

Last week someone tried to scam us. Someone sent emails out, emails using my name, claiming to be from me, emails asking you for help. Not the kind of help I ask for —, but emails asking for Apple gift cards. Some of you followed up; thank you for your caring heart. And, to the best of my knowledge, all of you who got these emails came to the realization - “This is a scam!” - thank you for your careful heart. We live in an age of scams, lies, and broken promises. And who is most at risk? Those who are old and alone. Those who are young and think they know it all. Those who have a heart. Those in a hurry. Those who want to believe.

We probably all know someone who has been scammed, or this close to falling for the scam. Most all of us know the fear that comes after clicking on a link and then realizing we were in too much of a hurry - “Oh, now! Now what?!” We all know what it’s like to have someone lie to us, to have someone break a promise to us. It hurts, doesn’t it? And it doesn’t just hurt our hearts and our wallets. It hurts us as a people - who can we trust? Survey says - 2024 Pew Report - “Most people can be trusted.” And the people - almost 2/3 answered: “NO!”

That distrust isn’t just an American thing. Paul knew people had that same distrust when he wrote our lesson to the Romans. Paul had some great, some amazing, (oh, I’ll say it) some unbelievable promises to share. For example, in our lesson we hear Paul promise: “**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.**” Before that, Paul says God calls you his “saints,” his “holy ones.” We might look around: “Holy ones? I’m not seeing it.” We might look inside: “grace and peace? I’m not feeling it.” And jumping ahead to chapter 8 - “all things working together for good”? I’m not seeing that. And “no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus”? I’m not feeling that either.

How can we trust promises like that ... how can we help other people trust promises like that, when there is so much distrust going around?

Here’s God’s answer - focus in on Jesus Christ. That’s what God has always done for us. He’s always pointed us to his Son. In bad times, when Adam and Eve made the biggest mistake of their lives, God promised to give Eve a special son, a son who would fight for his people and crush the devil’s head. In good times, when David wanted to give a great gift to God and build a temple for the Lord, God gave David an even greater gift. God promised to give David a special son, a son who would rule his kingdom forever. In evil times, as in our Old Testament lesson,

when evil King Ahaz couldn't be bothered to trust God, God promised a special son, a son of a virgin, a son who is God himself, to be God with us. We don't have some changing message from God. From his first promise until now, God has always pointed us to his Son.

This week we celebrate God keeping his promise. God so loved the world that he gave us his one and only Son. We might have expected this Son to come looking like a devil-crushing champion, or as a son of King David to be riding like royalty, or as Immanuel to be shining as God. Instead God's Son stepped into our world as we do, small and weak, needing all sorts of help.

When you wonder whether you can trust God and his promises, remember: God doesn't do things the way we might expect. To be God with us, he doesn't just fly overhead, hovering around us; to be God with us, he became one of us. Jesus presented himself with flesh and bones so people could see him, hear him, touch him, and trust him. As our champion against evil, he didn't just snap his fingers from heaven; he fought in the trenches with us. On the same battlefield where Satan took Adam and Eve ... the same battlefield where evil taunts us and tortures us, Jesus took our place. He let evil surround him and sweep over him, but he didn't let evil stop him or defeat him. Your champion against evil is battle-tested and battle-proven as the winner and champion we need.

And as a descendant of David, a son of Israel's greatest king, in the royal line - that sounds glorious, doesn't it? - Jesus, the Son of God, joined our shame. Think of David's sons - one son raped his half-sister and then was, in turn, murdered by her brother, who then worked to steal the throne from his father David. By the time Jesus was born, the glory of David was long gone. As a descendant of David, the Son of God wasn't born into glory; he was born into shame, the shame of sin and guilt. Now, in his life, Jesus didn't let that sin and guilt define him. He lived as a son of David should live - right by God, trusting God, showing off the best of God. But in his death, Jesus was defined by the shame of his family. He died carrying our guilt, cursed by God for our sin.

He said that his death would pay for our sin, that in his body and blood, given and shed on the cross, we have forgiveness. He said that whoever believes in him gets to have eternal life, life right by God, life with him in heaven.

That can be a mouthful to believe. It can be hard to believe when we don't feel forgiven, hard to believe when we feel like we're being made to pay for our sin. Every day sin and death give us reason to doubt and distrust what Jesus says.

So what can we do with that doubt and distrust? Did you see what Paul did for our doubt and distrust? He didn't leave us at Christmas or the cross. He takes us to Easter! By his resurrection from the dead, Jesus shows himself to be the Son of God in power. The baby born in Bethlehem wasn't just another baby; the Jesus dead on the cross wasn't just another dead man. Jesus is the Son of God in power. He has what it takes to keep his promises. He is someone we can trust. He is the Son of God in power.

When Jesus says: “**grace and peace to you,**” you can believe grace and peace will win out in your life - Jesus is the Son of God in power. When guilt is eating at you and you hear the promise: “**There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus**” ... when you hear Jesus say: “**my body for you, my blood for you, for the forgiveness of your sins,**” you can believe it - Jesus is the Son of God in power. When you have a friend going through a rough patch and you don't know what to say but: “**you know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,**” you can believe that promise, they can believe it because - Jesus is the Son of God in power. We don't need to let doubt and distrust spoil our lives. We don't need to let doubt and distrust spoil our view of others. Just as he promised, God has given us a champion against evil. Just as he promised, God gave us his Son; we have God with us. And just as he promised, he will save us to live with him heaven. Just as he promised - because we have the Son of God in power! Amen.

December 20 & 21, 2025

SERVICE SETTING 2

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we are surrounded by so many lies and half-truths that it can be hard to know who or what to believe.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we hear the unbelievable promised and then we hear the unbelievable proven true - we have Immanuel, God with Us!

“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.

C **As Isaiah said: “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 Heavenly Father, 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 four candles ... (usher lights candle) ... as we marvel at the Imminent Arrival of Emmanuel.

C We join Isaiah and Joseph marveling at how God will keep his promise—a baby born of a virgin—Emmanuel—“God With Us!”

P “Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”
(Isaiah 7:14)

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 7:10–14

Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”

Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 89C



1 Love will be our song for - ev - er, faith - ful love from
2 Heav'n and earth a - like af - firm it: LORD, you are mag -
3 Once, when Is - rael lacked a lead - er, Da - vid was the
4 Now, though, we have felt your an - ger; now we find dis -



a - ges past: love en - shrined with - in a prom - ise made by
nif - i - cent! E - vil pow'rs and hid - den forc - es you have
man you chose; an ex - alt - ed throne you gave him, and re -
as - ter near. Shame is ours in - stead of tri - umph; neigh - bors



you and sure to last; hu - man tongues and an - gel voic - es
ren - dered im - po - tent. At your throne of love and jus - tice
lief from all his foes; e - ven when your reb - el peo - ple
see our plight and sneer. How much long - er till you hear us?



join in rev - 'rence and de - light, prais - ing your un -
we ex - tol you, faith - ful King: blest are those who
scorned your ways and spurned your law, still your prom - ise
Life is short, so swift our days! Lord, re - new the



ri - valed splen - dor, lov - ing LORD, the God of might.
learn to trust you— they have am - ple cause to sing.
shaped the fu - ture: love en - dur - ing ev - er - more.
love you prom - ised— fill your peo - ple's hearts with praise.

SECOND READING

Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from

faith for his name's sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matthew 1:23

Alleluia!

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel.

Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Matthew 1:18–25

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not

consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, O Christ!

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Savior of the Nations, Come"

Hymn 301



1 Sav - ior of the na - tions, come; Vir - gin's
2 Not by hu - man flesh and blood, by the
3 Won - drous birth! O won - drous Child of the
4 From the Fa - ther's throne he came and as -
5 Praise to God the Fa - ther sing, praise to



Son, make here your home. Mar - vel now, O
Spir - it of our God was the Word of
vir - gin un - de - filed, though by all the
cend - ed to the same, cap - tive lead - ing
God the Son, our King, praise to God the



heav'n and earth, that the Lord chose such a birth.
God made flesh, wom - an's off - spring, pure and fresh.
world dis - owned, yet to be in heav'n en - throned!
death and hell. High the song of tri - umph swell!
Spir - it be ev - er and e - ter - nal - ly.

SERMON

Isaiah 7/Romans 1:1-7

NICENE CREED

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,**

begotten, not made,
of one being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who in unity with the Father and the Son
is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING PRAYER

God, we give thanks for your presence in our lives. Bless these offerings,
that they may be used to advance your kingdom and glorify your name.
And may our faith continue to grow stronger each day, bring us closer to
you. 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

M Eternal Father, throughout the centuries you repeated and affirmed your promise to send the offspring of the woman to crush the serpent's head. Through your prophets of old, you continually directed the eyes of your people to the advent of their Savior.

C We praise you, O Lord, for keeping your promise and sending your Son to destroy the works of the devil.

M As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our King, use your mighty Word to shatter our pride and to rouse us from spiritual slumber and apathy.

C Move us to take to heart the words of John: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

M You sent your Son to redeem us from sin. Let this good news be our joy and strength. Use it to cheer the lonely, encourage the fearful, and give hope to the despairing. In these days before Christmas, spare us from the stress of deadlines and the frenzy of commercialism.

C Fill our lives with the message of your peace and the music of your grace.

M Direct our eyes not only to the manger but also to the skies, where we will see your Son coming again, not as a lowly child but as the Lord of lords.

C Lift up our hearts in joyful anticipation of that day.

M Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.

M Come quickly, Lord Jesus, in your grace, in your power, and in your glory.

C Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

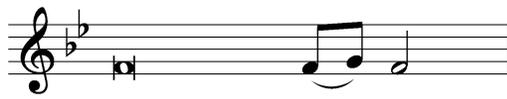
LORD'S PRAYER

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.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)



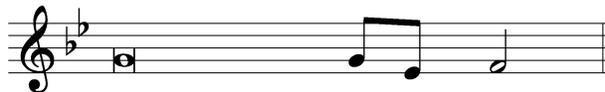
The Lord be with you.



And al - so with you.



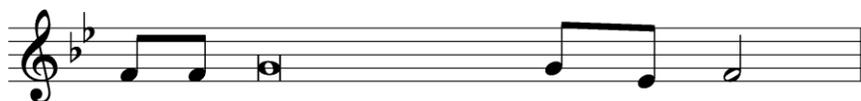
Lift up your hearts.



We lift them up to the Lord.



Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared when he called people to repentance and pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow - er,
God of might. Heav - en and earth are full of your
glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est.
Bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the
Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est, ho -
san - na in the high - est!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD



Je - sus, Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.

Je - sus, Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.

Je - sus, Lamb of God, you take a - way the
sin of the world; grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

"As Angels Joyed with One Accord"

Hymn 320



1 As an - gels joyed with one ac - cord up - on the
2 He came, not clothed in maj - es - ty nor pow'r that
3 This done, he soared to God's right hand, yet or - phaned
4 In ev - 'ry age— let praise a - bound— he comes; we

ad - vent of our Lord, so let us glad - ly
suits his de - i - ty. In low - ly state he
not his cho - sen band, for he, not bound in
hear his voice re - sound. His glo - rious gos - pel



praise the name of him who from the Fa - ther came.
walked till he in dy - ing set us cap - tives free.
grace and pow'r, at - tends his own each day and hour.
does not cease to bring us com - fort, joy, and peace.

He comes in water to the child
and cleanses it, from birth defiled.
This washing seals his pard'ning grace
and shows the Father's kindly face.

He comes to us in bread and wine
to give himself and gifts divine.
O praise him for this sacrament,
redeeming love's great testament!

Lift up your heads! All grief and pain
shall vanish when he comes again.
Where we shall see him face to face,
there joy alone shall have a place.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, 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

“Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates”

Hymn 305 (vs 1,2,5)

Lift up your heads, you mighty gates!

Behold, the King of glory waits.

The King of kings is drawing near;

the Savior of the world is here.

Life and salvation he will bring;

therefore rejoice and gladly sing.

To God the Father raise

your joyful songs of praise.

The King is born in poverty,

his chariot is humility,

his kingly crown is holiness,

his scepter, pity in distress.

The end of all our woe he brings;

therefore the earth is glad and sings.

To Christ the Savior raise

your grateful hymns of praise.

Redeemer, come! I open wide
my heart to you; here, Lord, abide!

O enter with your saving grace;
show me your kind and friendly face.

Your Holy Spirit guide us on
until our glorious goal is won.

Eternal praise and fame
we offer to your name.

Acknowledgments

Software distributed in partnership with Northwestern Publishing House. CCLI Copyright License 11194382, Size A and Streaming License CSPL059933, Size A. Setting Two from Christian Worship Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. Liturgical and musical settings of Scripture based on text from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. Created by Christian Worship: Service Builder © 2025 Concordia Publishing House. Tune: © 2010 Tim TenClay, admin. Faith Alive Christian Resources. Used by permission: OneLicense no. 712373 Advent Gathering Rite Based on Comfort, Comfort All My People CW Other words by Pastor Kevin Raddatz and Timothy Samelson. Faith of our Fathers Lyrics by Frederick W. Faber, (1814-1863) Music by Henry F. Hemy (1818-1888), arranged by James G. Walton (1821-1905). Public domain

Join Us In Worship This Holiday Season!

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - 5 pm

Christmas Day Festival Service - 9 am

New Year's Eve Service - 5 pm

Alpha and Omega

He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. That sounds neat, doesn't it? What does it mean? In a sense, it's all about Christ!

So what do we do? As we close out the year, we do some Alpha and Omega figuring with our offerings. In our house, Lisa makes sure that every year and every month, Christ and his work get the first checks. I get to make sure that Christ and his work get the last checks.*

For the first checks, we do our budget, looking at how it seems God will bless us in the new year. After we project our income, we figure our base offerings - xx% times income. With God's promise and our plan we're set to think of our offerings as blessings instead of squeezings.

For our last checks, we look over the past year, at God's giving and our giving. We see: God's been good! We see: we get to do some extra thanks-giving! (And maybe a little bit of catch-up.) We look at Christ's ministry and our ministry - "wouldn't it be great to support _____?!"

Alpha and Omega! First checks and last checks - it's all about Christ!

If a current offering statement would help you, please ask!

*This year, we didn't actually write checks. We gave from a Donor Advised Fund (DAF) we had set up with our WELS Foundation. I found it easy; Lisa found it to be too impersonal. We both found it to be insufficient; we didn't have enough money in our DAF to cover all our extra above-and-beyond offerings. It was an interesting experiment; in 2026, we go back to checks.