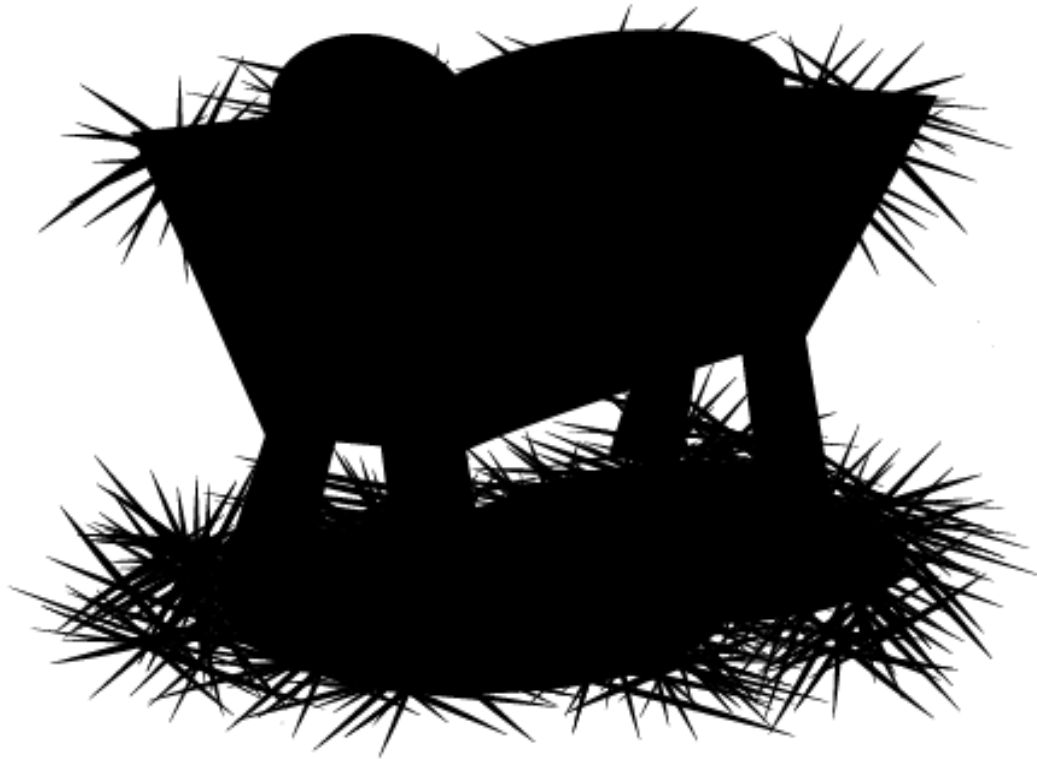


Advent Devotions

2024



Written by the Pastors of the St.
Cloud Circuit (LCMS)

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who arrived in a manger, still arrives in His Word and Sacraments, and will arrive again on the last day (the Latin word *Adventus* means to arrive)! We, the pastors of the St. Cloud Circuit, hope and pray these devotions are beneficial to you during this season of Advent.

This year’s devotions are based on 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The Thessalonians were confused about Jesus’ second coming, so there are many Advent themes in Paul’s letters to them. We encourage you to get out your Bibles, read through the text assigned for that devotion, and then read the devotion in this booklet.

These devotions aren’t intended to replace your daily devotional routine, rather they are intended to supplement it! Looking for a daily devotional routine? Ask your pastor! He’d love to help you out. But if you’re looking for something immediate, here’s a plan for praying the Psalms during Advent –

Advent	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	24	122	33	50	18:1-20	102	90
Noon	129; 131	135	137; 140	144; 145	146; 147	148	149; 150
Evening	25; 110	40; 67	85; 91	14; 16	126; 62	130; 16	80; 72

God’s blessings to you this Advent. Please check out our other resources at lcmcloud.org.

In Christ,

Rev Joshua Reber (Editor; Faith, St. Cloud; Trinity, Clear Lake)

Rev David Steege (Immanuel, Albany)

Rev Jeff Manthe (SonRise, Avon)

Rev Ben Hollingsead (St. Paul’s, Eden Valley)

Rev David Buchs (Concordia, Fairhaven; Circuit Visitor)

Rev Zach Hoffman (Holy Cross, St. Cloud)

Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud; 2nd VP Minnesota North District)

Rev Joel Kosberg (Love of Christ, St. Cloud)

Rev Fred Kutter (Emeritus, Immanuel, Albany)

December 1 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace (1 Th 1:1).

We sign our letters at the end, but Biblical letters (epistles) are signed at the beginning. Paul is stacking up the witnesses by listing Silas and Timothy – Dt 17 and 19 specifies that you need 2 or 3 witnesses to establish a charge. Jesus picks up on this when He says that wherever 2 or 3 are gathered in His name, there He is among them (Matt 18).

Sometimes Paul doesn't list other human co-author(s) (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy), but God is always listed as a witness. Jesus says that if you don't believe Him, you should at least believe the witnesses (John the Baptist, His works, the Father, and the Scriptures, read more in Jn 5:30-47).

The point is this – the Scriptures are reliable. There are internal and external witnesses. During Advent, we focus on John the Baptist's witness. We have not 1 Gospel, but 4 Gospels which all witness to Christ, and these all agree. Blood, water, and the Spirit, these 3, all flowed out of Christ at the crucifixion, and John the Evangelist was a sworn eyewitness (Jn 19 and 1 Jn 5).

You can take the grace and peace that Paul speaks about here to the bank. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, really died for your sins, and really came back from the dead. It wasn't just 3 men that saw His resurrected body, but over 500 (1 Cor 15).

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for all the faithful witnesses you give us. Send us Your Spirit so we can be faithful witnesses to Your Son, who came to us in human flesh at Christmas. Amen.

December 2 by Rev David Steege

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers (1 Thess 1:2).

Your pastor prays for you! What a wonderful gift it is to know that your name is brought before the Father. You are also a gift to your pastor. Your faith gives hope to your pastors, just as the Thessalonians' faith gave Paul hope.

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you” (v 4).

Many Christian commercials emphasize your decision for Christ. It's actually the other way around - God has chosen you. The Son of God comes to us in a manger, and He comes to you every Sunday in his Word and His body and blood. Advent is about you receiving our Lord. **“Wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess 1:10).**

The Holy Spirit rushed upon that child born in a manger to complete a mission spoken of in the Old Testament. The Old Testament Law and Prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament with the coming of Christ. Prophecy is consistent. This faith of the Old and the New Testament is lived out even today. The reception of the Thessalonians is the same as we read in the Old Testament, and it continues today with your faith. Yet in this world there will always be idol worship. During this season we see some many focusing on themselves rather than giving gifts. We see many focusing on gifts other than the wonderful gift of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, give us patience and faith as we wait for you to return. Amen.

December 3 by Rev Fred Kutter

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

For your yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain (1 Thess 2:1).

Paul was focused on boldly sharing the Gospel with those he calls “brothers.” He considered them as family. He loved them. Just as you send Christmas cards to your family and loved ones, so Paul writes to the Thessalonians.

The greatest message we can share with loved ones is the Gospel. If we care for them, we’ll follow Paul’s example. When we write Christmas cards, we don’t want to write with flattery, or with a pretext for greed, or to deceive (vv 4-6).

We, like Paul, want to convey the love God has given us to others. By God’s grace, we can share this Gospel with others. We do it, not seeking recognition for ourselves, and not seeking to please man, but to please God, who tests our hearts (v 4).

In these first days of Advent, think of your family and friends and how you can sincerely let them know how much they mean to you. Give them Jesus in your prayers, words, and actions. Like St. Paul, give yourself in whatever way you can to convey the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord Almighty, thank You for caring for and loving us. May we do the same for others. Amen.

December 4 by Rev Benjamin Hollingsead

1 Thessalonians 2:9-12

That you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12).

One of the great lies the devil tries to sell us is that living your life as a faithful Christian will be filled with regrets. The devil uses tools like social media, entertainment, and even our peers to make us believe that living a life grounded in Christian morality is a wasted life. They tell us that living as faithful Christians will fill our lives with less freedom, less fun, and less love.

St. Paul reminds us that though Christians will experience challenging times of labor and toil, it is not a wasted life. Living a Christian life that preaches the gospel with your words and deeds is one of genuine comfort, certainty, compassion, and contentment. We have comfort because we fear, love, and trust in the true God above all things. We know that the eternal God is also our Heavenly Father, who lovingly knit us together in our mother's womb and gave His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to die and rise to free us from sin and damnation.

Following our Heavenly Father's guidance for life is the longing of every Christian. The Christian life is a life filled with forgiveness, peace, and love. This love of our Heavenly Father is the joy of living a Christian life, one that the devil's lies can never diminish.

In this season of Advent, pick up your cross, follow Christ, talk about your faith, and live a life worthy of the Gospel.

Prayer: Dear Father, give us the Holy Spirit so that we may live a joyous life, filled with loving You and loving others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 5 by Rev David Buchs

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

When you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God (1 Thess 2:13).

“Dad says that you need to come set the table.” “Yeah, right. I don’t believe you.” The kid is hard-pressed to believe that it’s really the word of his father and not just the word of his punk brother. It can be dicey to send the kids with messages for one another, especially if they’re in the habit of trying to fool each other.

Paul is exceedingly thankful that the Thessalonians received his word as the Word of the Father. He knows how easy it would have been to mistake his message for the word of men. He’s just *some guy*. That is why Paul’s behavior becomes so important – he’s not seeking glory (2:6), he’s not trying to please man (2:4), he’s avoiding all error and deceit (2:3). He labors to deliver the Gospel free of charge because he knows that unless the Thessalonians receive it as the Word of God, they will not be saved.

Nonetheless, Paul, even in his pure-heartedness, is a sinful man and a sketchy messenger. It can only be that the Holy Spirit has convinced the Thessalonians of the Gospel, and for that Paul thanks God.

We have the same grounds for thanksgiving. The Gospel has only ever been delivered by sketchy messengers, whereby the Spirit delights in confounding our flesh. He makes it clear that unless he convinces us that it’s the Word of God, we’ll never believe it.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for sending us messengers of the Gospel, and thank you for teaching us to receive their word as your own. Amen.

December 6 by Rev Zach Hoffman

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

For you are our glory and joy (1 Thess 2:20)

It is a season of frustrated visits. There is the stress of planning and finding the dates for a visit that work best with everyone's calendar. The weather can cause delays and add to our anxious feelings as you wait for everyone to arrive. All these travel frustrations are typical.

There are those that we will not see this season. It might be due to conflict, or the distance they might need to travel is too great, or it might be because the one you hope to see passed away.

No Christmas gathering will be perfect. Every gathering will be a mixture of positive and negative emotions.

Paul longed to see the church in Thessalonica, but he did not let his frustrated waiting dampen his joy over the church.

Whether your Christmas gathering is smaller than you hoped it would be, or even if you might end up celebrating alone, take heart! Christ has come, and the gathering of His people is our glory and joy. Saint will greet saint, and the door to His Kingdom will be open. Our song will thunder louder than the angels that sang in multitude at Christ's birth. The whole family will be there. Christ guarantees it.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the birth of your Son Jesus, that as shepherd gathered to worship him on the night of his birth; we know that he will one day gather the whole church together. Amen.

December 7 by Rev Bruce Timm

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

We sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the Gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith (1 Thess 3:2)

Jesus told us, **"It is necessary that temptations come."** (Matt 18:7). If you didn't have faith, you wouldn't face temptation. Well, you would, but you wouldn't be opposed to it. You wouldn't struggle against it. You would enjoy it. You wouldn't consider it a temptation from the Devil, but rather an agreeable invitation to enjoy yourself.

Afflictions follow faith. Temptations pursue saints. It goes with the territory, but you are not alone against temptation or affliction. God never leaves you alone. That is most evident in the sending of His Son. If God didn't leave you alone in your sins, He will never leave you alone as His redeemed child.

In their affliction Paul sends Timothy to the Thessalonians to establish and exhort them in the faith. Paul is keeping with the sound pattern set by His Father in heaven. He sends the Word of God with flesh, with the body and the mouth of Pastor Timothy. This is one of the great ways God does not leave you alone. He sends a man, your pastor, to bring you God's powerful Word when you are tempted, God's comforting Word when you are afflicted, and God's merciful Word when you have sinned. (Note to self: Don't forget to let your pastor know of your afflictions. God put him there so you could have and hear God's Word.)

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, in the midst of our afflictions and temptations, You do not leave us alone. Help us to hear and receive Your strong and merciful Word. Amen.

December 8 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

We pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith (1 Thess 3:10)

Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to learn how the church was doing, and Timothy came back with a great report! They were full of faith and love and standing fast in the Lord!

But they still lacked something, and that something could only be diagnosed in person. Letters, emails, calls, and FaceTimes are great. I can talk with my family who lives 1000 miles away any time I want. But nothing replaces face to face communication. John recognizes this, saying that he still has a lot to write, but he'd rather say it face to face so that their joy could be complete (2 Jn 12, 3 Jn 13-14). This is why God sends pastors in the flesh to congregations.

God has something to say to you. For a long time, God communicated to the world through the Prophets. But now, in these last days, ever since that first Christmas, God speaks to us through His Son. God not only writes to you in the Bible - He comes to you *in the flesh*. And He does so Sunday after Sunday in the Holy Communion.

Every Sunday is Bethlehem. Bethlehem means "house of bread." In the bread, Jesus Christ comes to you in the flesh. He comes to save you. He comes to forgive you. He comes to give you peace. That's why we sing, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Prayer: Dear Father, give us faith that lacks nothing. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

December 9 by Rev David Steege

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all (1 Thess 3:12).

Too often we want to ignore the command to love and serve our neighbor. Let Jesus' example change that! The entire world was created through Him, and yet the world rejected Him when He came to them in the flesh.

What's Jesus' birth about? The Law of love. He was born to fulfill the Law, and the Law is love. So now listen to Paul with Christ in mind. Let the Lord increase and abound your love for one another and for all.

You can love because God first loved us. God laid down His life for us. That kind of love never runs out. Do not let your hearts grow cold, but repent. Advent is a season of repentance – repent of not loving God and for not loving others as He loved us.

When we turn to Christ, which is what repentance is, God takes our hearts and makes them blameless and holy, and He does this through the blood of Christ. What a great gift that is!

Prayer: Father, thank you for sending Your Son to this world to live and die for us. Thank you for the love You have given to us. Enliven our hearts, that we would have faith towards You and love towards one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 10 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

The Lord is an avenger in all these things (1 Thess 4:6).

Judgment. It's not your favorite Advent theme, but we can't forget about it. Jesus Christ is returning for His 2nd Advent, and when He does, it will be Judgment Day.

One of the biggest themes in Lutheran theology is judgment. We love the word justification, and rightly so. Justification is a judgment word. God judges Christians to be just (righteous) because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Judgment can be scary. God is coming back to avenge sins. That should scare us into repentance. When we are terrified and repent because of God's Judgment, God comforts us with the Gospel. Your sins are forgiven!

Judgment is also comforting. God knows about all the injustice that happens on this earth, and He is going to do something about it. You can sleep easy at night, knowing that God is coming back to right every wrong.

Since God is coming back, we live holy lives. Paul says that sanctification, which means holiness, is God's will (v 3). We struggle in our sinful flesh, but since God's will is a holy life, He helps us out. He sends us the Holy Spirit. We will be sinners till the day we die, but with God's help, we put our sinful flesh to death daily and live holy lives.

Prayer: Jesus, send us Your Spirit so that we can live holy lives, being pure and blameless until the day Your return. Amen.

December 11 by Rev Benjamin Hollingsead

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another (1 Thess 4:9).

Thanks be to God, the election season is over! Whether we are rejoicing or mourning the election results, we all have a duty to do so in a Christian manner. Paul instructs Christians to treat one another with brotherly love. Christians can have emotions like joy, anger, and sadness in this life, but what you do with these emotions matters.

Don't allow your feelings to cause you to speak words of anger, blasphemy, or hate towards God or neighbor. In times of anger and disappointment, the words of the Kyrie, "Lord have mercy" should be the words on the tip of our tongues.

For many of us, this holiday season will cause us to interact with family members and others at work who do not hold the same confession of faith and political persuasions as we do. When these interactions occur, St. Paul's wisdom to "**aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business**" should be applied. We should aspire to use the tongues and mouths we confess the Creeds with and receive the Holy body and blood of Jesus with in a manner that honors Christ when we are angry and disappointed. Don't allow this anger to be a poor witness of your Christian faith to those who are outside the Christian faith. Remember that whether the right person was elected or not, Christians will never lack anything. Because Christ is King, the Victory is ours because of Jesus, not by a politician who is a donkey or an elephant.

Prayer: Father, Your Son Jesus is King. Give us wisdom to live our lives with that fact on our lips and in our hearts. Amen.

December 12 by Rev David Buchs

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope (1 Thess 4:13).

From creation, we learn that God makes distinctions. Often God's distinctions are obvious: He separates the waters above and the waters below, the sea and the dry land. Sometimes the distinctions are not obvious for us to observe: clean and unclean, holy and common. At yet other times, the distinctions we observe end up being irrelevant: **"There is no distinction [between Jew and Greek]: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:22-23).**

Like a child learning to fit blocks into holes of their corresponding shapes, we are always learning to fit the pieces together as God has made them. We are learning to recognize the distinction that matters most of all: faith and unbelief.

That distinction is the brush with which Paul is painting his picture of grief. The believer grieves, but his grief is distinct from that of the world. Faithless grief gives way to despair. It is a road that leads ever downward.

The believer, however, grieves with hope. He recognizes that all grief is being swallowed up in the victory of Christ over sin and death. Christ cried out from the cross, **"Into your hands I commit my Spirit" (Ps 31:5).** So also Christians, even through their tears, hold fast to the certainty of a God who has pledged resurrection, eternal life, and joy through Jesus' blood. That makes Christian tears distinct – a blessed distinction granted by the Spirit to those who believe.

Prayer: Father, send us your Spirit that we may always hope and never lose heart, but look forward to the comfort promised to Your children. Amen.

December 13 by Rev Zach Hoffman

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

For you are all children of light, children of the day (1 Thess 5:5)

It's the most wonderful time of the year! We are twelve days away from Christmas, and there is much that would have our hearts glowing! Everyone is of good cheer!

Looking forward to judgment day really cuts against the nostalgic grain of Christmas. Paul, like Jesus, says it will come like a thief in the night, at a time when people are preached into a false sense of security. Then sudden destruction will come. Is the most horrible time quite near? It's not horrible for you. Those who believe are called to live in light of the coming of Christ. We look forward to his second Advent, because then we will be revealed as the children of God.

While we hang mistletoe (Does anyone actually hang mistletoe anymore?) and sing the Christmas tunes, we are children of the light. While you face temptations that are especially strong this time of year to give in and give up sobriety, and other behaviors that would add to your regret - you are a child of the light. We are not of the darkness.

John tells us in his Gospel that light has shined in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. That same light shines through you by the grace of Jesus our Immanuel.

Prayer: Almighty Father, help us to live like the end is near so that we might be revealed as children of the light at the second Advent of your Son. Amen.

December 14 by Rev Bruce Timm

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

We ask you, brothers (1 Thess 5:12)

There's enough in these 11 verses to keep you busy until Christ returns. That's Paul's ask. He asks the Thessalonians to keep busy in the faith. The faith is this – there is not a part of you that Christ has not redeemed. There's no keeping anything for yourself.

Christ has purchased you out of the devil's house of death and brought you into His house of life. So, Paul asks **“respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord, to esteem them very highly in love because of their work” (vv 12-13a)**. The Holy Spirit has brought you out of selfish rebellion to live in God's family so **“Be at peace among yourselves” (v 13b)**.

Even your work is redeemed! You don't work for yourself, but you work for God by serving your neighbor. So **“admonish the idle” (v 14)**. Those who do not work when able are not using God's gifts to provide for themselves and serve others.

We live together in Christ and no longer for ourselves so, **“encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all” (v 14)**. As you grow in faith, you begin to resemble your Father. These last days are difficult, but you belong to God in Christ Jesus so **“rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all instances” (vv 16-18)**. Finally keep your ears open for God's Word. **“Do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast to what is good” (vv 20-21)**.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ you have redeemed me to be a child of God. Grant me the will and strength to keep busy in that faith until You return. Amen.

December 15 by Rev Joshua Reber

1 Thessalonians 5:23-28

May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 5:23b)

Mary sings, “**My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior**” (Lk 1:46-47). In the same way, Paul makes a distinction here between spirit and soul. So what’s the difference?

Your body is a temple (1 Cor 6:19). The Temple had 3 distinct parts - the outer court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. Your spirit is the Most Holy Place, your soul is the Holy Place, and your body is the outer court.

Your body as the outer court is the easiest to explain. Everybody can see your body. Everyone, Gentiles included, was allowed in the outer court.

The Holy Place, which is your soul, was only for the priests. Lampstands were in the Holy Place, meaning there was light. Your soul is your mental faculties. It’s that which deals with reason. You do (or don’t do) math problems with your soul. The Most Holy Place was only entered by one priest once a year, and that was on the Day of Atonement. This is where God dwelled on the Ark of the Covenant. There were no lamps there because God is light. Your spirit is where faith resides.

Paul’s blessing is that God would make you holy completely, meaning body, soul, and spirit. In Christ, who became completely human, we are completely holy.

*Prayer: Father, keep us holy till the coming of your Son Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

December 16 by Rev David Steege

2 Thessalonians 1:1-2

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess 1:2).

I love Christmas cards. In a way, this is Paul's greeting on the front of a Christmas card. These words are easy to skip over and throw away like many cards you receive this holiday season, but don't throw these words away! Grace. Peace. What a wonderful greeting!

Grace is God's gift. We are saved by grace. We don't deserve it, but God gives us His Son anyways. Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year!

We often take for granted the peace on earth we have here in the United States. That could be taken away tomorrow. The peace that Paul is speaking about is eternal peace. It's the song of the angels to the shepherds, "Glory be to God on High, and peace to His people on earth."

How should we respond to these gifts of grace and peace?

Thanksgiving. That's one reason we go to church every Sunday. We owe God our thanks. God gives us wonderful gifts every day, and the only thing we can offer God in return is thanksgiving.

Grace and peace to you this holiday season.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for the grace and peace that you give us daily and for eternity. Give us grateful hearts, that we may glorify You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 17 by Rev Joshua Reber

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4

We ought always to give thanks to God for you (2 Thess 1:3).

Why does Paul give thanks to God for the Thessalonians? Because their faith is growing and because their love is increasing. That sounds like the post-communion collect – we thank God for the salutary gift He gives us, and then we ask that God would increase our faith towards Him and our love towards others.

There's no surprise in what Paul gives thanks for. What's surprising is what he boasts in. Whenever Paul boasts, he sounds like a madman (2 Cor 11:23). He boasts in the Thessalonians' persecutions and afflictions.

When's the last time you boasted in your weaknesses? That's what Paul would have us do. Why? Because when we are weak, then, and only then, are we strong (2 Cor 12:10).

How does Jesus come to us at Christmas? As a weak baby. How does He save the world? By dying. He had to fully rely on His Father the entire way. If perfect Jesus had to rely on His Father, how much more do we sinners need to rely on Him!

We are only strong if we rely on God. God opposes the proud but gives grace the humble. When you are weak, count it as joy! God is inviting you to put your faith in Him.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the weaknesses and crosses you give us. Give us faith and strength to bear these crosses, knowing that when we are weak, then we are strong. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 18 by Rev Benjamin Hollingsead

2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God (2 Thess 1:5).

My wife recently introduced my kids to *Mary Poppins*, and they have fallen in love with the songs. The most popular song from the film, is "A Spoon Full of Sugar Makes the Medicine Go Down." Mary Poppins sings this to teach the children to find ways of making the less desirable tasks of life more tolerable. Whether taking poor-tasting medicine, cleaning a room, or completing an undesirable task, a spoonful of positivity helps!

In a twist, Paul tells us that a spoonful of suffering, not sugar, is the ingredient that the Lord blesses us with that will make that day with our Lord in glory so much sweeter. Since the beginning of the Church, Christians have in every generation experienced persecution and hate. In v 5, Paul says that the suffering we face for being a faithful Christian should be seen as a great privilege. He assures the Church that suffering will be eliminated on the last day and that those who cause our suffering will be held accountable.

Take comfort in your present suffering! St. Paul says that because of our suffering in this life, the Lord will use it to benefit those around us and to glorify Christ. In his *Apologeticus* (circa AD 197), Tertullian said about Christian suffering: "The Christians' willingness to die for their faith leads to the conversion of others."

Bearing the crosses of life takes work. But remember that in your baptism, we who die like Jesus will certainly rise like him (Romans 6:5), and there will be nothing sweeter than that day!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for counting us worthy to suffer for Your name. Give us strength to glorify You. Amen.

December 19 by Rev David Buchs

2 Thessalonians 2:1-11

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming (2 Thess 2:8).

Christ is King and no power or principality or liar or thief can stand in His way. That fact is the cure for all uncertainty about the coming day of judgment and the trials and tribulations of the days that will precede it. Say what they will about the rapture or their predictions for the date of the world's end, Christ is King and Lord and Savior and that is the fact that gives Christians peace throughout their lives.

Not even the last gasps of the devilish hordes should give God's people pause. There's no need for concern – even when the last battle is mounted, it will end in the blink of an eye (Rev 19:19-20). Christ will continue to be King and to reign over His people in love.

All of this is a certainty because it is Christ's Word that kills and makes alive, that creates and destroys. It is with the breath of his mouth that He easily slays the dragon and obliterates all lawlessness. So do not be deceived. Do not listen to the words of liars who deny what the Word of God has spoken plainly and clearly.

Instead, do as Moses instructed the people of Israel at the brink of the Red Sea: **“The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Ex 14:14).**

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant us steadfast hearts and faithfulness that we may never grow faint in the day of trouble but lift up our heads, rejoicing that our salvation draws near. Amen.

December 20 by Rev Zach Hoffman

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:14).

It is time for the annual battle that we fight against ourselves and against others - the battle to find happiness. As Christmas draws near, and as another year comes to its end, we just want to be happy. We have expectations, and even a vision of what that holiday happiness looks like. We plan out how we will spend our time with family or friends, and maybe even what those activities will be, or perhaps, you are thinking about treating your introverted side to some quiet time away from everyone. Thus, you might already be planning how you will retreat.

We hope to give gifts that the receiver wants, because that would make us happy. We hope to receive gifts that we want, because, of course, that would make us happy!

God the Father wants you to obtain something of much greater and lasting worth. He wants you to obtain the glory of Jesus Christ.

His “vision” for your happiness is to draw you to His Son, to share in His inheritance and His victory so that having put all selfishness aside, we would worship him. God has called you to trust in Him above everything else that you might obtain the one the Father rejoiced over - Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Almighty Father, teach us to find joy in your Son Jesus Christ so that we might learn to live with contentment in this world. Amen.

December 21 by Rev Bruce Timm

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Now may Our Lord Jesus Christ ... comfort your hearts (2 Thess 2:16-17).

Paul has just encouraged the Thessalonians to stand firm in the faith and hold to the traditions that were taught to them. They were to devote themselves to the Apostles' teaching, and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42). They were also to honor their pastors, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with all (1 Thess 5:13ff).

On the one hand, the Christian life is easy. You don't have to do anything for your salvation. Just receive the gifts. Hear God's Word. Be baptized. Commune at the Lord's Table. On the other hand, the Christian life is hard. No longer is sinfulness your path. That is the way of death, but you now walk in the way of life. You don't live for yourself, but for Christ. Your justification is complete. Christ did all that. Your sanctification is a hard work in progress.

For this reason, Paul fills his letters with blessings. The blessing of this passage comes from the Father and the Son. Paul blesses them with the love of God, the eternal comfort, and the good hope. Hear this blessing. You may not be loved by the world, but you are loved by God. You may struggle here to live as God's child, but eternal comfort is yours. This world is sure to disappoint, but God has given you a good hope. It's called the resurrection. That will comfort your heart and establish you to abide in God's Word and in good works.

Prayer: Lord God, heavenly Father, continue to bless me with your gifts in Christ, that I may lead a holy life before You and my neighbor. Amen.

December 22 by Rev Joshua Reber

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you (2 Thess 3:1).

Paul asks for prayers. **“Pray for us.”** But then he clarifies what praying for Paul means: **“that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored.”** He didn’t say, “Pray for my health.” It’s not that praying for someone’s health is bad *per se*, but Paul tells us to pray for something more important. “Pray that the word of the Lord may be honored!”

Is God going to say no to that prayer? No! Jesus promises us that the Gospel will be proclaimed to every nation (Mk 13:10). God’s Word never fails. We fail. We are often faithless. But God is always faithful.

So why pray for something you know God will say yes to? Perhaps the question ought to be, “Why would I pray for anything else?”

Praying for things you know God will give you makes your mindset the Bible’s mindset. Jesus says, **“The heavenly Father [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Lk 11:12).**

This Christmas, pray that God’s Word would speed ahead and be honored. Pray that your family, friends, neighbors, and you yourself would hear God’s Word, honor, and keep it. God knows the world needs the Word given at Christmas, and once again, He’ll send us that Word.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may Your Word speed ahead and be honored among us, among our community, and among the world. Give us Your Spirit so that we may believe in Jesus Christ; through the same Jesus Christ, Amen.

December 23 by Rev David Buchs

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

Keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us (2 Thess 3:6).

It hardly seems a fitting lesson for the Eve of the Eve of the Nativity of our Lord. Where's the build-up to the manger, shepherds, and lowing oxen? Where's the anticipation of the angelic choir and the blooming rose, sprung from tender stem?

Yet here is a fruitful reminder that God does not intend for us to remain kneeling beside the manger with the shepherds and oxen. Rather, He sent His Son, born of the virgin Mary, to **“work the works of him who sent me while it is day. Night is coming, when no one can work” (Jn 9:4).**

Christ did not remain a baby, but grew in wisdom and stature and labored diligently for our salvation, in keeping with the commission handed over to Him by His Father. As we come to the meditation of the Nativity of our Lord, prepare to rise and brush off our knees and labor in works of righteousness, prepared for us from before the foundation of the world, and handed over to us through the Son.

Idleness is not simply a vice, but it is contrary to the life of the Christian. The time is short, the harvest is plenty, and today is always the day of salvation. Rejoice with the angels tomorrow and the next day, and be filled up by the feast of Christmas to set your hand to whatever task the Lord then puts in front of you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, make us fit worshipers of you, giving you the praise due your name, and living lives of thanksgiving and devotion, overflowing with love for our neighbors. Amen.

December 24 by Rev Benjamin Hollingsead

2 Thessalonians 3:13-15

If anyone does not obey our word... do not keep company with him... Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 Thess 3:13-15).

Last winter, we Minnesotans were blessed with a mild winter with not very much snow, which means this year will likely be very snowy. To be prepared, I acquired a new snowblower with more horsepower. There are many safety caution symbols all over my new snow blower! They serve as a reminder of the potential dangers, ensuring our safety while operating the snowblower.

The Bible warns that certain behaviors are dangerous to a person's body and soul. Paul tells us to not keep company with those who are living their lives in a manner that is counter to the teaching of Holy Scripture. We do not do this because we hate the person living in sin; we are operating similarly to the snowblower manufacturer who doesn't want someone to lose their hand.

We distance ourselves from individuals or do not commune with other church bodies because we don't want to hurt our souls or fall away from Christ. We do not hate the sinner, and by distancing ourselves from withholding communion from others, we hope the person who is living a life counter to that of Christianity or is confessing a faith different than ours will provide an opportunity to minister to them and to bring them back to the true Christian faith.

Prayer: Jesus, give us Your Spirit so that we would not grow weary in doing good. Amen.

December 25 by Rev Bruce Timm

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace (2 Th 3:16).

The angels sang to the shepherds, "Peace on earth." It wasn't just a wish or a prayer. The peace they sang was a physical peace, as physical as that newborn baby being nursed by his mom, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

The shepherds knew what they were looking for in Bethlehem and they soon found Jesus lying in that manger. But they must have wondered, "How can this little guy be the peace of the world?"

The same question would have been on the minds of those who stood outside Jerusalem, on that Friday before Passover, watching the horrific crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. How can this make for peace?

God tells us how. Every episode of life that disturbs your peace has one source – your sin. Read Genesis 3 and see how it goes. The moment Adam and Eve disobey God, the peace of their marriage and lives disappears. They run from God, blame others, and try to save their skin at the expense of God and their neighbor.

Peace is this: The Lord forgives you all your sins. He makes right what you cannot correct. He makes whole what you could not restore. He has forgiven you through the body and blood of Jesus of Nazareth. The body and blood born of Mary. The body and blood that hung on the cross and was raised from the dead. The body and blood you receive in the Lord's Supper. When you receive that peace, that God has forgiven you, you can spread peace to the world, by forgiving as you have been forgiven. That peace is the gift of Christmas.

Prayer: Jesus, Lord of peace, give me peace, that forgiven I might forgive. Amen.