



ABOUT THE PROPERS

An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service



Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 19, 2021



The Lord fulfills his gracious promises

The Fourth Sunday in Advent is traditionally known as “*Rorate Coeli*” Sunday. The Sunday derives its name from the Latin words of the Introit (opening verses) of the day: “You heavens above (*Coeli*), rain down (*Rorate*) righteousness (Isaiah 45:8). Having been told by the Angel Gabriel that she would give birth to the Son of the Most High, Mary hurried to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Mary rejoiced in the blessing the God has given to her and she testified that the coming Lord will bless not only her but all people of all time. Jesus is her Savior and our Savior – the Word made flesh to bring salvation to the nations.

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

Micah 5:2-5a

Verse 1 calls on the city to prepare for the onslaught of God’s judgment upon rebellious Judah. Yet what follows is a message of deliverance for the faithful. A king will be born to bring peace. But not just a descendant of David. He will trace his roots to Abraham, Adam, indeed before the creation of the world. This same passage that pointed the Magi to Bethlehem and the Savior, points us to this God-man who will rule more than the clans of Judah. He will bring peace and justice to the ends of the earth.

Second Lesson¹

Hebrews 10:5-10

The writer to the Hebrews explains the significance of God made flesh by stressing the sacrificial purpose for the Christ’s body. Quoting Psalm 40:6-8, the Lord gives us confidence in willingness of the Christ to make the only true sacrifice once for all. He had to become man, so that by his body we might be made holy once and for all.

Gospel of the Day¹

Luke 1:39-55

The exclamation of Elizabeth, the leaping of baby John, and the song of Mary are all Spirit-wrought reactions to the imminent fulfillment of God’s promised deliverance. We join Mary in marveling at the great things done by the Mighty One. The contrast of judgment for the wicked and deliverance for the faithful illustrates the depth of God’s mercy to every generation in Christ.

Psalm of the Day

Psalm 85

Instead of punishing us as our sins deserve, God forgives. He gives us peace and many other blessings to revive us spiritually.

Verse of the Day

Matthew 1:23

Isaiah’s prophecy was first spoken to the unbelieving King Ahaz of Judah. This promise is now fulfilled in Mary’s virginal conception and birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus is Immanuel, which means, “God with us.” Jesus is true man and true God, come to save us.

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Hymn of the Day

23 “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel” (Latin hymn, c. 12th century)

This hymn takes its content from the “O Antiphons” of the sixth or seventh century. These invocations are addressed to Christ the Messiah under his many biblical titles. Around the twelfth century, someone wove five of these antiphons into a hymn, taking its title from the seventh and final antiphon, “O Emmanuel.” Around the thirteenth century the refrain was added. We rejoice that Emmanuel, the Root of Jesse, the Dayspring from on high, the Key of David – that is, Jesus Christ, has come to save us!

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.

Minor Festivals

St. Thomas, Apostle (December 21)

Thomas, also called “Didymus,” was one of the Twelve apostles of the Lord Jesus. After Thomas doubted the other disciples’ claims that Christ rose from the dead, Jesus physically appeared to him and charged him to “stop doubting and believe.” Having been convinced in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that Christ has indeed risen and conquered death and sin, we approach Jesus in faith and echo Thomas’ reply, “My Lord and my God!”

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 (Α) 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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