

The Mid-Winter Worship Trumpet
Trinity United Church of Christ, Berlin
Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, Meyersdale

Family Worship Booklet
December 2020 – January 2021

You hold in your hands a booklet that will cover Sundays and weekdays of family devotions for daily worship. Trinity and Zion will not gather during this time for “in-person” worship to allow the COVID-19 cases to decline to a more manageable number.

There will be a daily scripture, short reflection, and prayer. As this is the Christmas season – pick a Christmas Carol to sing. On Sundays you will find an expanded reflection with all of the above features.

For Sunday, December 27 – for those with a computer here are several suggestions of Lessons and Carols Services to enjoy. The Lessons and Carols service originated at King’s College in England and has been sung for over 100 years on Christmas Eve. The service begins with a single young boy singing the first verse of *Once in David’s Royal City*.

King’s College on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sp4PALv6hRk>

Washington National Cathedral on YouTube: [move player to 10:00 for the service to begin with the organ prelude]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeNjYKM5RzM>

I look forward to seeing you in 2021 – safe, healthy, and ready to meet the challenges of being people of faith in Jesus Christ!

Merry Christmas and Blessed New Year!

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Sunday, December 27th – The Third Day of Christmas Lessons and Carols

In between the scripture lessons, sing a verse of a favorite Christmas Carol.

Bidding Prayer

Beloved in Christ, at this Christmastide let it be our care and delight to hear again the message of the angels, and in heart and mind to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, and the babe lying in a manger.

Therefore, let us read and mark in holy Scripture the tale of the loving purposes of God from the first days of our disobedience unto the glorious redemption brought us by this holy Child.

But first, let us pray for the needs of the whole world; for peace on earth and goodwill among all his people; for unity and brotherhood within the church he came to build, and especially in this, our own community.

And because this would rejoice his heart, let us remember, in his name, the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry, and the oppressed; the sick and them that mourn, the lonely and the unloved, the aged and the little children; all those who know not the Lord Jesus, or who love him not, or who by sin have grieved his heart of love.

Lastly, let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore, and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom in the Lord Jesus we are one forevermore.

These prayers and praises let us humbly offer up to the throne of heaven, in the words which Christ himself hath taught us:

Our Father, which art in heaven . . .

First Lesson – Genesis 3:8-15 – God announces in the Garden of Eden that the seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head.

Second Lesson – Genesis 22:15-18 – God promises to Abraham that in his seed shall the nations of the earth be blessed.

Third Lesson – Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 – Christ's birth and kingdom are foretold by Isaiah.

Fourth Lesson – Micah 5:2-4 – The prophet Micah foretells the glory of little Bethlehem.

Fifth Lesson – Luke 1:26-38 – The angel Gabriel salutes the virgin Mary.

Sixth Lesson – Matthew 1:18-23 – Matthew tells of the birth of Jesus.

Seventh Lesson – Luke 2:8-16 – The shepherds go to the manger.

Eighth Lesson – Matthew 2:1-11 – The wise men are led by the star to Jesus.

Ninth Lesson – John 1:1-14 – John unfolds the great mystery of the incarnation.

Prayer of Blessing:

O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thy only Son, Jesus Christ: Grant that as we joyfully receive him for our Redeemer, so we may, with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our Judge; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

May he who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill you with the sweetness of inward peace and goodwill; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

Christmas Carol

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**Monday, December 28 – Fourth Day of Christmas
Feast Day of the Holy Innocents
Matthew 2:13-18**

This is a Christmas story? Yes, it is. Matthew tucks it right into his story of Jesus' birth. It's a troubling story. Why would God sit on his hands and allow such an atrocity to be done to children? God warned Joseph to take his child out of Bethlehem. Would it have been so hard for God to warn the other dads in the city?

The story is troubling, and yet it's still a Christmas story and even a gospel story. You can get eye strain looking for the good news in this sad story, but there is some there. God sent his only Son to be born into a world like this, a world where kings abuse power, people are victimized, and children are murdered, a world where children suffer and parents weep for them, a world where Satan has a foothold and where evil appears to win as many battles as it loses and sometimes even more. This is what people cynically call "the real world." Christmas happened in the real world, our world.

If you can see past the blood and the violence, there is good news. In the baby Jesus, God entered this world – this corrupt, evil, unjust, devil-serving, sin-loving war-mongering, baby-killing world. God entered this world. He didn't wait until it was safe. He didn't make it easier for Jesus than it would be for anyone else. God didn't send Jesus to a rich family that lived in the lap of luxury. He didn't place Jesus under the protection of friendly government, have him be born in a state-of-art hospital, or make reservations for his family at the Waldorf Astoria. God entered this world – the real world, our world, just as it is with all its attending evils and dangers. Before his Son could say one controversial word or do one eyebrow raising deed, the powers-that-be tried to snuff him out. God entered this world. God came to this world not with a sword in his hand but with a cross on his back. He came not to destroy this broken, sinful world, but to redeem it.

Prayer: Today the Holy Innocents sang your praises, O God, not by speaking but by dying. Hear our prayer and grant that we may show by our lives the faith we profess with our lips. This we ask of you, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christmas Carol – *It Came Upon A Midnight Clear*

Tuesday, December 29 – Fifth Day of Christmas

Colossians 1:1-14

Jean Bosco Gakirage was not there when everyone he knew was murdered. It was 1994, and the Rwandan priest was returning to his home church for ordination when he received the terrible news: "Do not come home. Your parents and the whole congregation have been murdered in the sanctuary."

Jean refused to stay away. Reaching Mushya, his small village, he found that only seven children remained alive. With the bodies of his parents and friends still inside the church, Jean told the children, "We are the Resurrection." But he felt that he died that day.

The story did not go untold or unnoticed. A continent away, Marie Michelle saw a picture of the tall Rwandan in a mission magazine. Marie is a nun, living in seclusion and near-silence in a Missouri convent. Her heart went out to the newly ordained priest who lost his parents and six siblings to genocide. She asked for permission to write Jean a letter.

When the letter arrived, Jean could hardly believe it was for him. There was no one left to write to him since the death of his family and friends. He placed the envelope on the table while he stared at it—"to let it rest," he said, "because it had come far."

Finally, Jean opened the envelope and read these words:

I will pray for you every day. From now on you can think of me as your sister, and I will call you not "Father Jean" but "my brother."

Jean responded to the letter with thanks and a promise to pray for Marie as well. He also included words from Psalm 141, "The evildoers appall me...but my eyes are fixed on thee, O Lord God; thou art my refuge."

The daily prayers continued for ten years. Jean corresponded regularly. Marie was limited to two letters per year, but other nuns in the order wrote seasonally. Then, on July 8, 2004, Jean was given the opportunity to visit the convent. The nuns usually communicate with outsiders only through notes, but on this day Jean would be able to speak to Marie through a metal grate. After the midday prayers and

services were over, the curtain over the grate parted. Standing with her nine Passionist sisters, Marie peered through the bars at Jean.

"My brother," she said. "I thought I'd have to wait for heaven to see him."

After what will likely be their only meeting in this life, both agreed on their greatest connection.

Marie said, "The union in prayer is the deepest thing, better than letters and pictures." [John Beukema, Western Springs, Illinois]

The Apostle Paul reminds us to pray for others daily. As we prepare to begin 2021 – a fresh start – may we daily remember to pray for someone outside of our own home.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, whose might is over all the earth, we thank you for all the love you show us. We also thank you for everything that seems hard, but which you change into help and strength. We want to thank you in life and in death, in joy and in sorrow, for you are the great and mighty God, who calls us to life again and again, who leads us to fuller life. You have given us great love in Jesus Christ, our Savior. He shall always be before our eyes and remain in our hearts. Through him we can cry out in joy, "Abba, dear Father!" Amen.



December 30th – The Sixth Day of Christmas

2 Peter 3:8-13

Author Doug Mendenhall shares a brief parable that should cause all of us to pause and reflect:

Jesus called the other day to say he was passing through and [wondered if] he could spend a day or two with us.

I said, "Sure. Love to see you. When will you hit town?"

I mean, it's Jesus, you know, and it's not every day you get the chance to visit with him. It's not like it's your in-laws and you have to stop and decide whether the advantages outweigh your having to move to the sleeper sofa.

That's when Jesus told me he was actually at a convenience store out by the interstate.

I must have gotten that Bambi-in-headlights look, because my wife hissed, "What is it? What's wrong? Who is that?"

So I covered the receiver and told her Jesus was going to arrive in eight minutes, and she ran out of the room and started giving guidance to the kids—in that effective way that Marine drill instructors give guidance to recruits. ...

My mind was already racing with what needed to be done in the next eight—no seven—minutes so Jesus wouldn't think we were reprobate loser slobs.

I turned off the TV in the den, which was blaring some weird scary movie I'd been half watching. But I could still hear screams from our bedroom, so I turned off the reality show it was tuned to. Plus, I turned off the kids' set out on the sun porch, because I didn't want to have to explain *Jon & Kate Plus Eight* to Jesus, either, six minutes from now.

My wife had already thinned out the magazines that had been accumulating on the coffee table. She put *Christianity Today* on top for a good first impression. Five minutes to go. I looked out the front window, but the yard actually looked great thanks to my long, hard work, so I let it go. What could I improve in four minutes anyway?

I did notice the mail had come, so I ran out to grab it. Mostly it was Netflix envelopes and a bunch of catalogs tied into recent purchases, so I stuffed it back in the box. Jesus doesn't need to get the wrong idea—three minutes from now—about how much on-line shopping we do.

I ran back in and picked up a bunch of shoes left by the door. Tried to stuff them in the front closet, but it was overflowing with heavy coats and work coats and snow coats and pretty coats and raincoats and extra coats. We live in the South; why'd we buy so many coats? I squeezed the shoes in with two minutes to go.

I plumped up sofa pillows, my wife tossed dishes into the sink, I scolded the kids, and she shooed the dog. With one minute left I realized something important: Getting ready for a visit from Jesus is not an eight-minute job.

Then the doorbell rang.

Prayer: O Lord God, in exultation our hearts go out to you and your revelation of heaven, your revelation of the Spirit, who can fill our hearts so that we remain steadfast throughout our earthly life. It is still dark on earth. Sin and death hold sway, but we stand unafraid and seek repentance. In spite of all our failures we look to you and know you are our Savior. You send us Jesus Christ in your own glory. The world will be filled with light. Everywhere on earth, even among those who do not know you, the sincere-hearted will come to acknowledge that you, the Father of Jesus Christ and our Father, are God over all the world. You will show your glory to all people so that they may come to you, worship you, and walk in the light, to the everlasting glory of your name. Amen.

**December 31 – New Year's Eve, Seventh Day of
Christmas
John 8:12-19**

I am the light of the world, the founder of the Christian religion said. What a stupendous phrase! And how particularly marvelous today, when one is conscious of so much darkness in the world! Let your light shine before men, he exhorted us. You know, sometimes ... someone asks me what I most want, what I should most like to do in the little that remains of my life, and I always nowadays truthfully answer--and it is truthful--"I should like my light to shine, even if only very fitfully, like a match struck in a dark, cavernous night and then flickering out."

Malcolm Muggeridge in Jesus Rediscovered.

Prayer: Lord our God, thank you for letting your light shine every day of every year. Thank you that we may always lift our eyes to you, whose right hand will bring true order to everything, even in difficult times. Give our hearts the strength to be faithful in this age, the strength to glorify you. For you remain, no matter what happens on earth. You are our God. You have sent us the Savior and we can draw close to you. Your promise to us stands firm, the promise that your day with its truth and justice shall come, to the honor of your name. May many people turn their hearts to you; may they worship you and call to you for help, to the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

January 1, 2021 – New Year's Day
Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus
Matthew 25:31-46

Robby Robins was an Air Force pilot during the first Iraq war. After his 300th mission, he was surprised to be given permission to immediately pull his crew together and fly his plane home. They flew across the ocean to Massachusetts and then had a long drive to western Pennsylvania. They drove all night, and when his buddies dropped him off at his driveway just after sun-up, there was a big banner across the garage—"Welcome Home Dad!"

How did they know? No one had called, and the crew themselves hadn't expected to leave so quickly. Robins relates, "When I walked into the house, the kids, about half dressed for school, screamed, 'Daddy!' Susan came running down the hall—she looked terrific—hair fixed, make-up on, and a crisp yellow dress. 'How did you know?' I asked.

'I didn't,' she answered through tears of joy. 'Once we knew the war was over, we knew you'd be home one of these days. We knew you'd try to surprise us, so we were ready every day.'

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored. May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as in heaven. May this continue to be our prayer in the new year, and may we find fellowship with one another in what is eternal and holy. Bless us on our way. Bless us on our earthly pilgrimage so that we may remain free from all bondage, able to thank you day and night for all the good you do, even when things look very dark. We praise your name and we pray as the Savior has taught us. Amen.

January 2, 2021 – Ninth Day of Christmas

Ephesians 3:14-17

Craig Larson shares this from the passage for today: On my desk I like to display, on a bookstand, the kind of gift books you put on the coffee table—those filled with professional photos of nature or tourist destinations. My current book is called *America's Spectacular National Parks* (author, Michael Duchemin). For several days I have had the book open to a photo of the Grand Teton Mountains, an extra-wide photo that filled not only the left page, but crossed the fold and took half of the page on the right. It is a majestic display of deep blue sky; rugged, gray, snow-capped mountains; and a calm lake in the foreground.

This morning I decided to turn the page to the next photo, and as I did I discovered that I had missed something important. The right page of the Grand Tetons photo was an extra-long page folded over, covering part of the Grand Tetons. So when I opened it up, it not only revealed what was covered, but added another eight inches to the Grand Tetons photo. In other words, when I opened the fold, I added some 16 inches to the width of the photo. Wow. The Grand Tetons became even grander.

The Christian life has unfolding moments like that, when we discover there is much more to God and his kingdom than we knew, much more to his purpose for us than we imagined. Abraham experienced that at age 75, Moses at age 80, the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Again and again in the Bible, when God met people, he opened a glorious page for them that had previously been folded.

Prayer: Lord our God, we have gathered in your sight. We thank you that through your words you have given something of your very self to help us be your disciples, your children, who stand firm in faith and trust throughout our lives, whatever our lot may be. Help us in these times, and when days grow difficult and full of grief, hold your people securely in your hand. Help us to be firmly rooted in faith, however dark it is on earth. You can give us strength and courage; we can do nothing in our human strength. But the power of your Spirit can renew us, make us alert, and fill us with lasting joy. For we are your people, your children, and when held in your hand, we can rejoice in spite of all grief. Amen.

January 3, 2021 – Tenth Day of Christmas

Ephesians 1:3-14

When I was five-years-old, I first fully understood the message of these words:

He sees you when you're sleeping,
He knows if you're awake,
He knows if you've been bad or good,
So be good for goodness' sake!

Until that moment, I had lived in this childhood bliss, in which Christmas was the best day of the year. I had always believed that the gifts at Christmastime were there because Christmas always came with gifts. You could count on them. But now I painfully understood that if I wanted any gifts at Christmas, I had to be good. It was all riding on me. There was this all-seeing, all-knowing Santa, and if there was going to be any gifts, I had better shape up.

But then I thought, *How good is "good"? Can a person be "pretty good"? Does Santa understand that I have a twin brother, so I have more reasons to be provoked than other kids?* It was all so worrisome to me.

I grew up a little more and went on to elementary school. In the fourth grade, when I was 9, I continued to learn that all the good stuff in life depends on my effort. We had a reading program called SRA. Here's how it worked: There was a giant box of color-coded cards on the side of the classroom. You went and got one of the cards in the front of the box, read what was on it, and then answered questions about what you'd read. If you got most of the answers right, you moved up to the next highest color—red, yellow, blue, and if you were good enough and worked hard enough, you reached exotic colors, like magenta.

Moving up in SRA was all we cared about, because if you were still on one of the lower-level colors—red or yellow—you were a loser. Everybody's goal was to move up—to work really hard and reach the ultimate pinnacle of fourth-grade glory: aquamarine. But if you wanted the glory, you had to hustle. We would literally run

from our desks to the box. No pain, no gain! You had to be good enough, to work hard enough.

I grew up a little more. I was 14-years-old, and a friend invited me to a meeting after school called Campus Life. There was a guy there who had a beard, which automatically made him cool. He also had a guitar, which made him even cooler. He started saying stuff I'd never heard before. He said that if you wanted the good stuff from God—stuff like peace and forgiveness and the Holy Spirit—it didn't work like Santa, where you had to be good or you got nothing but coal in your Christmas stocking. He pointed out that it didn't work like SRA, where it all depended on your being smart enough and good enough and hustling enough. He said there was a thing called grace. God had decided to take all my sin, all my screw-ups, and forgive me. Grace had something to do with Jesus dying on the cross for me, and all I had to do was believe.

This man read from the Bible, which I hadn't really ever read. He read that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him, will not perish, but have everlasting life." This message was different from anything I'd heard before. It was not what I expected. It wasn't all on me. It was all on him—on Jesus. That message was so freeing, that as I took it in, I almost started to cry. But I was a 14-year-old guy, and we didn't do stuff like that. The next week, I thought, *I better not go to that meeting again, because I almost started to cry last week, and I cannot be humiliated by breaking down in front of my friends.* But I did go. And I did hear the message. And I did believe. And I experienced "amazing grace."

Prayer: Lord our God, we thank you that we may go to meet you with open hearts, with jubilant faith, and with this joyful shout, "God's salvation is coming! Through Jesus Christ day is dawning on earth for all nations." Stay with us and help us. Send us your Spirit to strengthen us, especially in times of trouble. Let all nations come before you. Let us tell all peoples, "Be comforted. The salvation of our God, who is also your God, is coming. In this salvation we will rejoice together forevermore to the glory of our God." Amen.

The Birthday of a King 191

"I will raise up...a King who will reign wisely." Jeremiah 23:5 (NIV)

1. In the lit - tle vil - lage of Beth - le - hem, There lay a Child one
2. 'Twas a hum - ble birth - place, but oh, how much God gave to us that

day, And the sky was bright with a ho - ly light O'er the
day; From the man - ger bed what a path has led, What a

Chorus
place where Je - sus lay. Al - le - lu - ia! Oh, how the
per - fect, ho - ly way.

an - gels sang. Al - le - lu - ia! How it rang! And the sky was

bright with a ho - ly light, 'Twas the birth - day of a King.

January 4, 2021 – The Eleventh Day of Christmas James 4:11-17

A little humor for today:

The pastor walked into the church alone and felt an overwhelming sense of God's holiness. He went to the front, knelt down at the altar rail, and began to beat himself on the chest, crying out, "Oh Lord, I am nothing!"

A few moments later, the minister of music entered the church. He too felt the overwhelming presence of God and, seeing the pastor at the altar, went and knelt down beside him. He also began to strike his chest and say, "Oh Lord, I am nothing. I am nothing."

It happened that the whole staff, one by one, began coming in. The minister of recreation, the minister of education—eventually, the whole staff, all kneeling at the altar bemoaning their "nothingness" before the Almighty.

A little while later, the church custodian came in and got caught up in the revival, as well. He knelt beside the ministerial colleagues and began beating on his chest, adding to the refrain, "Oh Lord, I am nothing. I am nothing."

At that moment the pastor looked up, saw the janitor, and nudged the minister of music. "Well, well," he said. "Just look at who thinks he's nothing!"

Prayer: Lord our God, we thank you for the help you have given us over and over again so that we can stand before you, rejoicing in the certainty of faith. We thank you for guiding and leading our lives and for letting us see a goal ahead, a goal to be revealed to all people. Be with us in times of silence when we seem to be alone. Keep us strong and steadfast through temptation and through all the turmoil of life. Help us to remain unshaken, for you walk with us holding us by the hand, and you can lift us above all that does not endure. Amen.

January 5, 2021 – The Twelfth Day of Christmas

Proverbs 22:1-9

Rebecca Sabky, an undergraduate admissions counselor at an Ivy League School, reads over 2,000 college applications every year. She writes: "The applicants are always intellectually curious and talented. They climb mountains, head extracurricular clubs and develop new technologies. They're the next generation's leaders. Their accomplishments stack up quickly." But she's always on the lookout for one rare quality: kindness, as exemplified in this true story:

[A student from a large public school in New England] was clearly bright, as evidenced by his class rank and teachers' praise. He had a supportive recommendation from his college counselor and an impressive list of extracurriculars. ... But one letter of recommendation caught my eye. It was from a school custodian.

Letters of recommendation are typically written by people who the applicant thinks will impress a school. This letter was different. The custodian wrote that he was compelled to support this student's candidacy because of his thoughtfulness. This young man was the only person in the school who knew the names of every member of the janitorial staff. He turned off lights in empty rooms, consistently thanked the hallway monitor each morning and tidied up after his peers even if nobody was watching. This student, the custodian wrote, had a refreshing respect for every person at the school, regardless of position, popularity or clout.

Over 15 years and 30,000 applications in my admissions career, I had never seen a recommendation from a school custodian. It gave us a window onto a student's life in the moments when nothing "counted." That student was admitted by unanimous vote of the admissions committee.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, be close to us as we seek you in the quiet of our hearts. Grant us the strength of your Spirit, the strength to wait patiently for your help in our lives. Help us to hold to all that is good. Help us to feel, each one of us, that we are your children and that we may rejoice in your fatherly care. May your will be done more and more fully in us and around us. May your will be done so that we may be given ever greater freeing and your light can dawn where there is still darkness. Amen.

January 6, 2021 – The Feast of Epiphany

Matthew 2:1-12

Today brings us to the close of the Christmas Season with the story of the Magi who came to worship Jesus. After all of these years of preaching – I needed to think about this story in a fresh way. I would like to suggest two ideas that struck me about the revelation of God’s glory.

First, I was struck by the way God both uses and subverts the Wise Men’s paganism to draw them to himself. God’s innovativeness in planting within decidedly non-biblical worldviews a series of clues that lead to the feet of Christ is very good news in our current cultural moment with its resurgent paganism. The second thing that struck me is that the Wise Men do not follow the star – the star follows the Christ. The heavens declare the glory of God.

On more thing – Herod gives instruction to the Wise Men – “go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report, that I might go and worship as well.” He’s lying. He’s not going to worship; he’s going to go with a dagger hidden in his cloak. But that’s good advice. It’s an odd thing to take a bad man’s words and say, “Church, would you heed him on this one?” But I’m going to anyway. Would you pay attention to what Herod is saying here? Go and make a careful search for Christ. And as you go out and look for Christ, for the man, this king that was born, that lives, that exists, that reveals his glory – as you find him, tell others, that they might worship too.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, be close to us as we seek you in the quiet of our hearts. Grant us the strength of your Spirit, the strength to wait patiently for your help in our lives. Help us to hold to all that is good. Help us to feel, each one of us, that we are your children and that we may rejoice in your fatherly care. May your will be done more and more fully in us and around us. May your will be done so that we may be given ever greater freeing and your light can dawn where there is still darkness. Amen.

We Three Kings

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1. We three kings of O - ri - ent are; bear - ing gifts we tra - verse a - far,
 2. Born a King on Beth - le - hem's plain, gold I bring to crown Him a - gain,
 3. Frank - in - cense to of - fer have I; in - cense owns a De - i - ty nigh;
 4. Myrrh is mine; its bit - ter per - fume breathes a life of gath - er - ing gloom;
 5. Glo - rious now be - hold Him a - rise; King and God and sac - ri - fice:

field and foun - tain, moor and moun - tain, fol - low - ing yon - der star.
 King for - ev - er, ceas - ing nev - er, o - ver us all to reign.
 prayer and prais - ing, voic - es rais - ing, wor - ship Him, God on high.
 sor - rowing, sigh - ing, bleed - ing, dy - ing, sealed in the stone - cold tomb.
 Al - le - lu - ia, Al - le - lu - ia, sounds through the earth and skies.

O star of won - der, star of light, star with roy - al beau - ty bright,

west - ward lead - ing, still pro - ceed - ing, guide us to thy per - fect light.

WORDS: John Henry Hopkins, Jr., 1857 (Matt. 2:1-11)

MUSIC: John Henry Hopkins, Jr., 1857

KINGS OF ORIENT

8.8.8.6 with refrain

January 7, 2021 – Thursday before the Baptism of the Lord

1 Samuel 3:1-21

The pericope before us this today is the beginning of Samuel's relationship with God. God was speaking to Samuel, Samuel knew he was being addressed. He did not know it was God. He actually had to learn how to recognize God was speaking to him. In other words, it's possible for God to speak to someone and for that person to know something is going on, but they don't know it's God.

Communication is simply guiding somebody else's thoughts. Dallas Willard writes about this in a book about guidance and God's will for your life: *Hearing God*. When someone is communicating with you, all they're doing is causing you to think certain thoughts you would not otherwise be thinking. Those thoughts are going on in your head. They're your thoughts, but somebody else is prompting them. That's communication.

Eli helped Samuel to discern when God may be speaking or guiding in his life.

Prayer is not just me talking with God. If God wants to, God can talk back. To commune, to be in community, involves communication. Jesus says about his people: "When he" – the Good Shepherd – "has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice." To have a personal relationship with God means I must be open to the possibility that the Spirit of God is prompting me, guiding me.

God still speaks. The Spirit still guides. The world still gets changed. People still get blessed. God will do it. The Spirit will do it through you. Whatever are of your life it is where you need wisdom, where you need guidance, just ask God.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, accept us as your children, whose lives are under your protection and who turn to you for strength. In the midst of all the struggles and temptations in this world keep us certain of your love and goodness. Grant that we may help your name to be honored on earth and your salvation to spread over all the world. May we help that the hope you have given us brings light and strength for our own lives and for all whom you love in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lord, Speak to Me 667

The things you have heard me say, entrust to reliable people. 2 Timothy 2:2

1. Lord, speak to me, that I may speak in liv - ing
 2. O teach me, Lord, that I may teach the pre - cious
 3. O fill me with Thy full - ness, Lord, Un - til my
 4. O use me, Lord, use e - ven me, Just as Thou

ech - oes of Thy tone; As Thou hast sought, so
 things Thou dost im - part; And wing my words that
 ver - y heart o'er - flow In kin - dling thought and
 wilt, and when, and where, Un - til Thy bless - ed

let me seek Thine err - ing chil - dren lost and lone.
 they may reach The hid - den depths of man - y a heart.
 glow - ing word, Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.
 face I see - Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glo - ry share.

TEXT: Frances Ridley Havergal
 MUSIC: Robert Schumann

CANONBURY
 L.M.

January 8, 2021 – Friday Before the Baptism of the Lord Psalm 29

Psalm 29 is one of my favorite Psalms. It begins with a prelude of four lines called the *Gloria in Excelsis*, and concludes with a postlude of four lines, what we would call the benediction. In between lies the real body of the poem – three strophes of five lines each, very symmetrically put together. Within those three verses you will hear the phrase *the voice of the Lord* which may be translated *the roaring of the Lord* – seven times. That’s why it’s called the Psalm of the Seven Thunders.

This Psalm is not about “come and get” – it is about “come and give.” The direction of worship is that we humble ourselves before God, and as we do, the Holy Spirit indwells us, puts beauty upon us and it makes us becoming.

This is a Psalm of listening in the middle of the poem. Listen for God’s glorious voice! Close your eyes and turn your eyes towards Jesus and hear his voice.

As the Psalm closes we receive God’s benediction – He gives us the power to endure, to stand in the storm, and having done all – to withstand. He gives people power in the storm – in spite of the storm!

Prayer: Father in heaven, we thank you for the many ways you strengthen us and reveal your life to us. We thank you for all your protection, also for your protection of our faith and hope. Grant that your Spirit may penetrate us more and more, enabling us to be your witnesses in this evil and unhappy world. May your Spirit give us hope for this life and for the life to come. Amen.

Hymn: Lord, Speak to Me

January 9, 2021 – Saturday before the Baptism of the Lord
Luke 5:1-11

Gary Haugen, the founder of International Justice Mission, a Christian organization that frees people trapped in sex trafficking, describes God's calling to start IJM.

I vividly remember when I finally had to make a decision to abandon my career at the U.S. Department of Justice to become the first employee of a not-for-profit organization that didn't yet actually exist called International Justice Mission. I had worked for three years with friends on the idea of IJM and was very excited, in theory, about this dream of following Jesus in the work of justice in the world. But then I had to actually act. I had to walk into the Department of Justice and turn in my badge I tried to be very brave and very safe. That is to say, I walked in and asked my bosses for a yearlong leave of absence My bosses politely declined.

I was suddenly feeling very nervous What was I really afraid of? As I thought about it, I feared humiliation. If my little justice ministry idea didn't work, no one was going to die. If IJM turned out to be a bad idea and collapsed, my kids weren't going to starve. We'd probably just have to live with my parents for a while until I could find another job, but with my education, odds are I would soon find a job. The fact is, I would be terribly embarrassed. Having told everybody about my great idea, they would know that it was a bad idea or that I was a bad leader. Either way, it would be humiliating.

So there it was. My boundary of fear. I sensed God inviting me to an extraordinary adventure of service, but deep inside I was afraid of looking like a fool and a loser. This was actually very helpful to see, because it helped me get past it. When I am [older], do I really want to look back and say, *Yeah, I sensed that God was calling me to lead a*

movement to bring rescue to people who desperately need an advocate in the world, but I was afraid of getting embarrassed and so I never even tried?...

Fear is normal, even among the earnest and devout, and it can be overcome. But first we must see the opportunity it provides—a revelation that only comes as we step to the precipice of action.

Prayer: Lord our God, we thank you that we are allowed to live in your love. We thank you for your promise that all the suffering on earth shall come to an end. Hear us when we turn to you with all we have on our hearts. We are weak, but you are strong. May we hope and trust in your strength. May our life, with all its practical concerns, remain in your hands until the day when you will act in might and the whole world will know the forgiveness of sins and will praise and thank you evermore. Amen.

January 10, 2021 – The Baptism of the Lord

Mark 1:4-11

If you watch *Entertainment Tonight*, you know that when there's a screening of a new movie the stars come out onto a red carpet, behind burgundy roping. The media packs in, all trying to see the celebrities dressed in multiple-thousand-dollar gowns or multiple-thousand-dollar suits. Their makeup and hair are done by professionals, and they're smiling and preening and nodding. And there's a flash, flash, flash, flash of cameras. The whole apparatus there is designed so that you know who the "it" people are, who's "it."

John comes with a counter message. His whole message is this: "I'm not 'it.' Don't ever think I'm 'it.' The one who is coming after me is 'it.' He's so much greater than I am because I baptize you with water, which is good, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. That changes everything. The one who can do that is unfathomably greater than me. I do the preparation work. I baptize you in the muddy Jordan River, but the one who is coming will baptize you into the cool, clear presence of God himself. He will change you on the inside, and you will have new life flowing within you. What would it be like to be saturated in the very power and presence of God? That is the main event."

In Mark 1 John is saying, "Confession and repentance are important. They're necessary preparation. But what they're building to—what you will stop and give your attention to—is the one who will baptize you in the Spirit, because that matters more than anything."

When John preached this, his audience was saturated in the Old Testament Scriptures. They understood why a life immersed in the Spirit of God was everything you could want and long for. But we are not quite as clear on that. We think, *I don't know. It's important, but I don't know why that would be good. I'm not exactly sure what it means. How*

good could it be? I have a home theater system. Could it possibly be any better than that?

So to help us understand why baptism in the Spirit is the pinnacle that all our preparation leads to, I want to look at one verse from elsewhere in the New Testament, [Romans 14:17](#). It gives a nice summary of baptism in the Spirit. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking." It's not primarily about rules and regulations, although a lot of people think that's exactly what Christianity is all about. So what is life with God really about? It's about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you are baptized into the Holy Spirit, you can intimately experience righteousness, peace, and joy.

Do you realize now why John says, "Someone is coming who is so much greater, because all I can baptize you with is water, but he can baptize you into the Holy Spirit"? That's what you need. Do you want to be baptized in the Holy Spirit? Do you want that presence and power of God in your life? Because you can know that. You can live that.

Our text says there will be necessary preparation for this baptism in the Spirit. Verse 2 says, "Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you and he will prepare your way." Verse 3 says, "Prepare the way for the Lord's coming. Clear the road for him." And the road clearing looks like this, in verse 4: "Baptize to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven." Verse 5 says, "And when they confessed their sins ..." You cannot skip over this step, and John's coming to make sure that happens. He's saying, "You've got to go through confession and repentance as preparation for this great immersion in the Spirit of God."

In John's time, if you were a pagan and you were showing up at the temple of Zeus or the shrine of Aphrodite and you were consorting with the temple prostitutes, and later you wanted to convert to Judaism, you had to go through a ritual

washing. This was to show that you were washing off the sewage of your old life to enter this clean new life with God. John shakes everybody up by saying, "Just because you were born Jewish, don't think that's enough. Don't think you can just live any way you want and then paper over that with some kind of religious veneer. You need to change as much as any pagan needs to change. You need a change of heart; you need a change of life. You need confession and repentance. That's what gets you ready. That's what opens you up so that this immersion in the Holy Spirit can come to you. That is a necessary step."

This is where Christians sometimes get confused. Some of you have been in churches where this was not actually taught, but the culture emphasized confession and repentance, right and wrong, rules and regulations—it was implied that that's what Christianity is about. In fact, that's all they did or all you were brought into. Your church was stuck there. Others of you may have been in churches where the emphasis was all on the life and the Spirit, so the culture taught that confession and repentance were downers. Skip right past that and go straight to the life in the Spirit. But it's neither one. You don't get stuck there, but neither do you skip over it. It's the necessary preparation for the main event.

My daily prayer is, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* That's how you open yourself. Are you willing to take a look at an issue in your life that everyone else in your life knows about and wishes you could recognize? Maybe they've tried to talk to you about it, and you've ignored them. Open up your life and say, "I'm going to stop pretending that's not true. I'm going to stop pretending I really have this together and that was just a little aberration. I'm going to actually look honestly at this. I'm going to confess and repent of this. Because more than anything else, I want a new life in the Holy Spirit. I want to be baptized and plunged into and immersed in and saturated in the very presence and life of God." Prepare the way of the Lord,

because someone is coming who is so much greater, and he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer: Lord our God, how great is your love, and how great is your help! May each one of us feel sheltered in your hand, knowing that our faults and shortcomings no longer matter. We can go straight toward the goal you have set, for you will help us through the forgiveness of sins and through all the good you can put into our hearts. And so we ask you to be with us. May we be faithful, believing firmly in your great mercy, so that your name may be glorified among us. May each heart be given the comfort of knowing that everything will yet turn to the good, to the glory of your name. Amen.



70 On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

D Bm D D/A A D

1 On Jor - dan's bank the Bap - tist's cry an - nounc - es
2 Then cleansed be ev - ery life from sin: make straight the
3 We hail you as our Sav - ior, Lord, our re - fuge

A/C# D Bm A

that the Lord is nigh. A - wake and hark - en,
way for God with - in, and let us all our
and our great re - ward. With - out your grace we

G D A/C# A G A D

for he brings glad tid - ings of the King of kings!
hearts pre - pare for Christ to come and en - ter there.
waste a - way like flowers that with - er and de - cay.

4 Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,
and make us rise to fall no more.
O let your face upon us shine
and fill the world with love divine.

5 All praise to you, eternal Son,
whose advent has our freedom won,
whom with the Father we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore

For an alternate arrangement see 900

Words: Charles Coffin, 1736; tr. composite, P.D.

Music (PUER NOBIS 8.8.8.8): *Trier manuscript*, 15th c.; adapt. Michael Praetorius, 1609; harm. George Ratcliffe Woodward, 1910, P.D.