

LECTIONARY SUMMARIES

FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(5 December 2021)

Malachi 3:1–7b

Philippians 1:2–11

Luke 3:1–14 (15–20)

The Preaching of Repentance Prepares Us for the Coming of the Lord

The preaching and Baptism “*of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” (Luke 3:3) prepare us for the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. The historic work of John the Baptist was completed with the first advent of our Lord Jesus in the flesh, but the ministry of the forerunner continues in the preaching of Law and Gospel and in Holy Baptism. Through His messengers, the Lord calls people of all nations to “*see the salvation of God*” (Luke 3:6). Our haughtiness is removed and our mountains of pride are brought low, but the Lord humbles us in order to exalt us in His mercy. As the Lord has begun this good work of repentance in us, so also does He perfect it by His Word and Holy Spirit, and He “*will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 1:6). He purifies us to be His priestly people, precious in His sight and abounding in faith and love, so that we offer our very lives in righteousness to the Lord (Mal. 3:3–4).

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(12 December 2021)

Zephaniah 3:14–20

Philippians 4:4–7

Luke 7:18–28 (29–35)

The Coming of Jesus Enables Us to Rejoice

The Third Sunday in Advent has traditionally been called by the Latin word *Gaudete*, meaning “Rejoice!” For as you are called to repentance, so also are you urged to rejoice in the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. By His own cross, He has accomplished salvation for you; “*he has cleared away your enemies,*” “*taken away the judgments against you*” and come to reign in your midst. Indeed, He rejoices over you with gladness and song (Zeph. 3:15–17)! Therefore, even from prison St. Paul encourages us to “*rejoice in the Lord always,*” knowing that the peace of God will guard and keep us in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:4, 7). We find an example and encouragement in the case of John the Baptist. As he languishes in prison, he calls upon Jesus and is strengthened by the Word of the Gospel that he receives. The same good news is preached to you, by which all things are made new and even “*the dead are raised up*” (Luke 7:22). Do not be offended by the cross, therefore, but let your life be one of prayer and thanksgiving (Luke 7:23; Phil. 4:6).

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(19 December 2021)

Micah 5:2–5a

Hebrews 10:5–10

Luke 1:39–45 (46–56)

The Lord Comes to Visit Us in Peace

The Fourth Sunday in Advent turns our attention toward the nativity of our Lord. With Mary, we await the coming of the Christ, her Son, conceived in her womb by the Spirit of God. As the Lord dealt graciously with her and did great things for her (Luke 1:48–49), so also He manifests Himself and His glory to us in mercy and gentleness. He comes to rule His people in peace, to “*shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD.*” He comes forth not from the great capital city of Rome or Jerusalem, but from lowly little Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, 4). He comes to sacrifice Himself, in fulfillment of His Father’s will, for the salvation and sanctification of His people (Heb. 10:10). He who once visited Elizabeth while hidden in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:39–45) now comes to visit us today, hidden in the lowliness of simple water, bread and wine.

CHRISTMAS EVE

(24 December 2021)

Isaiah 7:10–14

1 John 4:7–16

Matthew 1:18–25

The Word of the Lord Is Fulfilled in the Flesh of Jesus

Though Ahaz would not ask, the Lord gives a sign to the house of David that *“the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”* (Is. 7:14). With this promise, He signifies that salvation is by His grace alone; it is no work or achievement of fallen humanity, but the Lord’s own work and free gift. The promise is fulfilled as the Son of God is conceived and born of the Virgin Mary, and the sign is received in faith by the house of David in the person of Joseph (Matt. 1:20–24). “Incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary” (Nicene Creed), God is with us (Immanuel) in the flesh of Jesus, Mary’s Son. Joseph believes that Word of God and so demonstrates a marvelous example in his immediate and quiet obedience, taking Mary to be his wife and caring for her in faith and love. He loves her because the love of God is manifest in this, that *“the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world,” “to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:9–10, 14).

CHRISTMAS DAY

(25 December 2021)

Isaiah 52:7–10

Hebrews 1:1–6 (7–12)

John 1:1–14 (15–18)

The Living and Life-Giving Word of God Dwells Among Us in the Flesh

The Lord sends out His ministers of the Gospel to make disciples *“of all the nations,”* so that *“all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”* For the Lord has *“bared his holy arm”* in the incarnate Christ (Is. 52:7, 10). The Child in the manger, born of the Virgin Mary, is the very Word of God, the only begotten Son of the Father, *“whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world”* (Heb. 1:2). As *“all things were made through him”* (John 1:3), so are all things redeemed and made new in Him. In His body of flesh and blood, we behold *“the radiance of the glory of God”* (Heb. 1:3), *“glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). He dwells among us in peace that we might have life and light and salvation in Him. For by His Word of the Gospel, we are born again as the children of God, bearing His name and sharing His eternal life.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

(26 December 2021)

Exodus 13:1–3a, 11–15

Colossians 3:12–17

Luke 2:22–40

The Firstborn Son of God Is Our Redemption from Sin and Death

When the Lord destroyed the firstborn sons of Egypt, He spared the sons of Israel by providing a lamb in their stead. Hence, all the firstborn sons belong to Him. Every firstborn male animal was sacrificed, and every firstborn son of man was redeemed (Ex. 13:12–13). Therefore, the parents of Jesus *“brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord”* (Luke 2:22). However, He is not redeemed from priestly service but is consecrated for *“the redemption of Jerusalem”* and *“the consolation of Israel”* (Luke 2:25, 38). For God the Father did not spare His only begotten Son, but offered Him up as the true Passover Lamb, in order to redeem His people from bondage. His cross has caused many to stumble and fall, but His blood atoned for the sins of the world and delivers us from death. We now depart in the peace of Christ because we are also raised with Him. As we receive His body and blood, we join Simeon and Anna in *“giving thanks to God the Father through him,” “singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,”* including the Nunc Dimittis, with thankfulness in our hearts (Luke 2:28–32, 38; Col. 3:15–17).

EVE OF THE CIRCUMCISION AND NAME OF JESUS (NEW YEAR'S EVE)

(31 December 2021)

Isaiah 30:(8–14) 15–17

Romans 8:31b–39

Luke 12:35–40

Our Times Are in His Hands

The Church and the world are awake, but for very different reasons. The world counts down to midnight; the Church watches eagerly for her Master who is “*coming at an hour*” we “*do not expect*” (Luke 12:40). For many, the changing year brings regrets, fears and desperate wishes for improvement. The world delights in smooth talk and illusions of prosperity at any cost (Is. 30:9–10). It has already forgotten “*the Holy One of Israel*” born six days earlier (Is. 30:11). The Church ends the calendar year differently. “*In returning and rest ... in quietness and in trust,*” that is, in repentance and faith, for the Holy One saves us, and He is our strength (Is. 30:15). Our times are in His hands (Ps. 31:15), the hands of Mary’s Son — God not only with us, but for us (Matt. 1:23). So, who could be against us? If God has given His Son, “*how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*” (Rom. 8:31–32). The Church dresses for action not in fear, but in hope; Christ is coming to serve her with His gifts (Luke 12:37). Who is there to condemn us for the passing year? Christ has died, is raised and intercedes for us! What distress will the new year bring? Nothing can “*separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 8:34–39)!