



# ABOUT THE PROPERs

*An Explanation of the Variable Parts of the Divine Service*



## Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 21, 2025



### Imminent Arrival of Emmanuel

The Fourth Sunday in Advent is traditionally known as “Rorate Coeli” Sunday. The Sunday derives its name from the Latin words of the Introit (i.e. the opening verses) of the day: “Shower down (*Rorate*), you heavens (*Coeli*), from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness” (Isaiah 45:8). Emmanuel is an important person. “Emmanuel” (or “Immanuel”) means “God with us.” It was a special name given to Jesus already 700 years before he was born. Who is with us when Jesus is with us? God himself. God became a human being in a special way, becoming truly human but remaining fully God. God is still with us. We encounter him in a special way when we gather with two or three others in worship around the means of grace – the gospel in Word and Sacraments. He is so near to us that the thrill of anticipation is almost unbearable. Let it wash over you as you celebrate Christmas this week.

#### First Reading <sup>1</sup>

Isaiah 7:10-14

Such grace that God would even speak to a wicked king like Ahaz! What God said is even more surprising. He didn’t just promise deliverance and ask that Ahaz blindly trust him. God offered a sign to an unbelieving king to prove that he would keep his promise and save his people. How foolish of Ahaz to refuse! How sinful to make a pretense of piety! God, however, would let no sinful king stand in the way of deliverance for his people. So God chose the sign. Not merely a sign of Judah’s physical safety, God chose a sign that would prophesy the deliverance of the whole world from sin and death. A virgin would give birth to God in the flesh for the salvation of his people. In Christ Jesus, God kept every promise made.

#### Second Reading <sup>1</sup>

Romans 1:1-7

After thousands of years of God’s promises, Paul looks back and sees every one of them kept in Christ. All of Scripture promised the gospel message summarized in the name: Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus, the man born of Mary, is also our Lord, God himself. This God-man was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power to be the Christ who would save God’s people from their sins. God kept every promise in Christ to give us what we so desperately needed: Grace and peace to you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### Gospel <sup>1</sup>

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph found himself in the middle of an unwelcome nightmare: his bride to be was pregnant, and he was not the father. As a righteous man, he could not go forward with the marriage; as a merciful man, he could not expose Mary to public disgrace. How long did it take for him to fall asleep with broken betrothal promises on his mind? During the night, Joseph sees an angel who called him “the son of David.” Joseph’s father was Jacob, but the angel reminded Joseph that he was a descendant of kings. Starting this night, he would act as one of David’s line again: he would care for the promised Son who would reign on David’s throne. God had come to save his people, just as he promised. He would do it through the child in Mary’s womb. Joseph believed the promises of God kept in Christ and named the child, “The LORD saves,” knowing full well he was Immanuel.

#### Psalm of the Day <sup>4</sup>

Psalm 89 A

“Forever I Will Sing”

The Church sings Psalm 89 in services where we thank God for keeping his promises over long periods of time. It is the last psalm in Book II of the Psalter. Martin Luther said, “Psalm 89 is a prophecy of Christ and his heavenly kingdom. The psalmist emphasizes that the kingdom given to David will never come to an end, because it is based on Christ, not on our own sins or good works. Later the psalmist prophesies that this precious kingdom will be trampled, trodden, and torn by the Antichrist, but that we should not despair. Knowing this can be a comfort to us in these last days.”

## Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 1:23

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel.” Isaiah’s prophecy was first spoken to the unbelieving King Ahaz of Judah (Isaiah 7:14). 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. Amen.

## Hymn of the Day

327 “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (Latin hymn, c. 12<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>3</sup>

Advent

Advent is a season of preparation and anticipation. The Church looks for the coming of her Savior in this threefold advent: his coming in the flesh as a baby in Bethlehem, his return in judgment on the Last Day, and his present coming to us in Word and Sacrament. The Church encompasses all these facets of the season in a single word that defines Advent worship: “Come!” Throughout the prayers, hymns, and readings that single word is our invitation, our anticipation, our sure and certain hope. Come, Lord Jesus!

## Colors & Symbolism

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 & Customs

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).

<sup>1</sup> Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year A”. Jonathan E. Schroeder, Author.

<sup>2</sup> Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year B”. Daniel M. Deutschlander, Author.

<sup>3</sup> Courtesy of “Planning Christian Worship: Year C”. Joel J. Gawrisch, Author.

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