

**St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)
8948 N 1900 Ave Geneseo, IL 61254
309-949-2516**

November 29, 2020

First Sunday in Advent

The order of worship is based upon Divine Service Setting Three, Lutheran Service Book p. 184.

Confession and Absolution

Stand

The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

☐ In the name of the Father and of the ☐ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

☩ **Amen.**

☐ Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

☐ Our help is in the name of the Lord,

☩ **who made heaven and earth.**

☐ I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,

☩ **and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.**

Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination.

☐ O almighty God, merciful Father,

☩ **I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.**

☐ Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ☐ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

☩ **Amen.**

Service of the Word

Introit

Psalm 25:1-3; antiphon: Zechariah 9:9b, alt.

Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation.

To you, O LORD,

I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies exult over me.

**Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.**

Glory be to the Father and to the Son

and to the Holy Spirit;

as it was in the beginning,

is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation.

Salutation and Collect of the Day

□ The Lord be with you.

∞ **And with thy spirit.**

□ Let us pray.

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

∞ **Amen.**

Sit

First Reading

Isaiah 64:1-9, on back of bulletin

Ⲡ This is the Word of the Lord.

∞ **Thanks be to God.**

Gradual

Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26, alt.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation.

Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you.

Epistle

1 Corinthians 1:3-9, on back of bulletin

Ⲡ This is the Word of the Lord.

∞ **Thanks be to God.**

Stand

Verse of the Day

Psalm 24:7

□ Alleluia. Lift up your heads, O gates!

∞ **And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory
may come in. Alleluia.**

Holy Gospel

Mark 11:1-10, on back of bulletin

□ The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the eleventh chapter.

∞ **Glory be to Thee, O Lord.**

After the reading

□ This is the Gospel of the Lord.

∞ **Praise be to Thee, O Christ.**

Nicene Creed

∞ **I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible.**

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried.**

**And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures
and ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living
and the dead,
whose kingdom will have no end.**

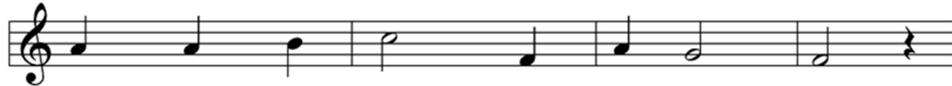
**And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and
glorified,
who spoke by the prophets.
And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
and I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life □ of the world to come. Amen.**

Sit

Hymn of the Day: 355 O Savior, Rend the Heavens Wide



1 O Sav - ior, rend the heav - ens wide;
2 O Fa - ther, light from heav - en send;
3 O earth, in flow'r - ing bud be seen;
4 O Fount of hope, how long, how long?



Come down, come down with might - y stride;
As morn - ing dew, O Son, de - scend.
Clothe hill and dale in garb of green.
When will You come with com - fort strong?



Un - lock the gates, the doors break down;
Drop down, you clouds, the life of spring;
Bring forth, O earth, a blos - som rare,
O come, O come, Your throne fore - go;



Un - bar the way to heav - en's crown.
To Ja - cob's line rain down the King.
Our Sav - ior, sprung from mead - ow fair.
Con - sole us in our vale of woe.

- 5 O Morning Star, O radiant Sun,
When will our hearts behold Your dawn?
O Sun, arise; without Your light
We grope in gloom and dark of night.
- 6 Sin's dreadful doom upon us lies;
Grim death looms fierce before our eyes.
O come, lead us with mighty hand
From exile to our promised land.
- 7 There shall we all our praises bring
And sing to You, our Savior King;
There shall we laud You and adore
Forever and forevermore.

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Sermon

Prayer of the Church

- Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.
- Gracious Lord, enrich Your saints in every way as we enter another Church Year. Encourage the preachers of Your Word and all who hear, that the testimony about Christ may be confirmed again among us. Give boldness and faithfulness to Matthew, our Synod president; Mark, our district president; Robert, our circuit visitor; and all pastors in Christ. As You have called us into the fellowship of Your Son, so sustain us as we wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, in Your mercy,
☩ **hear our prayer.**
- Heavenly Father, preserve and bless all Christian households, that husbands and wives would live in love and service to each other, that fathers and mothers would diligently bring up their children in Your fear, and that children would honor their parents and be well equipped for service to their neighbors in this life. Lord, in Your mercy,
☩ **hear our prayer.**
- Almighty God, be with the governing authorities and enable them to preserve peace and order in our nation. Hear our prayers for Donald, our president; Jay, our governor; our military and police; and other civil servants as well as all newly elected officials. Increase a spirit of unity and cooperation among the people of our land and the nations of the world. Lord, in Your mercy,
☩ **hear our prayer.**
- Eternal Lord, as Your Son once entered humbly into Jerusalem to cries of “Hosanna,” so send Him to us according to His promise in the Holy Sacrament, that we may eat His body and drink His blood in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of our sins and in the unity of a true confession. Lord, in Your mercy,
☩ **hear our prayer.**
- Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You so graciously sent to earth and offered as the Lamb of sacrifice for our sins. Holy Jesus, true Son of God, we thank You for demonstrating God's love for us by coming here as our Brother to die for our sins on the cross. As we journey in spirit to Bethlehem's stable once again where You first appeared in human flesh to be our Savior, lend us Your

grace to rededicate ourselves in thoughts, words, and deeds, to You. Holy Spirit, we thank You for giving us true faith, which trusts and confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world. Give us true joy and peace in believing. Lord, in Your mercy,

☞ **hear our prayer.**

☐ O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in this season when we are reminded so much of the precious gift of salvation which Your divine love has given us, stir up in our hearts a deep sense of brotherly love, and cause us to be concerned about the welfare of others. Give each of us a spirit of generosity toward those in need. Lord, in Your mercy,

☞ **hear our prayer.**

☐ Holy Trinity, bless us, your people, with every needful blessing. Graciously grant us good health this winter season, and keep every kind of disease and illness from us, and we pray especially that You bring this pandemic to an end. Watch over our children, and protect them from all harm and danger. Keep under your mercy and special care the aged and those who are feeble. We pray especially for Linda, Claris, Joseph, Pam, Paula, Jim, Norma, Don, John, Bob, Betty, Justin, Donald, Delores, Arlyn, Derek, Harley, Lillian, Lynne, Clinton's Family, Crystal, Fred, Jodi, Glenn, Mike, Virginia, Jim, John, Marilyn, Casey, Jim, Brian, Drew, Kathleen, Glenda, Kelly, Carolyn, Carolyn, and Karen. Give aid to the needy, and bring comfort to the distressed. When the winter weather becomes severe, keep us safe and warm. Protect us at all times in our travels. Stand guard over our homes, church, school, and places of employment. Lord, in Your mercy,

☞ **hear our prayer.**

☐ Merciful Father, forgive our many sins, for it was because of them that Christ had to come down among us and die. Have Your Word dwell in us richly in all wisdom, and grant us continual growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Savior Jesus Christ, who with You and the Holy Spirit is one God, now and forever.

☞ **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.**

Benedicamus

- ☐ Bless we the Lord.
- ☞ Thanks be to God.

Benediction

- ☐ The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and ☐ give you peace.
- ☞ **Amen.**



1 The ad-vent of our King Our prayers must now em-ploy,
2 The ev-er-last-ing Son In-car-nate deigns to be,
3 O Zi-on's daugh-ter, rise To meet your low-ly King,
4 As judge, on clouds of light, He soon will come a-gain



And we must hymns of wel-come sing In strains of ho-ly joy.
Him-self a ser-vant's form puts on To set His ser-vants free.
Nor let your faith-less heart de-spise The peace He comes to bring.
And His true mem-bers all u-nite With Him in heav'n to reign.

Closing Hymn: 331 The Advent of Our King

- 5 Before the dawning day ☞ 6 All glory to the Son,
Let sin's dark deeds be gone, Who comes to set us free,
The sinful self be put away, With Father, Spirit, ever one

The new self now put on.

Through all eternity.

Tune and text: Public domain

At this time the live streaming of the service will end. If anyone does not feel comfortable receiving the Lord's Supper at this time they are welcome to depart. The worship concludes with the Service of the Sacrament.

Service of the Sacrament

Preface

- The Lord be with you.
- ☩ **And with thy spirit.**

- Lift up your hearts.
- ☩ **We lift them up unto the Lord.**

- Let us give thanks unto the Lord, our God.
- ☩ **It is meet and right so to do.**

- It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared, proclaiming Him the promised Messiah, the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and calling sinners to repentance that they might escape from the wrath to be revealed when He comes again in glory. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

Sanctus

- ☩ **Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might: heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

The Words of Institution

- Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My
□ body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My □ blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Pax Domini

- The peace of the Lord be with you always.

☩ **Amen.**

Agnus Dei

- ☩ **O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.**
- O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.**
- O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world, grant us Thy peace. Amen.**

Distribution

- The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting. Depart □ in peace.
- ☩ **Amen.**

Nunc Dimittis

- ☩ **Lord, now let Thou Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy word, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou has prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel.**
- Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

Thanksgiving

- O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good,
- ☩ **and His mercy endures forever.**

- Let us pray.
We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- ☩ **Amen.**

- The Lord be with you.
- ☩ **And with thy spirit.**

Benedicamus

- Bless we the Lord.
- ☩ **Thanks be to God.**

Benediction

- The grace of our Lord □ Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

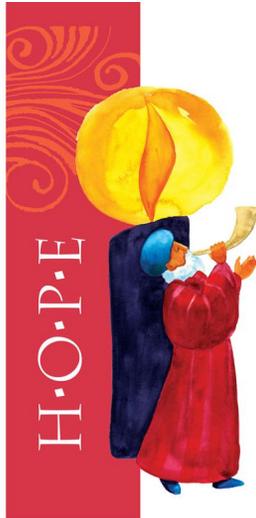
☩ **Amen.**

Today we receive the gift of Holy Communion. Communion is an expression of faith and agreement. If you're our guest this morning, we don't want to place you in a position of agreement with our beliefs before you've had opportunity to study them. Therefore, if you're not a member of a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregation, we invite you to speak with our pastor about this special opportunity, and request that you not partake of communion today. Thank you.

Acknowledgements

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1st CANDLE – (royal blue or purple) **THE PROPHECY CANDLE or CANDLE OF HOPE** – We can have hope because God is faithful and will keep the promises made to us. Our hope comes from God. *“And again, Isaiah says, ‘The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.’ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”* (Romans 15:12-13)

ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH-LCMS

churchoffice@stjohnsgeneseo.org

Website: www.stjohnsgeneseo.org

https://www.facebook.com/St.Johns.Geneseo

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HEARING ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Rev. Timothy Nerud

Pastor

309-949-2516 (Office)

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+In God's Grace—In God's Service+

Elder: Brad Gehn

Videographer: Joel Werling

Ushers: Aaron Raschke Dave Schmedt

Organist: Carmen Pamperin

Today's Readings: Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 64:1-9
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Holy Gospel: Mark 11:1-10

WE PRAY: By deepening our understanding of where we are between the first and second advents of our Christ, excite us to endless alleluias, O Holy Spirit of God, that we may be moved to thanksgiving, to prayer and praise, and to joyous living in our anticipation of the end-time event; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who with You and the Father are one God with dominion over us forever. Amen

WELCOME TO ALL!

We are anxious to share with you the Christ-centered ministry at St. John's. Our Liturgy follows closely the pattern of Word and Lord's Supper handed down from the ancient Church. It is our hope that you will make the Church's life of prayer your own. If you have difficulty following our order of service, please ask someone sitting near you for assistance. We pray that you will receive rich spiritual blessings from your presence here. May the peace and power of our risen Christ be yours always.

IF YOU DESIRE a visit or call from Pastor Nerud, please contact the church

office (309-949-2516).

OFFICE HOURS

Terri's hours	(Monday—Friday)	8 am—12 pm
Pastor's hours	(Monday, Pastor's day off)	
	(Tuesday)	9 am—12 pm
	(Thursday)	9 am—12 pm & 1 pm—4 pm
	(Wednesday & Friday)	please call ahead.

ATTENDANCE LAST SUNDAY

Sunday school—14 Adult Bible Class—18 Worship—58

LIVE STREAMED SERVICES are available on St. John's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/St.Johns.Geneseo/> and posted on Monday on the church website: www.stjohnsgeneseo.org found under the 'Sermon' tab and

WEEKLY OFFERING

Offering \$4,583.11

THIS WEEK AT ST. JOHN'S

Today	8:45 am	SS/Adult w/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship/Communion
Wednesday	5:00 pm	Confirmation
	7:00 pm	Advent Service
Thursday	6:00 pm	Elders meeting
	7:00 pm	Men's Bible Study
Next Sunday	8:45 am	SS/Adult w/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship/Communion

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and seek him in his temple.
Psalm 27:4

1 CORINTHIANS 1:9 – “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” The faithfulness of God is our great comfort. He has made promises to us, and He will keep them. He is kind and loving toward us, and He will not break faith with us. This gives us the confidence to step out in faith, to leave fear behind. When it comes to following the Lord's commandments for our daily lives, we know His will is best for us because our God is faithful.

THANK YOU to each of the ladies helping out with our worship services; Carmen Pamperin, Sally Brockway, and Christine Boudro. God surely supplies all our needs and even more.

MID-WEEK ADVENT SERVICES will be held Dec. 2nd, 9th, and 16th beginning at 7:00 pm. Join with your brothers and sisters in Christ in preparing for the coming of our King Jesus, the Savior of the world.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS will adorn our sanctuary on Christmas. Cost is \$8.00 each. Please sign-up right away. Pay Terri Hock by Dec. 6th.

KEEPING CHRIST ON CAMPUS—This is the ministry work of the Central Illinois District of LCMS at U of I Urbana-Champaign, ISU Normal, EIU Charleston, and WIU Macomb. Your help is vital in keeping contact with students at our universities. You can still give to this ministry. Place your “Thanksgiving” offering in the plate found in the Narthex.

THANK YOU to each one who helped with the decorating of the church. We are blessed with many willing hands.

JUST A REMINDER—If you do not wish to use ‘contribution’ envelopes for your regular weekly giving, please let Terri Hock know by Dec. 6. We are preparing for 2022 order. Thank you!

ADVENT DEVOTIONS AND PORTAL OF PRAYERS are available. Please pick one up for your family or perhaps share them with a friend or neighbor.

PRAYER MINISTRY

Give thanks as you pray:

MISSION— *Thank God for the Holy Spirit, who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.*

ST. JOHN'S—Mr. Aaron Raschke—We offer before You our common request for the well-being of Your church throughout the world that it may be so guided and governed by Your good Spirit that all who profess themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Specifically, we pray for Aaron and Autumn and ask your blessing on them.

ST. JOHN'S FAMILY—O Lord, You are the great Physician of soul and body. We pray that You would show mercy to Your servants:

Drew Schillinger	Jim Rahn	Carolyn Wildermuth
Arlyn Helke	Bob Esterlein	Lynne Johnson
Derek Helke	Lillian Hock	Jim Dahl
Carolyn Werner	Betty Firch	John Erdman
Paula Chapa	John Neumann	Fred Magerkurth
Norma Daniels	Linda Aper	

Andrew Hill, Sarah, John, Daniel (2019/2020 Seminary Student)

Don Eggers (son of a friend of Marilyn Woods)

Mike Miller (friend of Bob & Sherry Wechsler)

Jodi Martins (daughter of Gary & Darla Johns)

Jon & Anita Clausing (missionaries in Kenya)

Marilyn Potts (wife of Cal Potts, former St John Laborer For Christ)

Pam Bennett (friend of Dan/Roselyn Maeltzer)

Karen Wright (wife of Pastor Gary Wright)

Virginia Miller (mother of Jamie Werling)
Casey Powers (husband of Lisa (Bear) Powers)
Kelly Wechsler (cousin of Bob Wechsler)
Kathleen VanDeRostyne (friend of Bob & Sherry Wechsler)
Joseph Baamonde (Friend of Paula Mooney)
Clinton Kane Family (son of Sandy Kane)
Jim Neumann (father-in-law of Brad Gehn's son)
Harley Hepner (cousin of Sarah Hock)
Claris Anderson (mother of Sarah Hock)
Delores Gonion (mother of Michele Barry)
Glenn McAdam (friend of Bob & Sherry Wechsler)
Rev. Dr. Brian Saunders (President of Iowa East District)
Donald Gilbert (uncle of Pastor Nerud)
Justine Fowler (son of Kathy & Kurt Gehn)

MILITARY—We pray for those serving in our military and their families:

Mandy & Richard Davila (daughter & son-in-law of Dale & Linda Aper)
Luke & Nicole Thompson (son & daughter-in-law of John & Kindra Thompson)
Ken Willeford (husband of Alicia Willeford)
Tyler Hynes (nephew of Mark Ague)
Karl Flynn (son of Mr. & Mrs. Paul Flynn)
Zachary & Tiffany Gardner (nephew & wife of Bob & Lois Esterlein)

LUTHERANS FOR LIFE

“Christians engage in adopting not only because we desire to raise children but also—and above all—because the Most High desires their survival and salvation. We adopt because we have been so adopted. We adopt because little ones need homes. We adopt because we have homes and families to share. Life issues mean more than just political debates. Life issues involve more than just personal choices or someone else's problems. Life issues are always people and Gospel.” *Rev. Michael W. Salemink, Executive Director of Lutherans For Life – A Life Quote from Lutherans For Life • www.lutheransforlife.org*

First Sunday in Advent

November 29, 2020

Sermon Text: Isaiah 64:1-9 (Old Testament Reading)

Other Texts: Corinthians 1:3-9 (Epistle); Mark 11:1-10 (Gospel)

“Rend the Heavens and Come Down!”

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father for sake of the Lord Jesus Christ has come once to pay for sins and who will come again to save all who eagerly wait for Him.ⁱ

Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence— as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence!ⁱⁱ

Assyria has conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and was pressuring the Southern Kingdom of Judah. And while deliverance from Assyria would come, it would happen only after much grief and worse, Isaiah also was given foresight to see the Babylonian Exile of Judah yet in their future. So Isaiah, acting as a mediator, cries out to the Lord, asking Him to come down in power and glory to deliver them from their enemies.

We can relate as well, can't we? We too experience sorrow, suffering, and misfortune in this life. We too endure the hatred of our enemies. Christ's little flock, so despised and hated by the world, always seeking to scatter the sheep, whether by seduction, suppression, or outright oppression. Yes, why does not the Lord rend the heavens and come down and destroy our foes?

Certainly the Lord God can do such, for He has done such awesome things before. Egypt shook under the ten plagues. The sea was torn in two so that His people could cross on dry ground even as the pride of Pharaoh's army was then crushed and drowned under the waters. And speaking of mountains quaking, when the Lord came down on Mt. Sinai, it was wrapped in smoke and fire and trembled greatly with His manifestation.ⁱⁱⁱ So also, the mighty walls of Jericho crumbled before the power of the Lord. And so, like God's people of old, God's people today continue call out in prayer for the Lord to come down in might and shatter our enemies. But one must be careful for what one asks.

Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.^{iv}

Having God come down in power and glory to wipe out sinners sounds like a great plan until one recognizes that we would have to be included in that grouping. For all sin is an affront and an offense to God, and we are contaminated by it so deep, to the very depths of our core, so that even our righteous deeds, our best of works, are but a filthy stench before God. Like a menstrual garment, we are unclean before the Lord and so cannot be in His holy presence. And so, with

Isaiah, our prayer takes on a new tone. “Be not so terribly angry, O LORD, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people.”^v

Like Isaiah and Israel of old, we cannot claim great some special holiness of ourselves, our sinful nature makes that impossible. Instead, we can only cry out to God for mercy, that He nor remember our iniquity forever, but graciously pardon us, forgiving us our not only our many sins, but the contamination of sin which makes even our best of works unclean. And the Lord hears the prayer of His people!

In the past the Lord did awesome things that His people did not look for, as He rescued them from slavery in Egypt through the Exodus, protected them during the years of wilderness wandering, and finally brought them into the Promised Land, driving out their enemies before them. Yet, the problems continued. Not only did God’s people continue to be oppressed, far worse they continued in their sins, continued to anger Him. So God did something even more awesome; something that would never have been expected.

For the heavens were rent wide open, the angelic army proclaiming the Lord’s coming down, telling the shepherds that they would find Him, as a baby in a stable, lying in a manger. The heavens were rent once again when the Lord Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, God the Holy Spirit coming down in the form of a dove, the Father’s voice speaking, declaring Jesus to be His eternal Son, the agent of His saving plan.

And that plan took Jesus to another mountain, Mount Calvary. There, under the darkened sky, the earth shook again, rocks splitting open, when the Son of God died upon the cross. But this quaking of the earth opened tombs, and many saints were raise to life. A foreshadowing of three days later when there was another great earthquake as an angel threw down the stone from Jesus’ tomb to show it was empty. And so, another rending of the heavens occurred, the rending of the barrier between sinful man and the holy God, the barrier of sin falling like Jericho’s walls, represented by the temple curtain being torn from top to bottom. And so sinful man’s access to heaven was gained, because God’s Son became our brother in the flesh, and paid for our sins, rising in triumph for us and our salvation!

And so we do pray that God would rend the heavens again and deliver us from all evil. A prayer that will be answered when the Lord Jesus Christ comes down once again. And this time it will not be in humility, but in His heavenly power and majesty. On that day the mountains will not merely quake, but will be completely removed from their places and the very sky will vanish like a scroll being rolled up, for the current creation will be burned as brushwood in the fire of God’s holy presence when the wrath of God and the Lamb is finally unleashed in its full fury.^{vi} A fury that we will escape, be rescued from, because the Lamb already suffered for our sins under God’s fury in our place when the heavens were rent and the earth shook at His first coming.

On the day of our Lord Jesus Christ all our enemies will finally be destroyed, cast into the lake of fire. No longer will God’s people be the little flock under assault, but we will instead finally live in the fullness of the salvation that is already ours. Like Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, we too will imitate our Lord as our resurrected bodies shine in glory, the final consummation of the life given to us in our Baptism when we live forever in the new heavens and the new earth under God’s visible presence and the abundance of His blessings for His saints, redeemed by the blood of His Son, filled with His Holy Spirit.

That, my friends, is the future deliverance that is yours and all believers in Christ. But we are not there yet. Like Isaiah of old, we are still in the time of pleading for the Lord to come. So also, we dare not claim our holiness before the Lord, holding up our righteousness, for the only righteousness we have is in Christ. For in Him our sins are washed away, His perfect righteousness covering us, His blood washing away the contamination of sins that clings to our works like tar so that they are acceptable to our Father in heaven. But outside of Christ, there is only the filth, the uncleanness of sin, and the wrath of God and the Lamb.

So this season of Advent is a picture of the Christian life. We live in the grace of God, purchased by our Lord at His first coming even as we await His second coming to take us from this veil of sorrow, this valley of death, into life everlasting where all our tears will be wiped away, and we will only know joy and peace forevermore. But Isaiah's words offer us a warning to keep us sober until then. "Behold, you were angry, and we sinned."

This seems backward. Should it not be, "Behold, we sinned and you were angry"? And of course, God was not angry until we first sinned. Yet, Scripture forewarns us that part of God's wrath against sin is to turn people over to their sins. When Pharaoh refused time and time again to heed the Lord's Word through Moses, God finally hardened Pharaoh's heart, thereby locking him in his sin and unbelief as he had been choosing. Similarly, St. Paul has written, "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."^{vii} The greatest judgment God can unleash upon those who refuse to repent of their sins and turn to His grace in His Son is to honor their wish and lock them into their state of rebellion. A state which has eternal consequences.

So yes, God in His anger can turn us over to our debased heart and so our sin will grow and grow and, worst of all, we will not care. For should such happen we will no longer desire God's grace and mercy, but will staunchly continue in our impenitence, our sins, our unbelief, until of course the day of the Lamb's wrath. But then it will be too late.

So dear blood-bought Christians, live every day of your lives as "Advent people." That is rejoice in the payment for your sins and the victory over all your enemies, the devil, the sinful world of unbelievers, and your own sinful nature as well, which occurred when our Lord rent the heavens and made the earth quake at His first advent. But do not take this for granted, and so despise God's grace and the blood of Christ. Instead, let the joy and hope of your salvation keep you firm in faith, firm against sin, against Satan's temptations, the world's deceitfulness and persecution, and the lusts and cowardice of your own sinful nature so that you do not lose what your Lord has won for you.

But even as you fight valiantly against such, do not put your confidence in yourself, but in the promise God has given you, that He "will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."^{viii} The day of His second advent, when He rends the heavens and comes down one last time, and brings you into the eternal heavenly mansions that He is preparing for you, and all His blood-bought people who fight the good fight of faith.

Amen. Come Lord Jesus!^{ix}

ⁱ Hebrews 9:28.

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 64:1-2. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Exodus 19:18.

^{iv} Isaiah 64:5b-7.

^v Isaiah 64:9.

^{vi} Revelation 6:14, 16-17.

^{vii} Romans 1:28. See also verses 24 and 26.

^{viii} 1 Corinthians 1:8.

^{ix} Revelation 22:20.