



RORATE COELI (“RAIN DOWN”) FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church
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WELCOME IN THE NAME OF OUR BLESSED LORD! We are pleased you are here, gathered around the Gospel in Preaching and the Sacraments! **GUESTS** – If we can assist you in any way with questions about our confession of faith, spiritual struggles, understanding our liturgical service, or any other need, please let us know. It is our prayer that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will strengthen and comfort you.

CONFESSIOAL STATEMENT: Bethany Lutheran Church confesses all the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired word of God without any errors. We also hold, without any reservation, to the teachings of the Evangelical-Lutheran Confessions contained in the 1580 Book of Concord. We confess these teachings to be the correct interpretation of Scripture and a true explanation of the one, holy, catholic (universal) and apostolic faith.

PASTORAL CARE AND GUESTS AT THE LORD’S SUPPER: Scripture and our Confessions teach that the Lord’s Supper “is the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine” (Small Catechism). We are concerned about the spiritual welfare of all who commune at the Lord’s Table. *If you are a guest and desire to commune, please speak to the pastor before the service.* Our altar is open to those who confess oneness with us in doctrine, are members of sister churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and are not under church discipline in another congregation. In Christ, Pastor Lawson

DECEMBER 22, 2024 † 11:00 A. M.

† In the Name of Jesus †

Prayer before Worship: Lord God, heavenly Father, it is good and right that we should give thanks to You, that You have given us a glorious baptism like that of John the Baptist, and that therein You have promised us the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, and everlasting life through Your Son, Jesus Christ: We beseech You, by Your grace and mercy preserve us in such faith, that we never doubt Your promise, but be comforted by our baptism in all temptations; and grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may renounce sin, and ever continue in the righteousness bestowed on us in baptism, until, by Your grace, we obtain our eternal salvation; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Divine Service: Rite Two
Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary: p. 60

The Office of Preparation
(Confession & Holy Absolution)

Hymn of Invocation: 106, *On Jordan's Bank the Herald's Cry*

**C: On Jordan's bank the herald's cry Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings Glad tidings of the King of kings.**

**Then cleansed by ev'ry Christian breast, and furnished for so great a Guest;
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare For Christ to come and enter there.**

**For Thou art our Salvation, Lord, Our Refuge and our great Reward;
Without Thy grace we waste away, Like flow'rs that wither and decay.**

**To heal the sick stretch out Thine hand And bid the fallen sinner stand;
Once more upon Thy people shine And fill the world with love divine.**

**All praise, eternal Son, to Thee, Whose advent set Thy people free:
Whom with the Father we adore And Holy Ghost, forevermore.**

*At the Invocation and Absolution all may make the sign of the †
in remembrance of their Baptism.*

The Invocation: p. 60-61

P: In the Name of the Father and of the Son † and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

The Confession of Sin (form I): pp. 60-62

P: Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins to God, our Father, beseech Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

P: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

C: Who made heaven and earth.

P: I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;

C: And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

P: Let us bow before the Lord and confess our sins.

C: O almighty God, merciful Father, I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess to You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them, and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.

P: I ask each of you, in the presence of God who searches the heart: Do you confess that you have sinned, and do you repent of your sins?

C: I do.

P: Do you believe that Jesus Christ has redeemed you from all your sins, and do you desire forgiveness in His name?

C: I do.

P: Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God to all of you, and in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit.

May He comfort your heart by His holy Absolution,
and strengthen you by His Sacraments,
that your joy may be full.

Peace be with you! **C: Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word

Introit



Tone 4

Antiphon **P:** Rain down, you heav`ens, from above:/ And let the skies pour down `the Righteous One;

Let the earth `open her womb:/ And bring `forth Salvation.

Psalm **C:** **The heavens declare the `glory of God:/ And the firmament shows `His handiwork.**

Their voice is gone out in`to all the earth:/ And their words to the `end of the world.

In the heavens He has set a taberna`cle for the sun:/ Which is like a Bridegroom coming out `of His chamber.

His going forth is from the end `of the heaven:/ And his circuit unto `the end of it.

Gloria Patri **C:** **Glory be to the Father `and to the Son:/ and to `the Holy Ghost.**

As it was in the be`ginning, is now:/ and ever shall be, forever`more. Amen.

Antiphon **C:** **Rain down, you heav`ens, from above:/ And let the skies pour down `the Righteous One;**

Let the earth `open her womb:/ And bring `forth Salvation.

The Kyrie Eleison (form II): p. 63-64

C: **Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison.**

Christe eleison. Christe eleison. Christe eleison.

Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison. Kyrie eleison.

The Gloria in Excelsis is silent until Christmas Day.

The Salutation: p. 66

P: The Lord be with you.

C: **And with your spirit.**

Collect for the Day: p. 66

P: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, and help us with Your great might, that whatever is hindered by our sins may be speedily accomplished by Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever.

Amen.

Old Testament: *Deuteronomy 18:15-19*

P: *In those days Moses prophesied:* The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die." And the Lord

said to me: “What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.”

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Gradual

Tone 4



**C: You who dwell between the cher`ubim, shine forth!:/ Stir up `Your strength and come!
Give ear, O Shep`herd of Israel:/ You who lead Jo`seph like a flock.**

Hymn: 596, *Praise to Thee and Adoration*

**C: Praise to Thee and adoration, Blessed Jesus, Son of God,
Who, to serve Thine own creation, Didst partake of flesh and blood.
Teach me that I never may From Thy fold or pastures stray,
But with zeal and joy exceeding Follow where Thy steps are leading.**

**Let me never, Lord, forsake Thee, E'en though bitter pain and strife
On my way shall overtake me; But may I through all my life
Walk in fervent love to Thee, In all woes for comfort flee
To Thy birth, Thy death, and Passion, Till I see Thy full salvation.**

Epistle: *Philippians 4:4-7*

P: Brethren: Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made know to God; and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Alleluia Verse

P: Alleluia! Alleluia! You are my help and my Deliverer: Do not delay, O my God. Alleluia!

C: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Holy Gospel: *St. John 1:19-34*

P: The Holy Gospel according to † St. John, the 1st chapter:

C: Glory be to You, O Lord.

P: Now *at that time* this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” He said: “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. And they asked him, saying, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” John answered them, saying, “I baptize with water, but there stands one among you Whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.” These things were done in Bethabara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.” And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

P: This is the † Holy Gospel.

C: Praise be to You, O Christ.

*At the words “And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary
And was made man” all **may** bow out of reverence for Christ’s Incarnation.*

Nicene Creed: p. 69

**C: I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
Begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
Very God of Very God,**

**Begotten, not made,
Being of one substance with the Father,
By Whom all things were made;
Who for us men and for our salvation
came down from heaven
*and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary
and was made man;*
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried;
and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures
and ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father;
And He shall come again with glory
to judge both the living and the dead;
Whose kingdom shall have no end.
And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped
and glorified,
Who spoke by the Prophets.
And I believe one holy Christian and Apostolic Church.
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
And I look for the Resurrection of the dead
and the Life † of the world to come. Amen.**

Chief Hymn: 110, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

**C: O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Thou Wisdom from on high, Who ord'rest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show And teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, O come, Thou Lord of might, Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the law In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem; From ev'ry foe deliver them
That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save, And give them victory o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

**O come, Desire of nations, bind All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease, And be Thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

Sermon: Christ is in our midst. **He is and ever shall be.**

Offertory: pp. 70-71

**C: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your free Spirit.
Amen.**

The Intercessions: *each petition concludes:* Lord, in Your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Hymn of Preparation: *94, O How Shall I Receive Thee, sts. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10*

**C: O how shall I receive Thee, How welcome Thee aright!
All nations long to greet Thee, My hope, my heart's delight!
O Jesus, Jesus, set Thee Thy lamp within my breast,
And by its guidance let me Know what doth please Thee best.**

**What hast Thou left ungranted To give me glad relief?
When soul and body panted In utmost depth of grief,
In deepest degradation, Devoid of joy and peace,
Then, Thou, my soul's Salvation, Didst come to bring release.**

**I lay in fetters groaning, Thou com'st to set me free;
I stood, my shame bemoaning, Thou com'st to honor me;**

**A glory Thou dost give me, A treasure safe on high,
That will not fail or leave me As earthly riches fly.**

**Naught, naught, dear Lord, could move Thee To live Thy rightful place
Save love, for which I love Thee; A love that could embrace
A world where sorrow dwelleth, Which sin and suff'ring fill,
More than the tongue e'er telleth; Yet Thou couldst love it still!**

**Rejoice, then, ye sad-hearted, Who sit in deepest gloom,
Who mourn o'er joys departed, And tremble at your doom;
Despair not, He is near you, Yea, standing at the door,
Who best can help and cheer you, And bid you weep no more.**

**Sin's debt, that fearful burden, Let not your souls distress;
Your guilt the Lord will pardeon And cover with His grace.
He comes, He comes procuring The peace of sin forgiv'n,
For all God's sons securing Their heritage in heav'n.**

**He comes to judge the nations, A terror to His foes,
A Light of consolations And blessed Hope to those
Who love the Lord's appearing. O glorious Sun, now come,
Send forth Thy beams so cheering, And guide us safely home!**

The Liturgy of the Holy Communion

The Preface: p. 72

P: The Lord be with you.

C: **And with your spirit.**

P: Lift up your hearts.

C: **We lift them up unto the Lord.**

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

C: **It is good and right so to do.**

Proper Preface & Sanctus

It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared, proclaiming Him the Messiah, the very Lamb of God, and calling sinners to repentance that they might escape from the wrath to be revealed when He comes

again in glory. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

**C: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heav'n and earth are full of Your glory.
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He, blessed is He, blessed is He
who come in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.**

The Lord's Prayer: pp. 77-78

P: Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed by Thy name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass
against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
† but deliver us from evil;

**C: For Thine is the kingdom and the pow'r and the glory forever and ever.
Amen.**

The Words of Institution: pp. 78-79

*When the Pastor turns and elevates the Host and Cup, the congregation **may** bow as an act of reverent worship toward the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.*

The Pax Domini (The Peace of the Lord): p. 79

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

The Agnus Dei: pp. 79-80

**C: O Christ, the Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world,
have mercy upon us.
O Christ, the Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world,
have mercy upon us.
O Christ, the Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world,
grant us Your peace. Amen.**

The Distribution of the Holy Communion

Prayers for “**Before Holy Communion**” and
for “**After Holy Communion**” are found on page 40 in ELH.

The Nunc Dimittis: pp. 81-82

**C: Lord, now You let Your servant depart in peace according to Your word.
For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the
face of all people, a Light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people
Israel.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.**

The Collect of Thanksgiving

P: O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good.

C: And His mercy endures forever.

P: O God the Father, the fountain and source of all goodness, who in lovingkindness sent Your only-begotten Son into the flesh, we thank You that for His sake You have given us pardon and peace in this Sacrament, and we ask You not to forsake Your children but always to rule our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may be enabled constantly to serve You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

The Salutation, Benedicamus & Benediction: p. 84

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And with your spirit.

P: Let us bless the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

P: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and † give you peace.

C: Amen. Amen. Amen.

Dismissal Hymn: *The Lutheran Hymnal 93, O Lord, We Welcome Thee (Tune: 63)*

**C: O Lord, we welcome Thee, Our hearts for joy are leaping,
Thou, Jesus, dearest Child, Thy precious promise keeping,
Art come from heav'n to earth To be our Brother dear;
Thou gracious Son of God, Wilt banish all our fear.**

The mighty Son of God, His majesty concealing,
Dwells with our fallen race To give us balm and healing.
The everlasting God Descends from realms above,
Becomes a winsome Child, Reveals His Father's love.

Ah, sweet and gentle name! Its echoes far are sounding,
It pierces hearts of stone And tells of love abounding.
O Jesus, dearest Child, On Thee will we rely,
And, calling on Thy name, We die not when we die.

To Thee alone we cling, For Thee all else forsaking;
On Thee alone we build Tho' heav'n and earth be quaking.
To Thee alone we live, In Thee alone we die;
O Jesus, dearest Lord, With Thee we reign on high.

Our Life Together

THE PASTOR IS AVAILABLE for private Confession & Absolution, and for confidential pastoral counseling, or just to chat. Please feel free to stop in. (The Augsburg Confession teaches that “[private] Confession is not abolished among us. ... Our people are taught that they should highly prize the Absolution as being God’s voice and pronounced by God’s command. ... They are reminded what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences. ... They are taught that faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.” Article 25)

Bible Studies: The Sunday Bible study is reading through Genesis with an emphasis on certain theological themes, most especially the Promise of the Savior and how God, through His people Israel, worked to keep that promise. The Thursday study will not meet this week. When we resume next week, we will be moving on in 2 Samuel.

Church Cleaning at Bethany
December 16-28
Rieses

Make Sure to Keep the Mass in Christmas! Remember that Christmas is above all a Church Service in celebration of God coming into our flesh in Jesus. It's in the name: Christ and Mass – Christmas. *Christmas Eve Vespers with Lessons & Hymns* is at 7:00pm. *Christmas Day* is the festival Divine Service (the “Christ Mass”) is at 11:00am. You are encouraged to truly celebrate Christmas by receiving the gifts of God-in-the-flesh in the

church, where He distributes them and returning thanks and praise! Plus, what a great opportunity to set a faithful example for others in your life, even invite your family and friends to come with you to worship the Christ-child!

Hope Giving Tree: Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Hope Giving Tree. If you took a tag, but have not returned the item, please do so ASAP so that Pastor can bring it over to Hope.

Food Collection for the Needy: The basket in the entryway awaits donations of non-perishable food items to donate to those in need. The holy days are a good time to respond to God's love for us in Christ by focusing on the needs of the less fortunate in material blessings. Please give what you are able!

Joint Service on Epiphany Sunday (Jan. 5): The Feast of Epiphany will be celebrated on Sunday, January 5 with a Joint Parish Service at Concordia in Hood River at 10:00am. Coffee and refreshments will be served after the Service.

Our 2025 Annual Voters Meeting is set for Sunday, January 19th. After the Divine Service there will be a potluck followed by the meeting. We only have two of these meetings each year, so please put this date on the calendar and make every effort to attend. At the annual meeting the officers are elected and the budget is approved for the year. Current officers, please plan a time to meet to form a budget to propose to the voters.

Sacred Music & Talk for the Christmas Season... You can listen 24/7 to sacred talk and music for the 12 days of Christmas at issuesetc.org, lutheranpublicradio.org, Spotify, Amazon Alexa, Google Home, TuneIn, Apple HomePod and the Lutheran Public Radio mobile app.

Advent 4: Whether the hamlet of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) or gestating babies (Luke 1:41-44), the God of Christmas loves to elevate what seems insignificant. Indeed, the heart of the Gospel consists in exalting those of humble estate (Luke 1:52). Rejoicing in the Lord who creates, redeems, and calls regardless of size, skills, or circumstances, the sanctity of life delights to declare nothing less!

Prayer: *Lamb of God, make it so that our taking hold of You leads us to cradle Your little ones as well. Amen.*

Life Thoughts in the Church Year/One Year Lectionary – Lutherans For Life

Feasts, Commemorations, and Events

Monday: Pastor at Bethany

Tuesday: EVE OF THE HOLY NATIVITY; Concordia Lessons & Carols, 5:00pm
Bethany Lessons & Carols, 7:00pm

Wednesday: FEAST OF THE HOLY NATIVITY; Concordia Holy Communion, 9:00am
Bethany Holy Communion, 11:00am

Thursday: FEAST OF ST. STEPHEN, PROTOMARTYR; Pastor off

Friday: FEAST OF ST. JOHN, APOSTLE; Pastor at Bethany

Saturday: FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS; Pastor's Day Off

Next Sunday: *The Sunday After the Nativity*

Concordia Office of Matins, 9:00am

Bethany Sunday School, 10:00am

Bethany Holy Communion, 11:00am

Bible Study for the Parish at Bethany, 12:45pm

O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee...Continued

Rejoice, then, ye sad-hearted, Who sit in deepest gloom,
Who mourn o'er joys departed, And tremble at your doom;
Despair not, He is near you, Yea, standing at the door,
Who best can help and cheer you, And bid you weep no more.

No care nor effort either Is needed day or night,
How ye may draw Him hither In your own strength and might.
He comes, He comes with gladness, Moved by His love alone,
To calm your fear and sadness, To Him they well are known.

Stanzas 6 & 7 of Gerhardt's Advent hymn may be considered too negative in tone for today's world. Yet, they are an accurate depiction of our earthly struggle. Gerhardt's own life was filled with the kind of suffering that was not at all uncommon in his day. He outlived his wife and four out of five of his children; he was run out of his pulpit by the authorities for refusing to compromise God's Word; besides living half his life right in the middle of the greatest European war in several centuries. Gerhardt's life was one lived in the daily reality of deprivation and death.

These are, of course, still the realities of mortal life, even in an affluent society with a higher standard of living and lower mortality rates. Sickness and death are always certainties. Certain realities of modern life may, in fact, contribute to a kind of pain and hardship, ugliness, loneliness and heartache that is much more pervasive in our culture than in Gerhardt's. Life may be easier for us materially, but that may be the only way in which life is easier for us.

Rightfully do we *tremble at our doom* with repentant hearts: *When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer* (Ps 32:3-4).

But we are taught to sing that Christ is near, standing at the door (Mt 7:7-12, John 10:1-9, Rm 10:8, Rev 3:7-8, 19-20). In love, our Lord, who knows His own, willingly comes to this world to share in our anguish and still our woes (Mt 11:25-30, Jn 10:27-28).

Sin's debt, that fearful burden, Let not your souls distress;
Your guilt the Lord will pardon And cover with His grace.
He comes, He comes procuring The peace of sin forgiv'n,
For all God's sons securing, Their heritage in heav'n.

Stanza 8 is a gem of pure Gospel proclamation: Christ's first coming was for the purpose of *procuring the peace of sin forgiv'n*. There is a debt that must be paid, but which is beyond our own ability to pay it (Mt 18:21-35). Our comfort is found in the grace of God who sends His own Son to pay our debt (Rm 3:20-28, 5:6-11, Gal 3:10-13, Eph 2:1-13).

This stanza is a confession of the *vicarious atonement* which is essential for our salvation. The word *vicarious* means "in our place." What Christ did in His Passion & Death upon the cross to atone for our sin He did *vicariously*. He did it "for us men and for our salvation." In Christ, we have the peace of the forgiveness of sins that is given to all God's sons: *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ... God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons* (Gal 3:26-27 & 4:4-5; see also Eph 2:14-18). *I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin* (Ps 32:5).

Why should the wicked move you? Heed not their craft and spite!

Your Savior who doth love you Will scatter all their might.
He comes, a King more glorious, And all His earthly foes
In vain His course victorious Endeavor to oppose.

Stanza 9 describes the ongoing battle as the foes rage around us (1 Pt 5:6-11, Rev 2:9-11). The earthly foes cannot overpower our glorious King, who once came in lowliness to Zion, but soon comes in glory to deliver us forever.

He comes to judge the nations, A terror to His foes,
A Light of consolations And blessed Hope to those
Who love the Lord's appearing. O glorious Sun, now come,
Send forth Thy beams so cheering, And guide us safely home!

Thus, in stanza 10 we sing of the Day of Judgment when Christ will be revealed to all who have opposed Him (Ps 2). For us He is the *Light of consolation* as we have been taught to confess by His own words and deeds (Jn 8:12, 9:1-12).

Gerhardt then returns our thoughts to stanza 1 as we sing of hope once more. The language of the *glorious Sun* reminds us that in creation there was light before the sun, but the Sun of Righteousness has risen with healing in His wings (Mal 4:2) so that we may be given a new home where: *There shall be no night there; they need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light* (Rev 22:5).

In this greatest of Advent hymns, Paul Gerhardt masterfully proclaims the incarnation of Christ and its consequences for all who believe – the forgiveness of sins and the peace with God that He won for mankind and the joyful hope of His second coming for all who receive His forgiveness and live in His life and peace.

The Nativity Scene is credited to St. Francis of Assisi, who set up one with live people and animals at Greccio, Italy, on Christmas Eve, 1223 A.D. Customarily, the Crèche is set up gradually through Advent in anticipation of Christmas. On Advent 1, the stable only is set up. The ox and ass are added on Advent 2, followed by Mary and Joseph and an empty crib on Advent 3. No new figures are added on Advent 4. On Christmas Eve, the angel, shepherds, and Christ-Child are added, with the three Wise Men placed across the Chancel, so that they appear to be coming “from afar.” They are then added on Epiphany.