fruits of repentance as the *result* and not the *cause* of forgiveness, as well as the role of the pastor as *seelsorger*, the doctor of the soul, who is given to also offer counsel and encouragement in the Christian life.<sup>iii</sup>
- As great and powerful as John’s preaching and baptism are, they are preparatory and, thus, penultimate. John himself speaks of the greater One to come (Luke 3:16).
- The opening hymn speaks of the Lord’s coming in glory to judge the living and the dead (sts. 4–5), reminding us as John did, of the need to repent and trust in Christ and His forgiveness as the only way of deliverance from sin and condemnation.
- Psalm 112 speaks of the blessedness of the man who fears the Lord (fear here in the sense of the “fear, love and trust,” in God that describes faith), and who demonstrates that faith in the fruits of godly living, specifically steadfast faith in the face of the world and love for the neighbor. This psalm corresponds well with John’s preaching.
- The Office Hymn as well as the closing hymn summarize the preaching of John, and even imitate him as they call us to repentance and then in faith direct us to the Christ, who comes now to forgive us our sins and who will shield us with His mercy when He comes again in glory.

## December 20

- Elijah put all the false prophets of Baal not only to shame, but to death. Their sponsor, Queen Jezebel, threatened God's prophet with similar death, and so Elijah flees into the wilderness filled with fear. When hearts do not repent and cling to Christ alone, the preaching of repentance and faith in the one true God gives rise to violent hatred.
  - John and Jesus, whose way John prepared, are inseparable. Their preaching is the same: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). John is hated by the Pharisees because he called them a brood of vipers for their impenitence and trust in themselves. He is arrested by Herod for his daring to call a king to repentance for adultery, and he is killed because of the scorn of Herodias. Some might say John could have softened his tone, said things in a better way to avoid trouble, but there is no gentle way to kill sin, no kind way to expose and kill the old Adam. Sin cannot be reformed or persuaded away; it must be killed. The same preaching is seen in Jesus. He does not only match John's fire, He exceeds it. He tells us to treat our sin as though it were a gangrenous limb, to cut it off and throw it away. Those Pharisees who refuse to repent Jesus calls hypocrites, blind guides, sons of hell, whitewashed tombs and a brood of vipers. The cities of Galilee which refused to repent and receive Him, Jesus says will have a harder time on the Day of Judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah. This is the judgment against all who refuse to repent, it lies upon all who heed neither John nor Jesus.
  - As in John's time so also today the church sounds forth the call to repentance for sins against marriage. As our Lord, we call all to repent of their sins and to trust in Him, for outside of His sacrifice for us there is only wrath and judgment.
  - We admire John's boldness and delight in fiery preaching against our ungodly age, but we must not forget to hear the call to repent with our own ears. The words of John's sermon to Herod, "It is not lawful..." ought to be directed to hearers today: "It is not lawful to covet the treasures of this world."
- "It is not lawful to fear men more than God and so stay silent." "It is not lawful to hurt others, to refuse to defend the weak."
- Do not be like Herod and attempt to silence the call to repent. You will lose more than any kingdom you have concocted, you will lose more than your head, more than your bodily life, but both your body and soul.
  - This text gives the preacher the opportunity to teach concerning persecution. There is a misperception that persecution can only be for the sake Gospel in its proper sense. While this is the ultimate cross a Christian may bear, John's imprisonment and martyrdom show that Christians also suffer persecution for confessing the truth and goodness of God's Law.
  - John and Jesus are both also murdered unjustly, for speaking the Word of God, in an attempt to silence their calls to repentance. Here, too, John prepares the way for the One who is greater than he. His whole life and death is a finger that points us to the Christ. John is beheaded for the sake of defending holy marriage. Jesus is crucified that He might claim all humanity anew and take each of us to be a part of His Bride, the Holy Church.
  - The second stanza of the opening hymn speaks of Christ coming to provide the cure for the curse of death that lies upon the ruined race. Because of Christ's death for John and for all mankind, the martyrs and all the faithful departed await in heaven for the hope of the resurrection of their bodies.
  - In Psalm 71, the Christian prays for help, deliverance and preservation when persecuted and seized by the wicked who hate the righteous. Even in midst of suffering and persecution, the mouths of Christ's saints are filled with His praise, and thus the martyrs give witness and glory to Christ even by offering their lives.
  - The Office Hymn, written by Jochen Klepper who suffered under Nazi rule, does not ignore or easily set aside the dark trials that beset the child of God. Rather, in midst of such trials and sadness, we are comforted by God's promise to dwell with us, seen in greater beauty through His incarnation as Mary's Son to bear all things for us.

## December 24

- The great anticipation of the Feast of Christ's Nativity is felt in the propers of this last service of Advent. Drawing on the words of Moses in Exodus 16 before the giving of the manna from heaven, the antiphon of today's Introit speaks of the knowledge of the Lord's salvation at the evening service, and looks forward to the next morning's basking in the glory of the Lord through its readings from Exodus 40 and John 1, which both speak of that glory, first dwelling on earth in the tabernacle, and now in the flesh of God incarnate.
- A clear message of Advent rings out in the Collect of the Day. We ask that as we are joyful at the celebration of the yearly remembrance of God's only-begotten Son, we may also behold Him with confidence as He comes on the Last Day for the final Judgment. At this service, the preacher has a clear opportunity to teach how the celebration of the Lord's Nativity prepares us for His coming in glory.
- As with every chief service, the heart of this service is seen in the Gospel, with the account of the angel allaying Joseph of Nazareth's fears over Mary's pregnancy with the news that she has conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that her Child will save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).
- Of great importance is pointing out the direct messianic prophecy in the Old

Testament reading from Isaiah 7, which, contrary to the assertions of many modern interpreters, is exclusively fulfilled in the virgin conception and birth of our Lord Jesus by Mary. He alone is Immanuel: "God with us." With Matthew 1 we are given two *sedes doctrinae* of the virgin birth.

- That God comes to be with us illustrates the working of salvation; it is not by man climbing up to God, but by God coming down to us, dwelling in our flesh, that He might reconcile and bring us to God.
- Central to this Gospel is the identification of the Child to be born by His name: Jesus ("The LORD Saves"). Mary's Son is the LORD, Yahweh, the God of Israel. His name equally identifies His work: "He will save His people from their sins" (v. 21).<sup>iv</sup> Important for this service (and for all the Christmas services to come) is that the preacher not just set forth the Person of Mary's Child — He is true God and true man, God in human flesh — but also the saving purpose He has come to accomplish for us. This is how what we ask in the Collect of the Day will be true. When He comes again in glory, we will behold Him with confidence because we see Him as the One who has saved us from our sins.

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<sup>i</sup> See *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, p. 21, for more information (Concordia Publishing House, 2008), [cph.org/c-2863-treasury-of-daily-prayer.aspx](http://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.

<sup>ii</sup> See also the fine word study and comparison of similar words by A. Just in *Luke 1:1-9:50* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996), 73.

<sup>iii</sup> Especially helpful in the study of the fruits of repentance: Apology XIIb (VI); Johann Gerhard, *On the Gospel and Repentance*, § 140.

<sup>iv</sup> Gibbs notes that with "the people" "called *his*, that is, *Jesus'* people," Christ is "in the position of God himself." An explicit indication of Christ's divinity. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1-11:1* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 107n.