

Theology Matters

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Preparing for the Coming of Jesus Christ: Advent Daily Scripture Readings and Reflections from the Writings of John Calvin

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This Daily Advent Devotional Guide, prepared for South Highland Presbyterian Church of Birmingham, Alabama by Rev. Dr. Edwin Hurley, contains Daily Scripture Readings from the Common Christian Lectionary together with selections from the writings of the renowned Christian Theologian and Reformer, John Calvin. 2009 marks the 500th birthday of Calvin. It is a year in which we are invited to delve again into the vast works of this giant of worldwide Christianity and father of the Reformed and Presbyterian faith.

John Calvin, 1509–1564 was born at Noyon in Picardy, France on July 10, 1509, the son of Gérard Cauvin, a man of low birth who rose to become secretary to the bishop and attorney to the cathedral chapter. Calvin's mother, Jeanne le Franc, was the pious daughter of a well-to-do innkeeper of Cambrai. Calvin seemed destined by his father for an ecclesiastical career, and so was sent to study in Paris. There the young stellar student, with a gift for vast memory recall, demonstrated brilliance in philosophical and theological studies. Achieving the masters of arts degree, Calvin's father turned his obedient son from the study of theology to that of law in Orleans and later in Bourges. Calvin imbibed the "new learning" of Renaissance ideas that were contesting the supremacy of Medieval Scholasticism.

Calvin, who was baptized and raised in the Roman Catholic Church, had a "sudden" conversion to Protestantism, hearing and reading Martin Luther's fresh teachings, somewhere between 1528 and 1534. He mentions it only once, in the preface of his *Commentary on the Psalms*. In 1534 he began to assume intellectual leadership among advocates of Protestant reform. Fleeing Paris in 1534, as his writings were putting his life in danger, he wrote the first edition of his monumental *Institutes of the Christian Religion* from Geneva, published in 1536. There he began lecturing inconspicuously and without payment on Paul's Epistles in the Church of St. Pierre, where he was later received as pastor. After a brief time away Calvin would be recalled to Geneva for the rest of his life, where he would preach, teach, establish his academy, and build his Reformed Christian community, that would flow forth throughout Europe.

The Institutes, from which most of our Advent Reflections are drawn, is a superb comprehensive statement of classical orthodox Christianity. This would be Calvin's life work and the definitive text of Protestant Christianity for the next 500 years. *The Institutes* follow a traditional pattern of instruction giving expositions on the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is divided into four major sections.

- I. The Knowledge of God the Creator
- II. The Knowledge of God the Redeemer in Christ
- III. The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ
- IV. The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein.

A final section “On Christian Liberty,” deals with ecclesiastical power and civil administration. Any understanding of democratic participatory government, in either church or state, must turn to the writings of Calvin for its foundation.

Calvin continued to revise *The Institutes* until his final edition was completed in 1559. In addition, Calvin’s wide-ranging correspondence fills ten volumes. He published commentaries on nearly every book of the Bible and allowed his sermons, which were taken down as he spoke them two times a week on average by a secretary, also to be printed. The writings in this Advent Guide, beginning on the Fourth Sunday, are drawn from two sermons he prepared for Christmas.

The Guide will be most beneficial if you read all the Lessons, either quietly, or out loud with members of your family. However the main reading that inspires the selections from Calvin are in **bold** letters in the event time only allows one Scripture Lesson. Each day’s selection from Calvin is concluded by a selection from his prayers. The readings and prayers have been drawn from the following sources should you desire to read further.

John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion* edited by John T. McNeil, translated from the 1559 Latin Ed. and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles, 1977, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, cited herein by book, chapter and section. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press. www.wjkbooks.com.

John Calvin, *Sermons on the Saving Work of Christ*, Selected and translated by Leroy Nixon, 1950, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Ann Arbor, MI.

John Calvin, *Writing on Pastoral Piety*, Edited and with translations by Elsie Anne McKee. 2001 Panelist Press, New York.

After this whetting of the appetite during Advent, I encourage you to read the whole of Calvin’s *Institutes* through in a year. The following web site <http://www.foundationrt.org> at The Foundation for Reformed Theology in Richmond, VA will provide you with a daily reading guide.

First Sunday of Advent

Psalm 24:1-10, Isa. 1:1-9, **2 Peter 3:1-10**, Matt. 25:1-13

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9

The Knowledge of God and That of Ourselves Are Connected. How They Are Interrelated

Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern. In the first place, no one can look upon himself without immediately turning his thoughts to the contemplation of God, in whom he “lives and moves” (Acts 17:28). For quite clearly, the mighty gifts with which we are endowed are hardly from ourselves; indeed, our very being is nothing but subsistence in the one God. Then, by these benefits shed like dew from heaven upon us, we are led as by rivulets to the spring itself. Indeed, our poverty better discloses the infinitude of benefits reposing in God. The miserable ruin, into which the rebellion of the first man cast us, especially compels us to look upward. Thus, not only will we, by fasting and hungering, seek thence what we lack; but, in being aroused by fear, we shall learn humility.

For what man in all the world would not gladly remain as he is—what man does not remain as he is—so long as he does not know himself, that is, while content with his own gifts, and either ignorant or unmindful of his own misery? Accordingly, the knowledge of ourselves not only arouses us to seek God, but also, as it were, leads us by the hand to find him.

Yet, however the knowledge of God and of ourselves may be mutually connected, the order of right teaching requires that we discuss the former first, then proceed afterward to treat the latter. (John Calvin’s *Institutes* 1.1.1, 3)

May the Lord God and Father be present with us by his Holy Spirit and so govern and guide us, that all that we do, say, or think may be to his honor and glory, in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

First Monday: Look to God

Ps. 122, **Isaiah 1:10-20**, 1 Thess. 1:1-10, Luke 20:1-8

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil from your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. Isaiah 1:17,18

What It Is to Know God, and to What Purpose the Knowledge of Him Tends

I call “piety” that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces. For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by his fatherly care, that he is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond him—they will never yield him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to him.

You cannot behold him clearly unless you acknowledge him to be the fountainhead and source of every good. From this too would arise the desire to cleave to him and trust in him, but for the fact that man’s depravity seduces his mind from rightly seeking him.

The pious mind does not dream up for itself any god it pleases, but contemplates the one and only true God. It thus recognizes God because it knows that he governs all things; and trusts that he is its guide and protector, therefore giving itself over completely to trust in him.... Besides, this mind restrains itself from sinning, not out of dread of punishment alone; but because it loves and reveres God as Father, it worships and adores him as Lord. Even if there were no hell, it would still shudder at offending him alone.

Here indeed is pure and real religion: faith so joined with an earnest fear of God that this fear also embraces willing reverence, and carries with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed in the law.

Therefore, it is worship of God alone that renders men higher than the brutes, and through it alone they aspire to immortality. (John Calvin’s *Institutes* 1.2.1, 2)

So may all of us here and throughout the earth, being kept in perfect peace and quietness, serve Thee in all godliness and virtue, and being delivered and protected from the fear of our enemies, give praise unto Thee all the days of our life, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

First Tuesday: See God’s Glory in Nature

Ps. 33, **Isaiah 1:21-31**, 1 Thess. 2:1-12, Luke 20:9-18

Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness. Isaiah 1:27

The Knowledge of God Shines Forth in the Fashioning of the Universe and the Continuing Government of It

The final goal of the blessed life, moreover, rests in the knowledge of God. Indeed, his essence is incomprehensible; hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception. But upon his individual works he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance.... Wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness.

Here, however, the foul ungratefulness of men is disclosed. They have within themselves a workshop graced with God’s unnumbered works and, at the same time, a storehouse overflowing with inestimable riches. They ought, then, to break forth into praises of him but are actually puffed up and swollen with all the more pride.... Yet they set God aside.... And certainly however much the glory of God shines forth, scarcely one man in a hundred is a true spectator of it!

We ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart.... Consequently, we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than meticulously to search out, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself to us. (John Calvin’s *Institutes* 1.5.1, 4, 9)

O most gracious God and Father, full of compassion, have mercy on us in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

**First Wednesday:
See God's Glory In Scripture**

Ps. 50, **Isaiah 2:1-4**, 1 Thess. 2:13-20, Luke 20:19-26

Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."
Isaiah 2:3

Scripture is Needed as Guide and Teacher for Anyone Who Would Come to God the Creator.

It is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe. It was not in vain, then, that he added the light of his Word by which to become known unto salvation; and he regarded as worthy of this privilege those whom he pleased to gather more closely and intimately to himself.... Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips.

For by his Word, God rendered faith unambiguous forever, a faith that should be superior to all opinion.... Therefore, however fitting it may be for man seriously to turn his eyes to contemplate God's works, since he has been placed in this most glorious theater to be a spectator of them, it is fitting that he prick up his ears to the Word, the better to profit.... Now, no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture.

Hence, we must strive onward by this straight path if we seriously aspire to the pure contemplation of God. We must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from his works.

The Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard.... Indeed Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 1.6.1)

We call upon our heavenly Father, Father of all goodness and mercy, asking Him to guide us by His

Holy Spirit to the true understanding of His holy teaching, and may make it bear in us all the fruits of righteousness, to the glory and honor of His Name. Amen.

**First Thursday:
Reformation, Recovery, Regeneration**

Ps. 18:1-20, **Isa. 2:5-22**, 1 Thess. 3:1-13, Lk. 20:27-40

O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! Isaiah 2:5

Human Nature as Created, the Original Integrity of Man's Nature

Man was created in God's image (Gen. 1:27). For although God's glory shines forth in the outer man, yet there is no doubt that the proper seat of his image is in the soul.... The likeness of God extends to the whole excellence by which man's nature towers over all the kinds of living creatures.

There is no doubt that Adam, when he fell from his state, was by this defection alienated from God. Therefore, even though we grant that God's image was not totally annihilated and destroyed in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is frightful deformity. Consequently the beginning of our recovery of salvation is in that restoration which we obtain through Christ, who also is called the Second Adam for the reason that he restores us to true and complete integrity.... The end of regeneration is that Christ should reform us to God's image.

Now we see how Christ is the most perfect image of God; if we are conformed to it, we are so restored that with true piety, righteousness, purity, and intelligence we bear God's image....

Therefore, God provided man's soul with a mind, by which to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong; and, with the light of reason as guide, to distinguish what should be followed from what should be avoided.... To this he joined the will, under whose control is choice.... Therefore, Adam could have stood if he wished, seeing that he fell solely by his own will. (John Calvin's *Institutes*, 1.15.3, 4, 8)

We call upon our heavenly Father, Father of all goodness and mercy, asking Him to cast His merciful eye on us His poor servants, not imputing to us the many faults and offenses that we have committed, but instead seeing us in the face of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, as He has established Him as Mediator between Him and us. Amen.

First Friday: The Nature of Providence

Ps. 102, Isa. 3:1-4:1, 1 Thess. 4:1-12, **Luke 20:41-21:4**

Jesus looked up and saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on. Lk. 21:2-4

God by His Power Nourishes and Maintains the World Created by Him, and Rules Its Several Parts by His Providence

Faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, is also everlasting Governor and Preserver—not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow.

God's providence, as it is taught in Scripture, is opposed to fortune and fortuitous happenings. Now it has been commonly accepted in all ages, and almost all mortals hold the same opinion today, that all things come about through chance. What we ought to believe concerning providence is by this depraved opinion most certainly not only beclouded, but almost buried. Suppose a man falls among thieves, or wild beasts; is shipwrecked at sea by a sudden gale; is killed by a falling house or tree. Suppose another man wandering through the desert finds help in his straits; having been tossed by the waves, reaches harbor; miraculously escapes death by a finger's breadth. Carnal reason ascribes all such happenings, whether prosperous or adverse, to fortune. But anyone who has been taught by Christ's lips that all the hairs of his head are numbered will look farther afield for a cause, and will consider that all events are governed by God's secret plan.

Truly God claims, and would have us grant him, omnipotence—Providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events. Thus, it pertains no less to his hands than to his eyes. The universe is ruled by God, not only because he watches over the order of nature set by himself, but because he exercises especial care over each of his works. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 1.16.1, 2,4)

Since we are surrounded by so many dangers, may He always have His hand extended over us to guard us and keep us under His protection until the end. May He give this grace not only to us but also to all peoples and nations on earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

First Saturday: The Coming Beautiful And Glorious Day

Psalm 90, **Isaiah 4:2-6**, 1 Thess. 4:13-18, Luke 21:5-19

On that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel. Isaiah 4:2

How We May Apply This Doctrine of Providence to Our Greatest Benefit

For he who has set the limits to our life has at the same time entrusted to us its care; he has provided means and helps to preserve it; he has also made us able to foresee dangers; that they may not overwhelm us unaware, he has offered precautions and remedies. Now it is very clear what our duty is: thus, if the Lord has committed to us the protection of our life, our duty is to protect it; if he offers helps, to use them; if he forewarns us of dangers, not to plunge headlong; if he makes remedies available, not to neglect them... God's providence does not always meet us in its naked form, but God in a sense clothes it with the means employed.

Therefore, the Christian heart, since it has been thoroughly persuaded that all things happen by God's plan, and that nothing takes place by chance, will ever look to Him as the principal cause of things; yet, will give attention to the secondary causes in their proper place.

Gratitude of mind for the favorable outcome of things, patience in adversity, and also incredible freedom from worry about the future all necessarily follow upon this knowledge. Therefore whatever shall happen prosperously and according to the desire of his heart, God's servant will attribute wholly to God, whether he feels God's beneficence through the ministry of men, or has been helped by inanimate creatures.

He fearlessly dares commit himself to God. His solace, I say, is to know that his Heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 1.17.4, 6, 7, 11)

Our God, Father, and Savior, since You have been pleased to give us the grace to come through the night to the present day, now grant also this favor, that we may employ it entirely in Your service, that we may not think, say, or do anything except to please You and obey Your good will; so that by this means all our works may be to the glory of Your name and the edification of our neighbors, in the name of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Second Sunday: Total Renewal Is Required

Psalm 150, Isaiah 5:1-7, **2 Peter 3:11-15**, Luke 7:28-35

Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God? But in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. 2 Peter 3:11, 12a, 13

Man's Corrupt Nature

Let us divide the knowledge that man ought to have of himself. First, he should consider of what purpose he was created and endowed with no mean gifts. By this knowledge he should arouse himself to meditation upon divine worship and the future life. Secondly, he should weigh his own abilities—or rather lack of abilities.

Indeed, Augustine speaks rightly when he declares that pride was the beginning of all evils. For if ambition had not raised man higher than was meet and right, he could have remained in his original state.... [D]isobedience was the beginning of the Fall. This is the inherited corruption, which the church fathers termed “original sin,” meaning by the word “sin” the depravation of a nature previously good and pure. A saying of Chrysostom’s has always pleased me very much, that the foundation of our philosophy is humility.

Augustine first teaches: the human will does not obtain grace by freedom, but obtains freedom by grace; when the feeling of delight has been imparted through the same grace, the human will is formed to endure; it is strengthened with unconquerable fortitude, controlled by grace, it never will perish.... [B]y the Lord’s free mercy it is converted to good, and once converted it perseveres in good; the direction of the human will toward good, and after direction its continuation in good, depends solely upon God’s will, not upon any merit of man.... [W]hatever the will can do it is able to do only through grace.

The whole knowledge of God the Creator that we have discussed would be useless unless faith also followed, setting forth for us God our Father in Christ. For Christ is not without reason called “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15).... For God’s mercy is revealed in Christ to all who see and wait upon it with true faith. (John Calvin’s *Institutes* 2.3.14, 2.6.1, 2.7.8)

O Lord God, eternal and almighty Father, we confess and acknowledge without pretense before Your holy majesty that we are poor sinners, conceived and born in iniquity and corruption, inclined to do evil. O Lord, we are grieved with ourselves to have offended You; with true repentance we ask that Your grace may relieve our

distress, through that same Jesus Christ Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Second Monday: How and Who to Love

Ps. 145, Isaiah 5:8-17, **1 Thess. 5:1-11**, Luke 21:20-28

You, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief, for you are all children of light and children of the day. Therefore let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 1 Thess. 5:4, 8

Explanation of the Moral Law—the Ten Commandments

For God has so depicted his character in the law that if any man carries out in deeds whatever is enjoined there, he will express the image of God, as it were, in his own life. Here, therefore, let us stand fast: our life shall best conform to God’s will and the prescription of the law when it is in every respect most fruitful for our brethren.... Hence, it is very clear that we keep the commandments not by loving ourselves but by loving God and neighbor; that he lives the best and holiest life who lives and strives for himself as little as he can, and that no one lives in a worse or evil manner than he who lives and strives for himself alone, and thinks about and seeks only his own advantage.

Christ has shown in the parable of the Samaritan that the term “neighbor” includes even the most remote person. We are not expected to limit the precept of love to those in close relationships.... But I say: we ought to embrace the whole human race without exception in a single feeling of love; here there is no distinction.... since all should be contemplated in God, not in themselves.

Therefore, if we rightly direct our love, we must first turn our eyes not to man, the sight of whom would more often engender hate than love, but to God, who bids us extend to all men the love we bear to him, that this may be an unchanging principle: whatever the character of the man, we must yet love him because we love God. (John Calvin’s *Institutes* 2.8.51, 54, 55)

My God, my Father, and my Savior, since You have been pleased to give me the grace to come through the night to the present day; now grant also this favor, that I may employ it entirely in Your service, that I may not think, say, or do anything except to please You and obey Your good will, so that by this means all my works may be to the glory of Your name and the edification of my neighbors, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Second Tuesday: The Bridge of Love

Ps. 146, Isa. 5:18-25, **1 Thess. 5:12-28**, Luke 21:29-38

Be at peace among yourselves. May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. 1 Thess. 5:13, 23, 24

Christ Had to Become Man to Fulfill the Office of Mediator

Now it was of the greatest importance for us that he who was to be our Mediator be both true God and true man. Our most merciful Father decreed what was best for us. Since our iniquities, like a cloud cast between us and him, had completely estranged us from the Kingdom of Heaven, no man, unless he belonged to God, could serve as the intermediary to restore peace.... The situation would surely have been hopeless had the very majesty of God not descended to us, since it was not in our power to ascend to him. Hence, it was necessary for the Son of God to become for us "Immanuel," that is, God with us, and in such a way that his divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together.

His task was to restore us to God's grace as to make of the children of men children of God; of the heirs of Gehenna, heirs of the Heavenly Kingdom. Who could have done this had not the selfsame Son of God become the Son of man, and had not so taken what was ours as to impart what was his to us, and to make what was his by nature ours by grace?

It was his task to swallow up death. Who but the Life could do this? It was his task to conquer sin. Who but the very Righteousness could do this? It was his task to rout the powers of world and air. Who but a power higher than world and air could do this?

Here is something marvelous: the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be borne in the virgin's womb, to go about the earth, and to hang upon the cross; yet, he continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning! (John Calvin's *Institutes* 2.12.1, 2; 2.13.4)

We call upon our heavenly Father, Father of all goodness and mercy, asking Him to cast the eye of His mercy on us His poor servants, not imputing to us the many faults and offenses we have committed, but instead seeing us in the face of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, as He has established Him as Mediator between him and us. Amen

Second Wednesday : Our Prophet, Priest, and King

Ps. 147:1-11, **Isa. 6:1-13**, 2Thess. 1:1-12, Jn. 7:53-8:11

The seraph touched my mouth with a live coal and said: "Now that this has touched your lips your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" And he said, "Go." Isaiah 6:7-9

To Know the Purpose for Which Christ Was Sent We Must Look at Three Things in Him: the Prophetic Office, Kingship and Priesthood

Now it is to be noted that the title "Christ" pertains to these three offices: The illustrious name of "Messiah" was also bestowed upon the promised Mediator. I recognize that Christ was called Messiah especially with respect to, and by virtue of, his kingship. Yet his anointings as prophet and as priest have their place and must not be overlooked by us.... We see that he was anointed by the Spirit to be herald and witness of the Father's grace. This, however, remains certain: the perfect doctrine he has brought has made an end to all prophecies.

I come now to kingship. The devil, with all the resources of the world, can never destroy the church, founded as it is on the eternal throne of Christ.... Therefore Christ, to lift our hope to heaven, declares that his "kingship is not of this world" (John 18:36). Thus, it is that we may patiently pass through this life with its misery, hunger, cold, contempt, reproaches, and other troubles—content with this one thing: that our King will never leave us destitute, but will provide for our needs until, our warfare ended, we are called to triumph.

Now we must speak briefly concerning the purpose and use of Christ's priestly office: as a pure and stainless Mediator he is by his holiness to reconcile us to God. An expiation must intervene in order that Christ as priest may obtain God's favor for us.... The priestly office belongs to Christ alone because by the sacrifice of his death he blotted out our own guilt and made satisfaction for our sins. (Heb. 9:22) Thus, we see that we must begin from the death of Christ in order that the efficacy and benefit of his priesthood may reach us.... In Christ there was a new and different order in which the same one was to be both priest and sacrifice. No other satisfaction adequate for our sins, and no man worthy to offer to God the only-begotten Son, could be found. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 2.15.2, 3, 4, 6)

O God and Father most gracious and full of compassion, have mercy upon us in the name of Your

Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And as You blot out our sins and stains, magnify and increase in us day by day the grace of Your Holy Spirit, mortifying all our sins, and producing in us the fruits of righteousness and innocence that are pleasing unto You; through the same Jesus Christ Your Son our Lord. Amen.

Second Thursday: Reconciled by Christ

Ps. 147:12-20, Isa. 7:1-9, 2 Thess. 2:1-12, **Lk. 22:1-13**

“Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.” “When you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house.... He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.” Luke 22:8, 10, 12

How Christ Has Fulfilled the Function of Redeemer to Acquire Salvation For Us

How could God have given in his only-begotten Son a singular pledge of his love to us if he had not already embraced us with his free favor?... [W]e are taught by Scripture to embrace God’s benevolence and fatherly love in Christ alone.

However much we may be sinners by our own fault, we nevertheless remain his creatures. However much we have brought death upon ourselves, yet he has created us unto life. Thus, he is moved by pure and freely given love of us to receive us into grace.... To take away all cause for enmity and to reconcile us utterly to himself, he wipes out all evil in us by the expiation set forth in the death of Christ; that we, who were previously unclean and impure, may show ourselves righteous and holy in his sight. Therefore, by his love, God the Father goes before and anticipates our reconciliation in Christ. Indeed, “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19), he afterward reconciles us to himself. But until Christ succors us by his death, the unrighteousness that deserves God’s indignation remains in us, and is accursed and condemned before him. Hence, we can be fully and firmly joined with God only when Christ joins us with him. If then, we would be assured that God is pleased with and kindly disposed toward us, we must fix our eyes and minds on Christ alone.

“He tasted death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9). By dying, he ensured that we would not die, or—which is the same thing—redeemed us to life by his own death. (John Calvin’s *Institutes* 2.16.2, 3, 7)

Grant us O heavenly Father, so to celebrate this day the blessed remembrance of Your dear Son, to exercise ourselves in the same, and to proclaim the benefit of His death, that, receiving new growth and strength in faith and in all things good, we may with so much greater

confidence proclaim You our Father and glory in You. Amen.

Second Friday: Our Victory With Christ

Ps. 148, Isa. 7:10-25, **2 Thess. 2:13-3:5**, Luke 22:14-30

He called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word. 2 Thess. 2:14, 16-17

His Resurrection

Now comes the resurrection from the dead. Without this what we have said so far would be incomplete. For since only weakness appears in the cross, death, and burial of Christ, faith must leap over all these things to attain its full strength. We have in his death the complete fulfillment of salvation, for through it we are reconciled to God, his righteous judgment is satisfied, the curse is removed, and the penalty paid in full. Nevertheless, we are said to “have been born anew to a living hope” not through his death but “through his resurrection” (2 Peter 1:3). For as he, in rising again came forth victor over death, so the victory of our faith over death lies in his resurrection alone.... Therefore, we divide the substance of our salvation between Christ’s death and resurrection as follows: through his death, sin was wiped out and death extinguished; through his resurrection, righteousness was restored and life raised up, so that—thanks to his resurrection—his death manifested its power and efficacy in us. By rising again he obtained the victor’s prize—that there might be resurrection and life. (John Calvin’s *Institutes* 2.16.13)

For our life must be hidden in order to be resurrected with our Lord Jesus Christ, and this in two ways. For we are already actually resurrected with Him, inasmuch as He gives us the grace to walk in obedience to His righteousness. Because what would we be unless the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ worked in us and produced its power and its fruit? Now we have another kind of resurrection, that is, in hope we are already sharers in our Lord Jesus Christ, but the possession is not yet evident.

Since we must be companions of the glory of His resurrection, let us be so not for one day or one meal only, but let us persevere in that and continue the whole course of our lives. (John Calvin’s “Easter Sermon” April 14, 1560)

Almighty God, heavenly Father, in steadfast faith may we receive our Lord Jesus Christ’s body and blood, yea

Christ Himself entire, true God and true man, the holy bread of heaven that gives us life. So may we live no longer in ourselves, but may He live in us to lead us to the life that is holy, blessed, and everlasting, whereby we may truly become partakers of the new and eternal testament, the covenant of grace, assured that it is Your good pleasure to be our gracious Father forever. Thus, may we render praise and thanks unto You without ceasing, and magnify Your name in word and deed; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Second Saturday: Best Seat in the House

Ps. 149, Isaiah 8:1-15, **2 Thess. 3:6-18**, Luke 22:31-38

Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. Luke 22:31

His Ascent Into Heaven

To the resurrection is quite appropriately joined the ascent into heaven. Now having laid aside the mean and lowly state of mortal life and the shame of the cross, Christ by rising again began to show forth his glory and power more fully. Yet, he truly inaugurated his Kingdom only at his ascension into heaven.... Christ was invested with lordship over heaven and earth, and solemnly entered into possession of the government committed to him. He not only entered into possession once for all, but continues in it, until he shall come down on Judgment Day.

From this our faith receives many benefits. First, it understands that the Lord by his ascent to heaven opened the way into the Heavenly Kingdom which had been closed through Adam.

Secondly, as faith recognizes, it is to our great benefit that Christ resides with the Father. For having entered a sanctuary not made with hands, he appears before the Father's face as our constant advocate and intercessor. Thus, he turns the Father's eyes to his own righteousness to avert his gaze from our sins. He so reconciles the Father's heart to us that by his intercession he prepares a way and access for us to the Father's throne. He fills with grace and kindness the throne that for miserable sinners would otherwise be filled with dread.

Thirdly, faith comprehends his might, in which reposes our strength, power, wealth, and glorying against hell.... Christ as Intercessor will not condemn those whom he has received into his charge and protection. No mean assurance, this—that we shall be brought before no other judgment seat than that of our

Redeemer, to whom we must look for our salvation. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 2.16.14, 16)

O Lord God, we give You thanks for all the benefits that we constantly receive from Your hand, that You are pleased to sustain us in this bodily life, giving us all the things we need. And especially we thank You that you have been pleased to regenerate us in the hope of a better life, which you have revealed to us by Your holy gospel. We ask You not to allow our affections to be tangled in these corruptible things, but that we may always raise our eyes above, anticipating our Lord Jesus Christ, until He will come again for our redemption. Amen.

Third Sunday: Making the Connection

Ps. 25, Isa. 13:1-13, **Hebrews 12:18-29**, John 3:22-30

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire. Heb. 12:25, 28

The Way We Receive the Grace of Christ—By Faith

We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only begotten Son—not for Christ's own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. We obtain this by faith.

The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself. Faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit. By faith alone the Spirit leads us into the light of the gospel. Paul shows the Spirit to be the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears.

Faith rests not on ignorance, but on knowledge. We do not obtain salvation either because we are prepared to embrace as true whatever the church has prescribed, or because we turn over to it the task of inquiring and knowing. But we do so when we know that God is our merciful Father, because of the reconciliation effected through Christ, and that Christ has been given to us as righteousness, sanctification, and life.

We hold faith to be a knowledge of God's will toward us, perceived from his Word.... Now we shall possess a

right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Here, indeed, is the chief hinge on which faith turns: that we do not regard the promises of mercy that God offers as true only outside ourselves, but not at all in us; rather that we make them ours by inwardly embracing them. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 3.1.1, 4; 3.2.2, 6, 16)

Grant, Almighty God, since you have shown us by so many, such clear and such solid testimonies, that we can hope for no other Redeemer than Him whom You have set forth: and as You have ratified His divine and eternal power by so many miracles, and sealed it by both the preaching of the gospel and the seal of Your Spirit in our hearts, and You confirm the same by daily experience: Grant that we may remain firm and stable in Him. May we never decline from him; may our faith never waver but withstand all the temptations of Satan; and may we so persevere that we may be gathered at length into that eternal blessedness and perpetual rest brought forth for us by the blood of the same, Your Son. Amen

Third Monday: Engrafted

Psalm 40, Isaiah 8:16-9:1, **2 Peter 1:1-11**, Lk 22:39-53

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus, he has given us through these things his precious and very great promises. 2 Peter 1:3, 4

The Indestructible Certainty of Faith Rests Upon Christ's Oneness With Us

For the end of the conflict is always this: that faith ultimately triumphs over those difficulties which besiege and seem to imperil it... For we await salvation from him not because he appears to us afar off, but because he makes us, engrafted into his body, participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself... Since Christ has been so imparted to you with all his benefits that all his things are made yours, that you are made a member of him, indeed one with him, his righteousness overwhelms your sins; his salvation wipes out your condemnation; with his worthiness, he intercedes that your unworthiness may not come before God's sight. Surely this is so. We ought to hold fast bravely with both hands to that fellowship by which he has bound himself to us... Christ is not outside us but dwells within us... With a wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and

more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us.

For faith does not certainly promise itself either length of years or honor or riches in this life; But it is content with this certainty: that, however many things fail us that have to do with the maintenance of this life, God will never fail us... We make the freely given promise of God the foundation of faith because upon it faith properly rests. Faith is certain that God is true in all things.

It now remains to pour into the heart itself what the mind has absorbed. For the Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depth of the heart. Wherever this faith is alive, it must have along with it the hope of eternal salvation as its inseparable companion... Hope is nothing else than the expectation of those things which faith has believed to have been truly promised by God. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 3.2.18, 24, 28, 29, 36,42)

Grant, Almighty God, since You have deigned to approach us so familiarly, that in return we may also desire to approach You and remain in firm and holy union; so that while we persevere in that lawful worship which You prescribe for us in Your word, Your blessings may increase toward us, until You lead us to fullness, when You shall gather us into Your celestial kingdom, by Christ our Lord. Amen.

Third Tuesday: Repentance and Regeneration

Psalm 85, **Isaiah 9:2-7**, 2 Peter 1:12-21, Luke 22:54-69

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

Our Regeneration By Faith: Repentance

With good reason, the sum of the gospel is held to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins. Any discussion of faith, therefore, that omitted these two topics would be barren and mutilated and well-nigh useless. Now, both repentance and forgiveness of sins—that is, newness of life and free reconciliation—are conferred on us by Christ, and both are attained by us through faith.

The Hebrew word for “repentance” is derived from conversion or return; the Greek word, from change of mind or of intention. The meaning is that, departing from ourselves, we turn to God, and having taken off our former mind, we put on a new mind. On this account, in my judgment, repentance can thus be well defined: it is the true turning of our life to God, a

turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit.

Therefore, in a word, I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God that had been disfigured and all but obliterated through Adam's transgression. I say, the closer any man comes to the likeness of God, the more the image of God shines in him. In order that believers may reach this goal, God assigns to them a race of repentance, which they are to run throughout their lives. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 3.3.1, 5, 9)

Grant, Almighty God, that as You invite us daily so kindly and delightfully, to make known to us Your paternal goodwill, which you once showed to us in Christ Your Son, O grant that, being allured by Your sweetness, we may surrender ourselves wholly to You, and become so teachable and submissive that wherever You guide us by Your Spirit You may follow us with every blessing. Let us not in the meantime be deaf to Your warnings; and whenever we deviate from the right way, grant that we may immediately awake when You warn us and return to the right path; and deign also to embrace us and reconcile us to Yourself through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Third Wednesday: We Are God's

Psalm 53, Isaiah 9:8-17, 2 Peter 2:1-10a, **Mark 1:1-8**

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Mark 1:3, 4

The Sum of the Christian Life: the Denial of Ourselves

I do not insist that the moral life of a Christian man breathe nothing but the very gospel, yet this ought to be desired, and we must strive toward it. But I do not so strictly demand evangelical perfection that I would not acknowledge as a Christian, one who has not yet attained it. For thus all would be excluded from the church. Let each one of us, then, proceed according to the measure of his puny capacity and set out upon the journey we have begun. No one shall set out so inauspiciously as not daily to make some headway, though it be slight. Therefore, let us not cease so to act that we may make some unceasing progress in the way of the Lord.

Here, then, is the beginning of this plan: the duty of believers is "to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him,"... (Rom. 12:1). We are consecrated and dedicated to God in order that

we may thereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory....

We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to the flesh. We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Conversely, we are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal. Let this therefore be the first step, that a man depart from himself in order that he may apply the whole force of his ability in the service of the Lord.

From this also follows this second point: that we seek not the things that are ours but those which are of the Lord's will and will serve to advance his glory. This is also evidence of great progress: that, almost forgetful of ourselves, surely subordinating our self-concern, we try faithfully to devote our zeal to God and his commandments. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 3.6.5;3.7.1, 2)

Grant, Almighty God, that as You would have our life formed by the rule of Your law, and have revealed in it what pleases You, that we may not wander in uncertainty but render You obedience, O grant that we may wholly submit ourselves to You and not only devote our life and all our labors to You, but also offer to You as a sacrifice our understanding and whatever prudence and reason we may possess, so that by spiritually serving You we may really glorify Your name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Third Thursday: Generosity in Giving

Ps. 126, **Isaiah 9:18-10:4**, 2 Pet. 2:10b-16, Matt.3:1-12

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth? Isaiah 10:1-3

Self-Renunciation Leads to Proper Helpfulness Toward Our Neighbors

Now, in seeking to benefit one's neighbor, how difficult it is to do one's duty! Unless you give up all thought of self and, so to speak get out of yourself, you will accomplish nothing here. But Scripture, to lead us by the hand to this, warns that whatever benefits we obtain

from the Lord have been entrusted to us on this condition: that they be applied to the common good of the church. And therefore the lawful use of all benefits consists in a liberal and kindly sharing of them with others. No surer rule and no more valid exhortation to keep it could be devised than when we are taught that all the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbors' benefit. (1 Pet. 4:10)

So, too, whatever a godly man can do he ought to be able to do for his brothers, providing for himself in no way other than to have his mind intent upon the common upbuilding of the church. Let this, therefore, be our rule for generosity and beneficence: We are the stewards of everything God has conferred on us by which we are able to help our neighbor, and are required to render account of our stewardship. Moreover, the only right stewardship is that which is tested by the rule of love. Thus it will come about that we shall not only join zeal for another's benefit with care for our own advantage, but shall subordinate the latter to the former.

Scripture helps in the best way when it teaches that we are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honor and love. Each man will so consider with himself that in all his greatness he is a debtor to his neighbors, and that he ought in exercising kindness toward them to set no other limit than the end of his resources.

Thus it will first come to pass that we shall not dash out to seize upon riches and usurp honors through wickedness and by stratagems and evil arts, or greed, to the injury of our neighbors; but to pursue only those enterprises which do not lead us away from innocence. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 3.7.5, 6, 7, 9)

Grant, Almighty God, that as You have adopted us as sons with this regulation, that we may cultivate brotherly kindness one toward another, and labor for our mutual benefit. O grant that we may prove by the whole tenor of our life that we have not been called by you in vain, but that we may so live in harmony with one another that integrity and innocence may prevail among us. May we so strive to benefit one another that Your name may be thus glorified among us. Amen.

Third Friday: Free At Last

Ps. 130, Isaiah 10:5-19, **2 Peter 2:17-22**, Matt. 11:2-15

These false prophets are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. They speak bombastic nonsense. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are

slaves of corruption; for people are slaves to whatever masters them. 2 Peter 2:17, 18, 19

Christian Freedom

Christian freedom, in my opinion, consists of three parts. The first: that the consciences of believers, in seeking assurance of their justification before God, should rise above and advance beyond the law, forgetting all law righteousness. The whole life of Christians ought to be a sort of practice of godliness, for we have been called to sanctification. Here it is the function of the law, by warning men of their duty, to arouse them to a zeal for holiness and innocence. But where consciences are worried how to render God favorable, what they will reply, and with what assurance they will stand should they be called to his judgment, there we are not to reckon what the law requires, but Christ alone, who surpasses all perfection of the law, must be set forth as righteousness.

Those bound by the yoke of the law are like servants assigned certain tasks for each day by their masters. These servants think they have accomplished nothing, and dare not appear before their masters unless they have fulfilled the exact measure of their tasks. But sons, who are more generously and candidly treated by their fathers, do not hesitate to offer them incomplete and half-done and even defective works, trusting that their obedience and readiness of mind will be accepted by their fathers, even though they have not quite achieved what their fathers intended. Such children ought we to be, firmly trusting that our services will be approved by our most merciful Father, however small, rude, and imperfect these may be.

We see whither this freedom tends: namely, that we should use God's gifts for the purpose for which he gave them to us, with no scruple of conscience, no trouble of mind. Nothing is plainer than this rule: that we should use our freedom if it results in the edification of our neighbor, but if it does not help our neighbor, then we should forgo it. It is the part of a godly man to realize that free power in outward matters has been given him in order that he may be the more ready for all the duties of love. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 3.19.2, 5, 8, 12)

Grant, Almighty God, not that we may offer beasts to You but consecrate to You ourselves with all that we have. May we also abstain from every evil work, from all fraud and all cruelty toward our brethren, and so deal with one another that we may testify with our whole life that You are really our Father, ruling us by Your Spirit, and that true and holy brotherhood exists among us. May we live justly toward one another so as to render to each his own right, and thus show that we are members of Your only begotten Son, so that He may

acknowledge us when He shall appear for the redemption of His people and shall gather us into His celestial kingdom. Amen.

Third Saturday: How To Pray

Psalm 80, Isaiah 10:20-27, Jude 17-25, Luke 3:1-9

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Stir up your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. Psalm 80:1-3

Prayer Which Is the Chief Exercise of Faith, and By Which We Daily Receive God's Benefits

But after we have been instructed by faith to recognize that whatever we need and whatever we lack is in God, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the Father willed all the fullness of his bounty to abide so that we may all draw from it as from an overflowing spring, it remains for us to seek in him, and in prayers to ask of him, what we have learned to be in him.

It is, therefore, by the benefit of prayer that we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father. For there is a communion of men with God by which, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, they appeal to him in person concerning his promises in order to experience, where necessity so demands, that what they believed was not vain, although he had promised it in word alone. Therefore, we see that to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true is it that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.

Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable. Surely, with good reason the Heavenly Father affirms that the only stronghold of safety is in calling upon his name. By so doing we invoke the presence both of his providence, through which he watches over and guards our affairs, and of his power, through which he sustains us, weak as we are and well-nigh overcome, and of his goodness, through which he receives us, miserably burdened with sin, unto grace; and, in short, it is by prayer that we call him to reveal himself as wholly present to us. Hence comes an extraordinary peace and repose to our consciences. For having disclosed to the Lord the necessity that was pressing upon us, we even rest fully in the thought that none of our ills is hid from him who, we are convinced, has both the will and the power to take the best care of us. (John Calvin's *Institutes* 3.2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11)

The rules of right prayer:

First Rule: We pray with Reverence.

Second Rule: We pray from a sincere sense of Want, and with Penitence.

Third Rule: We yield all confidence in ourselves and humbly plead for Pardon.

Fourth Rule: We pray with Confident Hope.

Our good God, Father and Savior, since You have pleased to command us to work to meet our needs, by Your grace may You so bless our labor that Your benediction may extend to us; without it we cannot continue to live. And may Your favor serve us as witness of Your goodness and presence, that by it we may recognize the fatherly care You have for us. Amen.

Fourth Sunday: Home in Little Bethlehem

Ps. 110, Isa. 11:1-9, Rev. 21:9-21, Lk. 1:26-38, **2:1-8**

Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. Luke 2:4-5

We consider the place of His birth, Bethlehem. This is no slight or unimportant confirmation when we see how the Son of God was born as such, a long time before the Prophet had made mention of it. If Joseph and Mary had had their dwelling-place in Bethlehem and had made their residence there, it might not have been strange that she delivered there and Jesus Christ was born there. But this which ought today to help us, has been much obscured. For one might at least know that not without cause the Prophet had said, "Thou, Bethlehem, although thou art today despised as a little village, yet thou wilt produce Him Who is to be Head of My people."

But when Joseph and Mary are living in Nazareth and they come into the city of Bethlehem just when she must be delivered and Jesus Christ is born there, who will not see that God guided the whole thing by His hand? Men, then, must knowingly and with sure knowledge be blind when they are not willing to recognize here the Word of God, Who marked His only Son, so He could be received without any doubt as Him Who had been promised.

Surely there was sufficient occasion to cause Joseph to come to Bethlehem in the edict published by the Roman Emperor. But to bring there a woman with child and about to be delivered, it is certain that was not governed by man and God was at work there. We see how even God uses strange means to accomplish His will. For the edict of Caesar, though it was carried out without tyrannical subjection, made it necessary that the Jewish

people were then tagged, they had a check upon each person, and it was to show them that they need no longer expect any liberty. Jesus Christ was promised to deliver the Jews and all believers from the subjection of Satan and from all tyranny. It seemed that this edict was to close the door, that God might never accomplish what He had promised to His people. However, it is the means of accomplishing it. For when Joseph and Mary come as poor people subject to a tyrant, a pagan and an unbeliever, and so Jesus Christ is born in Bethlehem, it shows the Prophecy to be true. God (as I have said) here gives full certainty to His own so that they must not doubt the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. (John Calvin's *Sermons on the Saving Work of Jesus Christ*, "The Nativity of Jesus Christ" p. 44)

Grant, Almighty God, that since at the coming of Christ Your Son, You really did perform what Your servants, the prophets, had previously so much foretold, and since You daily invite us to the unity of faith, that with united efforts we may truly serve You. O grant that we may not continue torn asunder, every one pursuing his own perverse inclinations at a time when Christ is gathering us to You. And may we then add to the true and lawful worship of Your name brotherly love toward one another, that with united efforts we may promote each other's good, and that our adoption may thus be proved and be more and more confirmed, that we may ever be able with full confidence to call on You as our Father, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Fourth Monday: Angels From On High

Ps. 67, Isa. 31:1-9, Rev. 21:22-22:5, Lk 1:39-56, **2:8-14**

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" Luke 2:13-14

We also have to note that, in the history which St. Luke here recites, on the one hand we learn how the Son of God emptied Himself of everything for our salvation, nevertheless, on the other hand He did not fail to leave certain and infallible testimony that He was the Redeemer of the world promised from all time. Even though He took our condition, He was able to maintain his heavenly majesty. Both sides are here shown to us. For our Lord Jesus Christ is here in a manger and He is, as it were, rejected by the world. He is in extreme poverty without any honor, without any reputation, as it were, subject to servitude. Yet He is magnified by Angels from Paradise, who do Him homage.

In the first place, an angel bears the message of His birth. Then the same one is accompanied by a great multitude, even by an army, who are all present and

appear as witnesses sent by God to show that our Lord Jesus Christ, being thus abased for the salvation of men, never ceases to be King of all the world and to have everything under His dominion. He willed to be not only a mortal man clothed in our nature, but, as it were, a poor earthworm stripped of all good. May we never doubt, then, however miserable we may be, that He will keep us as His members.

On the other hand, we see that He has in Himself a Divine majesty, since the Angels recognize Him as their superior and their sovereign King. We ought not to doubt, when we shall be under His keeping, that He has all that is needed to maintain us. Let us know, however much He was abased, it in no wise takes away from His Divine power nor hinders us from being securely under His guidance.

Now we see the summary of this history. That is, in the first place, we know that the Son of God, even our Mediator, has united Himself to us in such a way that we must never doubt that we are sharers both of His life and of all His riches. Let us know also that He brought with Himself to us everything that was required for our salvation. For He was not thus emptied without always retaining His Divine majesty. (John Calvin's *Sermons on the Saving Work of Jesus Christ*, "The Nativity of Jesus Christ" p. 37, 38)

We bow ourselves before the majesty of our good God, in acknowledgment of our offenses, asking that He may make us feel them more than we have; and then that He may bend down to call us to Himself, seeing that we draw back instead of approaching Him and cannot lift a foot to advance a single step unless He works in us by the power of His Holy Spirit. May He give power to His word to touch us to the quick in our hearts. And may we come to taste in its entirety the love that He bears us and the goodness that He shows us, so that we may be ravished with an ardent love for him, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Fourth Tuesday: Shepherds From Down Low

Ps. 94, Isa. 33:17-22, Rev. 22:6-11, 18-20, Luke 1:57-66
Luke 2:15-20

The shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all were amazed at what the shepherds told them. Luke 2:15-18

Christmas Eve
O Holy Night of Joy and Peace –
the Dear Savior’s Birth

The wise men of this world are so inflated with pride and presumption that scarcely will they condescend to be scholars of unlearned men and poor shepherds from the fields. But it is all our wisdom, nevertheless, that we learn from these shepherds to come to our Lord Jesus Christ. For although we may have all the sciences of the world stuffed into our heads, of what use will it be when life fails us? How will it help us to know “Him in whom the treasures of all wisdom are hidden,” as St. Paul says?

God gave this honor neither to the great ones of this world, nor to the wise, nor to the rich, nor to the nobles, but He chose shepherds. Since it is so, let us follow that order. It is true that Wise Men came from the East to pay homage to our Lord Jesus Christ. But the shepherds had to come first, in order that all presumption might be abolished, and that he who would be reputed Christian must be as a fool in this world. So, let us not bring a foolish presumption to judge by our imaginations the admirable secrets of God, but let us adore them in all simplicity. Further, let us look at the faith which was in these shepherds. Then it will no longer be difficult to follow them. They come to adore the Redeemer of the world. And in what condition do they find Him? There He is laid in a manger and wrapped in a few little cloths, and it is the sign which had been given to them by the Angel. Now it surely seemed that this was to astonish them and even to make them turn their backs in such a manner that they might no longer recognize Jesus Christ as their Savior.

For the Scribes and Teachers of the Jews surely thought that the Redeemer who had been promised must come in great pomp. Here then was a scandal. The sign given to these poor people of the Redeemer is that He will be laid in a manger as if He were cut off from the rank of men. Yet even that does not turn them away. They come, then, to know Him as Lord, confessing how God has had pity on them and that finally He willed to fulfill His promise which He had given from all time, and they are assured by such a spectacle. Since, then, the faith of these shepherds was so great, we shall be doubly guilty and stripped of every excuse, unless we learn in their school, and unless the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ be not a scandal, and unless we come to yield to Him as our sovereign King. (John Calvin’s *Sermons on the Saving Work of Jesus Christ*, “The Nativity of Jesus Christ,” p.38, 39)

Grant, Almighty God, that since it is the principal part of our happiness that in our pilgrimage through this world there is open to us a familiar access to You by faith, O grant that we may be able to come with a pure heart into Your presence, and that we seek to spend our whole life in glorifying Your name; by the blood of Your only begotten Son. Amen.

Ps. 132, Isa. 35:1-10, Rev. 22:12-21, Lk 1:67-80; **2:1-20**

The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Luke 2:10,11

We know that it is our good, our joy and rest to be united with the Son of God. As He is our Head, we are His body, so also from Him we hold our life and salvation and all good. We could not reach so high (seeing that scarcely can we crawl upon the earth), unless from His side He approached us, and already He has approached in His birth, when He clothed Himself in our flesh and He made Himself to be our brother.

Let us bethink ourselves to profit from this history, so that we may be able to be in tune with the song of the Angels in glorifying God, and to so receive what He here gives for the rejoicing of our souls. In the first place the Angel says, “Fear not. I announce to you a great joy.” Then there is this testimony in common from all the army that God sends, “Peace on earth to men.” This, then, is what we have to remember first of all: that we seek our joy in Jesus Christ. There will be a curse upon all the enjoyments of the world, since they will be changed into gnashing of teeth, until men are right with God.

Cursed then are all enjoyments, all honors, all things desirable, until we feel that God received us in mercy. Being thus reconciled with Him we can enjoy ourselves, not merely with an earthly joy, but especially with that joy which is promised to us in the Holy Spirit, in order that we may seek it in Him. For peace and joy are inseparable things.

This peace, then, must precede, that we know that God owns us as His children, even since He does not impute to us our sins. Are we thus at peace with God? How will that be? By the remission of our sins, by the free unmerited love which He bears toward us in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us note well, then, that the peace which the Angels of Paradise preach here carried with it this joy, which the first Angel had mentioned, saying, “I announce to you a great joy,” that is, the salvation you will have in Jesus Christ. He is called our Peace, and this title declares that we would be entirely alienated from God unless He received us by means of His only Son. Consequently we also have something to boast of when God accepts us as His children, when He gives us

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liberty to claim Him openly as our Father, to come freely to Him, and to have our refuge in Him. (John Calvin's *Sermon on the Saving Work of Jesus Christ*, "The Nativity of Jesus Christ" p. 35-36, 45-47)

Grant, Almighty God, that as You have once been pleased not only to adopt us as Your children, but also to unite us to Yourself by the bond of marriage, and to give us a pledge of this sacred union in Your only begotten Son: O grant that we may continue in the faith of Your gospel, and so sincerely cherish the pledge given to You, until in your merciful kindness we shall at length enjoy fellowship with You in Your celestial kingdom, through the same Christ our Lord. Amen

Christmas Day

The Word Became Flesh And Lived Among Us

Ps. 98, Zech. 2:10-13, 1 Jn 4:7-16, **Jn. 1:1-18; 3:1-36**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.
John 1:1, 14; 3:16

Let us rejoice that Jesus Christ was sent to us, that God gave Himself to us in His Person, that Jesus Christ came to be our means of reconciliation between God and ourselves, that God accepts us as His children. That is why this Word should be sacred to us so that as to make us prize this priceless gift which is brought us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The Word," says he, "was in the beginning." The Son of God did not begin to exist when He appeared to the world. For He already was, from all time and before all time. There was a virtue which was in the Word of God at the beginning. But finally it was manifested. We know it now since Jesus Christ was sent into the world.

"In Him is life." There are two things we must properly consider. One, that we have beginning and life through this Word. The other, that we are sustained through Him—and not only we, but all the world. Not only was the world in the beginning created through this Word, but also it would no longer exist unless it were preserved in this same condition by this same means. Nothing of that which was made, was made without this Word. We have nothing which does not depend upon God and which has not its being in Him.

God, then, surely wishes to be magnified both in heaven and on earth, and in all His works which we see, but much more in man, because He has stamped His image upon us more than upon all other creatures. For He has not said of the sun, of the stars, nor of any other creature however excellent it may be, "I will to make here a masterpiece who is to be in my image and likeness." (John Calvin's *Sermon on the Saving Work of Jesus Christ*, "The Deity of Jesus Christ" p.17, 18, 31)

There is all fullness of the Godhead in Jesus Christ. When then, we have such a testimony, it is just as if God extended His two arms to make us feel His inestimable goodness: Let us be satisfied, then, to have such a witness from God, so that, knowing how He was made man, that is, that He emptied Himself for our sakes, we may be so delighted as to aspire to the Kingdom of heaven, so as to adhere to Him in true union of faith. May our true joy be to serve Him in all fear and humility, and to give ourselves entirely to His obedience. (John Calvin's *Sermon on the Saving Work of Jesus Christ*, "The Nativity of Jesus Christ" p.43, 50)

Heavenly Father, we offer You eternal praise and thanks. Never allow us to forget these things, but having them imprinted on our hearts may we grow and increase daily in our faith, which is at work in every good deed. Thus may we order and pursue all our life to the exaltation of Your glory and the edification of our neighbors; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who in the unity of the Holy Spirit lives and reigns with You, O God, forever. Amen.

