

Our lesson today is one of my favorites, and yet I can't come close to wholly appreciating just how wonderful it is. Why? My life has been so good, too good, too easy to wholly appreciate how wonderful God's promise here is. Now someone like Christa or Claire - as a young girl Christa heard the bullets whizzing by as she escaped from East Germany to West Berlin; as a young teen Claire was shepherding her young siblings, scrounging along the railroad tracks for rotten potatoes no one else would touch, as they were packed into railroad freight cars and shuttled through Nazi Germany. They would better appreciate the promise and picture in our lesson. Or our brothers and sisters in Ukraine as they try to survive in war-torn Ukraine. Or our brothers and sisters living in the hood, trying to survive as landlords abuse them and gangs harass them. We have it so good. And yet there are times and ways we can appreciate our lesson.

Our lesson is God's promise of rescue - **“Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”** It comes when this world is at its worst, when God, in his judgment, finally lets evil run amok ... when the world drips with the bloodshed of violence; and death covers everything with blindness, sickness, and a desolate emptiness. Sound familiar? In the news? In the people around you?

Listen to Isaiah! “God is bringing a new life!” **“The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.”** Can you imagine such a complete change? From Death Valley desert to lush, green forest ... from Badlands empty to full of life and color ... from blah to wow with joy. Instead of a land dark with death, a land shining with the glory of the LORD - God on duty, right there where you need him! That's the change God has coming for you!

Listen to Isaiah! “God is coming to rescue his people!” **“Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.”** God is coming with retribution, and vengeance! God is coming to make people pay! After all the years of evil running wild; after all the years of people thumbing their nose at God; after all the years of the world stepping on God's people ... God is coming to the rescue! Christ is coming to stand up for his people, to crush the devil's head. It's going to be payback time for God! He will have his way, and anybody and everybody in his way will be crushed!

On that day - when God comes in retribution and vengeance, when God comes for payback, to crush and destroy - won't it be great to know God's forgiveness? To know that God has come to rescue us, to fight for us instead of against us, to cradle us instead of crush us?

On that day, God would have good reason to come after us for payback. I think of how I made my parents pay for being faithful Christian parents - when they led the home devotions, I made them pay; when they put God first with Bible memory work, when they put God first with church and Bible Study and Sunday School ahead of my priorities, I made them pay. Sound familiar? God would have good reason to come after me for payback. I think of how my home congregation gave me so much - and then I got my offering statement, \$2 after a summer of 70 hour work-weeks. I remember walking by the peeling paint at my home church wondering "why doesn't somebody do something about that?" while I did nothing about it. Sound familiar? God would have good reason to come after me for payback. I remember - no I don't, I don't even know how many of God's family I have hurt with my fighting, my grumbling, my lazing. God would have good reason to come after me for payback. Payback worse than the taste of hell we read about in the news; payback worse than any vengeance we might imagine.

That's what makes God's forgiveness so great. Instead of seeing Christ come after us with the ax and fire, we get to see Christ come for us. From heaven to Bethlehem the Son of God became one of us to step in and step up for us. Out in the wilderness he fought the devil for us. On the cross he died for us. Instead of seeing God come after us for payback, we get to see the cross where God went after Jesus for payback, and Jesus paid it all back, for you and me, and the world! We get to see Jesus as the Prince of Peace come to set us right with God; as Immanuel, God with Us, God on our side!

We get to see God with us and God for us! Not just on that last day, but today - when we see God's judgment, God's vengeance, God's payback all around us, when we see God's enemies and God's war against evil rocking the world around us - on that last day and today, with Jesus, we get to take this promise as rescue for us! **"Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."**

Then look what we get to look forward to! **"5 Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. 6 Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. 7 The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow."** Everything wrong in this world will be made right. Every haunt of death will be filled with life!

“8 And a highway will be there [we get a direct road to God!]; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. 9 No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, [You’ll be perfectly safe!] 10 and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” We’ll get to go home to be with God where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain because the way of this world will be done! The best moment of your best Christmas will live on forever! That’s the life we get to look forward to! That’s the life God is promising you and me! That’s the life God is offering to the world!

Now, what are we going to do with that promise? Isaiah said: **“Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come ... your God will come to save you!”** Whom do you know who is feeling weak and worn out by this world? Whom do you know who is feeling stressed out, afraid in this world? Whom do you know is being stepped on? Who is feeling empty, sad, alone? God has given you the Good News they need - the promise of rescue, the promise of new life! Point to Jesus and share this promise with them: **“Be strong, do not fear; your God will come ... your God will come to save you!”** Amen.

SERVICE SETTING 2

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... how much of the Xmas holiday is about nostalgia (re-capturing some good feeling from the past)? How much is about hope (hoping for the right gift, the right smile, the right score)?

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... our Holy Day preparations are filled with more than just nostalgia or hope for a passing feeling. We look back to what our God has promised and what he has done in Jesus, and now we get to look forward to see we have a whole new and better life ahead (not just a day of celebrating, but a life of peace and joy)!

“COMFORT, COMFORT, ALL MY PEOPLE”

A Gathering Rite

P In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

♪ **John the Baptist’s voice is crying in the desert far and near,
Calling people to repentance for the kingdom now is here.
O that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;
Let the valleys rise to meet him and the hills bow down to greet him.**

P During the season of Advent, we hear John the Baptist call us to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. We approach our God with humble and penitent hearts. We are weak and easily drawn to sin by our own flesh, the Devil, and the World around us. As Isaiah says:

C **“All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass.” (Isaiah 40: 6b, 7)**

P We have sinned against you in our thoughts, words and actions. For our many sins and our lack of love toward You and our neighbors, we deserve punishment both now and forever.

C **But Jesus, my Savior, has paid for my sins with His innocent suffering and death. Trusting in Him, I pray: God have mercy on me, a sinner.**

♪ **“Comfort, comfort all my people; speak of peace,” so says our God.
“Comfort those who sit in darkness, groaning from their sorrows’ load.
Speak to all Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
Tell them that their sins I cover, that their warfare now is over.”**

P Our gracious Father in Heaven has been merciful to us. Promising comfort and peace, He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave His life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by His authority I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Though your sins were as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow!

C **“Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” (Isaiah 40: 1-2)**

P **“And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together.”**

C **“For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” (Isaiah 40: 5)**

♪ **All our sins our God will pardon, blotting out each dark misdeed;
All that well deserved his anger he no more will see or heed.
We have suffered many a day; now our griefs have passed away.
God will change our aching sadness into ever springing gladness.**

P Today we light three candles...(usher lights candle)
...as we hope for the Imminent Arrival of the Messiah.

C **We join Isaiah and John in waiting for the promised Messiah to make life right for us—just as he promised.**

P **“See the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him.
See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” (Isaiah 40:10-11)**

C **“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)**

♪ **Now make straight the crooked highway; make the rougher places plain.
Let our hearts be true and humble, ready for his holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord now o’er earth is spread abroad,
And all flesh shall see the token that his word is never broken.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus Christ, and come with the good news of your mighty deliverance. Drive the darkness from our hearts, and fill us with your light; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 35:1-10

The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the LORD,
the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
say to those with fearful hearts,
"Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you."

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.
The burning sand will become a pool,
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.
In the haunts where jackals once lay,
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

And a highway will be there;
it will be called the Way of Holiness;
it will be for those who walk on that Way.
The unclean will not journey on it;
wicked fools will not go about on it.
No lion will be there,
nor any ravenous beast;
they will not be found there.
But only the redeemed will walk there,
and those the LORD has rescued will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM OF THE DAY

Refrain

Psalm 146A

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.

Our Savior, Lord, Emmanuel, now truly God is with us!

3. This baby in a feeding trough; what could he do to help me?
My mind is far too small to see, or comprehend His destiny.
He suffered all that I deserved, and died forsaken on a tree.
He sacrificed His perfect life to win a heav'nly home for me.

4. Now let us join the angel choir; sing Alleluia at His birth.
The servant King in human form; His sacrifice brings peace on Earth.
O Shepherd of our souls, all praise; please guard, protect and guide us.
You paid the price to conquer death, Our King of Kings, victorious!

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matthew 11:10

Alleluia!
I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Matthew 11:2-11

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

" 'I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.'

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, O Christ!

HYMN OF THE DAY

"O Lord, How Shall I Meet You"

Hymn 324



1 O Lord, how shall I meet you, how wel - come you a - right?
2 Love caused your in - car - na - tion; love brought you down to me.
3 Re - jice, then, you sad - heart - ed, who sit in deep - est gloom,
4 Sin's debt, that fear - ful bur - den, let not your souls dis - tress;
5 He comes to judge the na - tions, a ter - ror to his foes,



Your peo - ple long to greet you, my hope, my heart's de - light.
 Your thirst for my sal - va - tion pro - cured my lib - er - ty.
 who mourn o'er joys de - part - ed and trem - ble at your doom.
 your guilt the Lord will par - don and cov - er by his grace.
 a light of con - so - la - tion and bless - ed hope to those



O Je - sus, let your Word be a lamp to light my way,
 Oh, love be - yond all tell - ing that led you to em - brace
 De - spair not; he is near you, he's stand - ing at the door
 He comes, for you pro - cur - ing the peace of sin for - giv'n,
 who love the Lord's ap - pear - ing. O glo - rious Sun, now come,



to show me how to please you, to guide me ev - 'ry day.
 in love, all love ex - cel - ling, our lost and fall - en race!
 who best can help and cheer you and bids you weep no more.
 his chil - dren thus se - cur - ing e - ter - nal life in heav'n.
 send forth your beams most cheer - ing, and guide us safe - ly home.

SERMON

Isiah 35:1-10

APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
 maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried.**

He descended into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy Christian Church,
 the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and the life everlasting. Amen.**

OFFERING PRAYER

All good gifts come from you, dear Lord, and from your gifts we bring this offering. Help us to use it for your purposes here in this place, and for the benefit of those in need. **Amen.**

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Gracious Lord, you sent your Son into our world to destroy the power of Satan and to restore our human race as your children and heirs. Work in us during this Advent season so that we may rejoice in the coming of our Savior and long for his coming again.

Make us eager to receive the King who comes to save us.

Use the preaching of your holy law to rid us of all delusions that sin is acceptable or that we can gain your love by what we do. Move us to realize how detestable our sin is to feel sorrow for what we have done wrong.

Lead us to be honest about our sin and our need for a Savior.

Lift up our hearts to see the King who comes to save. Lead us to marvel at his willingness to take on our human form and stand in our place. Show us the power he extends in his Word and sacraments to make us your children and keep us in faith. Thrill us with his promise to come and take us to our eternal home to live with you forever.

Open our eyes to see and believe the wonders of our Savior's love.

As we live with Christ and trust in him, move us to exercise the strength of his Holy Spirit so we turn from sin and all temptation. When we fall, forgive us and renew us to love and serve you and all people.

Empower us and guide us to walk with Christ by faith.

Protect us from the distractions that come at this time of the year. Even as we celebrate Christmas as a holiday, keep our hearts focused on your holy day gift of Jesus.

Give us joy, not only in Christ's coming at Christmas, but his coming in the gospel, and his coming on the last day.

Move us to share with others the most important gift of this season, the truth about Jesus. Lead us to pray for those whose joy is diminished because of sickness, pain, or loss. [Especially bless... here name the person and the cause of the petition.] Even in our busy times, give us opportunities and the heart to help those in need.

May others see the love of Christ in our words and actions.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Lord, shine through the distractions of this season so that our joy and faith also shine through - for your glory and the good of your people!

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Lord, you have given us your Holy Scriptures for our learning. May we so hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart that, being strengthened and comforted by your holy Word, we may cling to the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

"Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes"

Hymn 313

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Conceptions A Newsletter of Pregnancy and Life Resources - Winter 2025

An Affiliate of Christian Life Resources in Fellowship with WELS

A Shepherd's Message

Thankfulness for a Precious Gift

"Thanks, but I already have one of those." So said a five- or six-year-old boy to a relative one Christmas morning. I can still picture my mother's look of horror as she quickly pulled me aside to tell me that you can't say that. You still need to just say "thank you," because otherwise, even if you don't mean it this way, you're basically saying, "I don't want what you gave me."

It's amazing how often people respond that way to one of the greatest gifts our Lord gives us: life itself. "Thanks, God, but my life isn't the way I'd want it to be. I'd rather die than have to live the life you've put before me." It shocks me each time I hear from someone that they've heard similar advice from their doctors! "You should really consider taking him off life support. Whenever he wakes up, he won't be the same as he was before, and he wouldn't want that, right?"

If even our doctors, those who work most to help preserve life, are telling us that sometimes life isn't a gift to be cherished, then why should we care? Because God does. He has said and shown that in passages beyond counting, but to give just one: "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matthew 10:30) Or perhaps we can look to that gift which is truly our Lord's greatest gift: Jesus. We see him this Christmas season wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Did he not care for life? This is the Savior who gave his all for our eternal life, but who also had compassion on the sick (Matthew 14:13), compassion on the hungry (Matthew 15:32), compassion for those who grieved the dead (John 11:33).

May we, likewise, continue to value the gift of life even when the world around us does not. May we not forsake it when it doesn't look exactly the way we want. May we, this holiday season, give thanks to God and encourage others to give thanks with us for what he has given: life.

Pastor Alex Kirchenwitz - St. Paul Lutheran Church - Round Lake Park, IL

A Matter of Life... or Death

Remember the line from the old poem: "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again"? Sadly, lawmakers sometimes use a tactic of "if at first you don't succeed, slip what you want into an amendment within a completely unrelated bill." In January 2025, Illinois legislators filed an assisted suicide bill, called the End-of-Life Options Act, in the Senate (SB9) and also in the House (HB1328), but progress stalled. In February, Senate Bill 5B1950, Sanitary Food Preparation, was filed. On May 23, Amendment 2 to this bill was filed and titled End of Life Options for Terminally Ill Patients Act, aka Deb's Law. The amendment is not related in any way to the subject of the bill: sanitary food preparation. It states "Medical aid in dying is part of general medical care and complements other end-of-life options, such as comfort care, pain control, palliative care, and hospice care, for individuals to have an end-of-life experience aligned with their beliefs and values." To read it in entirety, go to <https://legiscan.com/IL/amendment/581950/id/259407>.

Six days later, the House passed SB1950 with a vote of 63 to 42. At about 3 a.m. on October 31, it passed in the Senate, 30 to 27. Now the bill is on Governor Pritzker's desk and, if signed by him, will become

law and take effect nine months later. Illinois would become the 11th state, plus Washington, D.C., to legalize physician-assisted killing.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. Ephesians 6:11 (EHV)

A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. John 10:10 (EHV)

Join Us In Worship This Holiday Season!

Advent Wednesdays
at 3:30 and 6:30 pm
Advent Dinners at 5 pm

December 17- Nativity Scenes

Sunday, December 14 - Children's Christmas Service at 3:00 pm

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - 5 pm
Christmas Day Festival Service - 9 am
New Year's Eve Service - 5 pm