



ABOUT THE PROPERS

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Second Sunday in Advent

December 5, 2021



When the Lord Comes Near, He Humbles His People

The Second Sunday in Advent is traditionally known as “*Populus Zion*” Sunday. *Populus Zion* means “People of Zion.” The Sunday derives its name from the Latin words of the Introit (opening verses) of the day: “Say to the *daughter of Zion (Populus Zion)*, ‘See, your Savior comes!’” (Isaiah 62:11a). “Daughter of Zion” was a title used to refer to the people of Israel. As the spiritual house of Israel, we too in the New Testament Church look to our coming Savior who comes to us.

People tend to feel a lot of pressure this time of year. We want our houses to look good for out-of-town guests. We want to impress people with the thoughtfulness of our gifts. What a welcome relief, therefore, to hear what is required to meet the Lord: only repentance. You see, Jesus is not someone we need to impress with our good works. Indeed, repentance is the opposite of work. Repentance is the humble admission of our sin combined with the joyful trust that everything needed to bring us close to God has already been done by him.

The Propers

The Propers are those portions of the service that change (or, are “proper” to) each Sunday or season of the church year. The Propers differ from the Ordinary (from the Latin ordo, which means “regular order”) portions of the liturgy, which do not change (e.g. the Lord’s Prayer). The Propers offer the variety to the worship service and emphasize particular worship themes throughout the liturgical calendar.

First Lesson¹ Malachi 3:1-7b

The Lord announces to suffering believers in the Old Testament God’s special message of New Testament hope and comfort. The Lord promises a herald to proclaim his coming. Let hearts be prepared; the Desire of Nations is about to come to his temple with judgment and the refiner’s fire. Though no one can stand before his righteousness, yet there is righteousness for the purified and acceptance for those who heed the messenger’s call for preparation. Christ’s first coming is then connected in prophetic perspective to His second and final coming on the Last Day. “The messenger of the covenant” is coming to eternally restore the righteousness of the Lord.

Second Lesson¹ Philippians 1:3-11

In spite of fierce opposition to both the message and messenger, Paul expresses joy and complete confidence in the power of the Word. For the gospel in Word and sacrament comes to us to fill in the valleys of our depression with the fruit of his righteousness, leveling the mountains of our disobedience with the insight of his law, making a highway for our God straight to our hearts. Thus is prepared a clear, level and straight path from grace to glory when he comes again.

Gospel of the Day¹ Luke 3:1-6

The careful precision of Luke demands the preacher’s journey back in time to see the historical setting of this account and thus acknowledge once again the providential hand of the Lord. “When the time had fully come,” the Christ’s great forerunner, the promised messenger of preparation, John the Baptizer appeared. As Malachi predicted and as Paul encouraged, John was a faithful preacher of repentance by which the people of God were truly prepared in head and heart.

Psalm of the Day Psalm 66

In her song to her Lord, the Church calls on the world to give fitting praise to God for his blessings.

Verse of the Day

Luke 3:4,6

John the Baptist was the one prophesied by Isaiah in chapter 40, “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord.’” John came to do one thing: to point to Christ. He prepares the way for his King by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

16 “On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry” (Charles Coffin, 1676-1749)

The call to repentance – to prepare for Christ to enter our hearts (v2) – is only accomplished by the work of the King himself (vv3-4). We rejoice that Christ has entered our hearts through faith (vv3,5) and praise our Triune God because his advent has won our freedom from sin (v5).

Church Year Season^{1 & 2}

Advent

While most of the world marks the passage of time from January through December, Christians have kept their own calendar for centuries. This Christian year is a way of remembering key events in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

In Advent, the first season of the Church Year, the Word of God bids us prepare for the coming of Christ. The readings for Advent have this urgency to them: Since he is surely coming again in judgment, we desperately need for him to come to us first in grace. For without that coming in grace we will perish at his coming in judgment. The Prayer for the Day on each Sunday in Advent is especially beautiful, worth repeating perhaps in the sermon introduction or highlighting in the worship folder. These ancient prayers were said by many of the faithful even during the week when children would take turns reciting them as they lit the candle(s) on the Advent Wreath.

The threefold focus of Christ’s coming to us is as follows:

- Jesus arrived once as a baby in Bethlehem, coming near to humanity to save us. Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas.
- Jesus arrives here among us today through his Word, in Holy Baptism and in Holy Communion, to forgive us and strengthen us.
- Jesus will arrive in glory at the end of this world. We look forward to that day with excitement because Jesus has already come and prepared us for it.

Colors & Symbolism

Advent: Blue

The traditional color for Advent is purple. Advent is a penitential season of preparation for Christmas; thus the color purple which symbolizes sorrow and repentance (along with royalty). Since another theme of Advent is hope and anticipation, the color blue (the sky) has come to be used in many churches to symbolize the believer’s hope and expectation of Jesus’ Second Coming.

Traditions & Customs²

The Advent Wreath

A tradition of the Advent season is the lighting of candles on a wreath. Each light reminds us of Jesus, the Light of the world (John 8:12). Each Sunday we light an additional candle, providing a visual countdown to the celebration of Christ’s birth. On Christmas Eve we light the center candle, remembering Jesus’ nativity and the light and life that he brings (John 1:4,9).

Nain Paraments

Advent

Superfrontal: “Come Lord Jesus” is the Advent (meaning “coming” or “arrival”) prayer of Christians who await Christ’s promised return (Revelation 22:7,12,20) on the Last Day (Revelation 22:17,20), and who desire to eagerly receive Jesus now in the Gospel. The stars are representative of the Church’s anticipation of Jesus’ return when he will “appear in the sky...with great power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). The stars also remind us of God’s creative work. They especially remind us of Jesus, the bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16) and Light of the World (John 8:12) who came to save us from the darkness of sin and death.

Lectern antependium: Chi (X) and Rho (P) are the first two letters in the Greek word for Christ (Χριστός). This ancient symbol represents Jesus and his office as the Messiah, the anointed King of kings and Savior of the world (Matthew 16:16).

Pulpit antependium: Alpha (A) and Omega (Ω) are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. These two letters symbolize Jesus Christ, our eternal Lord and Savior, who is the first and the last, the beginning and the end (Revelation 22:13).

¹ Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author; Jonathan E. Schroeder, Editor.

² Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author and Editor.

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