



PICTURE OF A PROFOUND MYSTERY

ADVENT DEVOTIONS 2019
STEADFAST **LUTHERANS**.org

PICTURE OF A PROFOUND MYSTERY



www.steadfastlutherans.org/parish

“Picture of a Profound Mystery”

Advent Devotions

Written by: Rev. Marcus J. Baikie, Rev. John Preus,
Rev. Andrew Richard, and Rev. Joshua V. Scheer

Editor: Rev. Joshua V. Scheer

Art Director: Kris Brown

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“Lutheran Service Book” (“LSB”) is copyright © 2006
by Concordia Publishing House. www.cph.org

Digital images are provided courtesy of Pitts Theology Library,
Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Steadfast in the Parish is a free resource designed
by Steadfast Lutherans, Inc. for use within Lutheran churches.
Pastors are encouraged to share, download, print, and use these
publications within their congregations.

Printed copies of this resource is available for purchase.

Copyright © 2019 by Steadfast Lutherans, Inc.

www.steadfastlutherans.org

*For the
Evangelical Lutheran Church
wherever she may be found*

And for the Glory of God



Wedding of Mary and Joseph

Marriage is God's institution. It is His creation and His gift to creation. Holy Matrimony is an indissoluble and perpetual bond. Adam declared this at his awakening to find his wife presented to him by God Himself. Jesus says, "what God has joined together, let no man put asunder." Wedlock is of God – something He created even before the Fall into Sin. God has never changed His gift of marriage. It is still that same lifelong union of one man and one woman for the purpose of companionship, procreation, restraint of sin, and the beautiful picture of the mystery of Christ and His Church.

The world around us however hates God, and thus it hates the gifts of God. Indissoluble? The world presents no-fault divorce. Bond? The world presents not a union but a contract between two parties. Male and Female? The world denies nature itself and declares that even this is not necessary. Male? The world seeks to destroy the unique gift that is manhood present in being a husband. Female? The world seeks to destroy this unique gift of womanhood present in being a wife as well. Companionship? The world only sees this from selfish measures of having personal needs met and feeling fulfilled. Procreation? The world hates children as it hates life, redefining as curse what God plainly calls a blessing. Self-Control? The world rejoices in license and despises devotion and fidelity. Christ and His Church? No need to even comment on what the world thinks of that.

But you, dear Christians are not of the world anymore. God's gift of marriage, no matter how the world tries to defile it remains a gift from God for you as God's own child. God's gift of being placed into the office of husband or wife is a blessed thing. It's the home which God ordains, that wonderful estate from which both the Church and the State borrow much of their tasks and authority. The Christian marriage and with it the Christian home are established before Sin. They are thus also a part of Christ's redeeming work after Sin. Our Lord took on a family, a household when He came to be among us as God in the flesh, begotten of the Father and born of the Virgin.

There is a great need in the Christian Church to regularly be taught and reminded from God's Word about the blessed estate of marriage and the individual offices of husband and wife (and by extension father and mother). Obviously, those who are in this blessed estate will find immediate application of these devotions. Others who may be past this time of life or even those who have not yet been placed into this estate also have something to gain from this devotion. First, the devotion catechizes from God's Word over and against the prevailing perverted catechesis the world and culture are teaching every day. Second the devotion should motivate us to pray for the estate of marriage and the Christian home – in general among God's people and the world around us, but also in specific cases that we know ourselves – whether in our congregations or among our neighborhoods or in our extended families. Third, this devotion should help you to defend this sacred and holy institution of our God among the world. Fourth, this devotion should help you encourage your fellow Christians and others who struggle in this estate. The world has no doubt its many evangelists and apologists each clamoring for more Christian marriages to be destroyed. Let's stand as Christians and pull back couples from taking destructive and sinful actions. Let's care enough and love enough to speak hard words to our neighbor to urge them to stay and do their duty. This is a thing that God has joined together, and our Lord explicitly states that man should not tear it apart.

The title of these devotions is ultimately the blessing of any marriage devotional. Marriage is a picture of the profound mystery of Christ and His Church. Our authors have made efforts to make many connections to this mystery. As you live among marriage (whether in it or not) you will also no doubt ponder the profound mystery of Christ and His Church. And as Advent reminds us of the Lord's coming, we are reminded of the great wedding feast yet to come.

These devotions are bound to bring out sins. Past sins. Present sins. Sins of anger against God's Word. Sins committed against you. Sins you have committed against others and ultimately against God. That sacred and holy work of the Holy Spirit through the Word to bring you conviction of sin should not be left aside – but taken as the urging from the same spirit to go and seek out your pastor to hear God's Word of remedy for sin – the blessed absolution that accompanies faithful pastoral care of your souls. This devotion assumes that you are attending church services every chance you can do so – for any effort in marriage requires the work of God in you first. Any motivation to pray begins with first receiving from God what He gives in Divine Service. Any love for others, shown in word and deed, finds its root, motivation, ability, and power in the love we receive first from our Triune God.

Read these, learn from them, use them to pray, use them to confess, use them to encourage one another. Christ has so blessed us with the time to have such words for our instruction and admonishment. Use them to uphold and properly confess what a great gift of God that is among us in the estate of marriage. May God the Holy Spirit use them richly to bless you in your hearing.

Blessed Advent as you get this Picture of a Profound Mystery.

Rev. Joshua V. Scheer
Editor-in-Chief
Steadfast Lutherans



Triumphal Entry — Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey to the waving of palm branches.

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

“Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

Matthew 21:2-5

By considering marriage, we also consider the relationships God creates and protects within marriage. Marriage is a fitting theme for Advent since marriage is a biblical picture of the relationships God creates and protects within His Church. God joined Himself forever to our flesh and blood by choosing to make a woman His mother. He comes as a Husband to serve His Bride and all the children He begets within her, to whom He gives new birth by the same water and word that makes their mother, the Church, holy and beautiful in His sight. The God who reigns in heaven is our Brother who will come again to bring us to the home He has prepared. We consider these marriage-related themes in Advent.

If it seems forced to squeeze this particular Gospel lesson into this theme of marriage, it isn't. Marriage and humility go hand in hand. Jesus tells His disciples what He needs. What He needs He needs to serve the needs of those He loves. He rides into Jerusalem as the true father of the nation to lay down His life for his Bride and share His honor and victory with His children. The glory we find in marriage is not to be found where men serve themselves or where women show the world what they're worth. It is found in the humble service that husband and wife give to each other. As Christ submitted to His Head, so husbands submit to Christ and wives to their husbands. And so the whole Body benefits from our Lord's humility.

Lord Jesus, grant that by serving our spouses our children learn to praise You whose glory is revealed in lowliness. Amen.

MONDAY IN ADVENT 1

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it ...”

Genesis 1:27-28

When God made man, He said, “Let Us make ...” The Holy Trinity is personally involved in making man in His image – “in Our likeness.” God created man in His image. But just as the image of God is triune in Himself, so also it pleased God to make it triune in man. This means that both the male and the female reflect the image of God in His perfect creation – particularly in marriage. God made them in His image for the expressly and immediately stated purpose of having babies: “Be fruitful and multiply.” Thus, the image of God in man is most clearly seen in the relationship between husband, wife, and the children God creates through their one-flesh union. The Father commands the Son and the Son, (the Word) by whom all things are made, submits in holy love. So from this union of Father and Son proceeds the Holy Spirit who broods over their creation as the Lord and Giver of life. Likewise, in a properly ordered Christian marriage we see this very image reflected: The man is the head of his wife who submits to him in love, and proceeding from this serving and submitting love are children. The purpose of marriage is life. God gives life. God says that “[man] is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man” (1 Corinthians 11:7). Woman is not made less in the image of God by being the glory of her husband. It is *by being his glory* that she reflects the image she was made in just as it is *by leading and serving his wife* that man reflects the image *he* was made in. Children reflect the image of God when they honor their parents and hold God’s Word sacred. Christ’s submission to the Father is our glory and our children’s because it brings us back to God.

*On my heart imprint Thine image, blessed Jesus, King of Grace.
Amen.*

TUESDAY IN ADVENT 1

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” ... So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

Genesis 2:18, 21-23

It is not good for man to be alone. It's not *bad* for man to be alone; it just isn't *good*. God created man in His image. He created him to love as he loves. So God made him a fitting helper to love as He loves. God gave him a wife. And Adam named her. To name something is to have dominion over it. It is to be the lord (*dominus*) of that which you named. Adam was Eve's lord (cf. 1 Peter 3:6). He dearly loved her.

We Christians call Jesus Lord. We of all people should see lordship for what it is at its best and not for what it often becomes at its worst. To be owned and ruled is good—*if* the one who owns and rules is good. Jesus is good. He is our Lord. He rules us. God's Son assumed our flesh and blood in order to purchase us to be His own. As God formed Woman from Man's side to be his beloved bride, so from the wounded side of the second Adam flow the water and blood that gives us new birth in Holy Baptism, through which God creates His Church and presents her to His Son who is bone of our bone forever. He gives Jesus authority to subdue all things under the great Name He has given Him. As our Lord, Jesus gives His name to us. He rules us, His holy Bride, in His kingdom with the forgiveness of our sins.

Grant our marriages, Lord, to reflect and honor your love toward us, your beloved Church. Amen.

WEDNESDAY IN ADVENT 1

Blessed is he who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children's children! Peace be upon Israel!

Psalm 128

To eat the fruit of the labor of our hands is a blessing. Who will choose to forgo such a blessing? Eating the fruit of the labor of our hands is what makes it well with us. Children are a blessing. So why do so many Christians choose to forgo such blessings? Because children eat the fruit of the labor of our hands. How, then, will it be well with us?

But this is not the fear of the Lord. This is not His way. A man's wife is of greater value than his hands. He has his hands to serve her. The fruit of his *wife's* labor is more precious and enduring than the fruit of *his* labor. The fruit of *his* labor is mammon which is to serve the fruit of *her* labor, which are children. A man who views children as a burden not worth sacrificing mammon for is a man who does not fear the Lord. This is true whether he neglects his children or avoids having them. We do not forgo God's blessings when we invest in our children. We reap them. God invests in life and blesses the man who fears Him. He sends peace from Zion through the promise of the gospel which is for us and our children. He wants you not to obsess over your own prosperity, but to look with joy at Jerusalem's, that is, the Church's, your children's inheritance. You see it when you teach your children to know Jesus and to fill your home with the praises of faith.

Forgive us, Lord, and fill our hearts and homes with life. Amen.

THURSDAY IN ADVENT 1

“Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

Luke 1:13-17

Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11). He who is least is one who is prepared for the Lord. John prepared God’s people by humbling them unto repentance. He turned the hearts of the fathers to the children. In other words, he taught the wise and prudent to see what had been revealed to babes (Matthew 11:25)— to see that what God gives the simple is greater than what the arrogant can gain themselves. This is exactly what happened for Zechariah.

Turning the hearts of the fathers to the children means: First, that fathers must learn what great things their children possess. Their children possess the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:3). Children have what they have not because they have figured things out, but because God includes them in the promises He makes. Second, it means that fathers must teach their children what great things are already theirs. They must learn what God gives His children so that they can teach them as God’s children. When a father leads his family in devotions, reading Scripture and singing hymns, this is humility. He doesn’t give his wife and children what he has worked to gain or figured out, but what Christ has revealed and won.

Give humility to the heads of our homes, dear Father, that their hearts might be turned to the inheritance God prepares for His children. Amen.

FRIDAY IN ADVENT 1

And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.

Luke 1:59-64

Elizabeth was a good woman. Her name means, “*my God is an oath*.” God swears by himself. He remembers His mercy. He promises to save His people from their sins. He means what He says. John means, “*the LORD is gracious*.” The Lord was gracious to Elizabeth to give her a child. More so, the Lord was gracious to raise up a prophet to prepare His way. The first man he prepared was Zechariah, whom Gabriel silenced for having doubted God’s word. Now, imagine how this happened. Her husband comes out from the temple where he had been burning incense unable to speak. He would have had to write down for his wife what God said the child’s name was. He comes out punished by God, stricken dumb, humiliated. And what does he write down? *The LORD is gracious*. Elizabeth believes. Her excitement to have a baby is mingled with her hope as a Christian mother that God is gracious to sinners.

Her honor was in her husband. She did not name her son. He did. Zechariah means, “*the LORD remembers*.” Elizabeth remembered too. When she was pressured to follow custom by her friends and neighbors, she heeded her husband’s word: “No; he shall be called John.” They asked her husband, her lord. God gives him back the ability to speak when he writes as he did before: “His name is John.” He had a godly wife. She contended for the truth he had taught her when he couldn’t do so himself. He confirmed her word because she was right. Her God made an oath. She honored her husband by trusting in God’s word.

Lord God, remember the oath You have sworn to our fathers and bless our mothers for teaching us Your grace. Amen.

SATURDAY IN ADVENT 1

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Romans 13:11-14

Marriage is despised. Even many Christians hold marriage in low esteem. Lord, have mercy! And we see what devastation it causes. Children are raised without fathers either because they are negligent in instruction or just absent. Mothers are driven either by sad necessity or by unwholesome priority to invest themselves in the marketplace instead of personally investing in the fruit of their marriage. Even when these things cannot be helped, we are dealing with something bad, a culture that disorders God's creation and undermines the stability of the Christian home. We're dealing with sin. We must own it. Tomorrow, we gather to hear the gospel. But the Day of the Lord is coming just as quickly. Husbands and wives, parents whose children are married or will be: know the works of darkness, so that you may put them off and help others do so too. Learn what makes for a godly marriage and see how it is threatened. Stick with this devotion. Your salvation is so near. And the world is so evil. It is within our marriages—our homes—that God will preserve what is still most precious among us. That is why the works of darkness the Apostle mentions are sins that attack marriage and the home. Trace how these very sins have crept into your life. Only in humility and repentance does God invite us to put on the armor of light. So we awake from sleep. Salvation is here. The Bridegroom is on His way and serves you even now.

Jesus our Light, join our marriages and abide in our homes that we might walk in Your eternal day now and forever. Amen.



End Times — Jesus teaches his disciples about the approaching end of the age, while the events themselves occur in the background.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

[Jesus said,] “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Luke 21:34-36

The season of Advent is a preparation for the coming of the Lord. Normally we think of Advent as preparation for Jesus’ birth, but today’s Gospel reminds us that, even as we are looking ahead to Christmas, we are always to be looking ahead to Jesus’ coming again on the Last Day.

Some think that preparation for the Last Day means forsaking all everyday roles and responsibilities. After all, what’s the point of having a job, a home, or even a family if it’s all going to end in a short time anyway? Some even go so far as to leave their wives and children to be more prepared for the end.

Our Lutheran Confessions explicitly reject this sort of preparation for the Last Day: “Also condemned are those who teach that Christian perfection requires the forsaking of house and home, wife and child, and the renunciation of such activities as are mentioned above [e.g., serving in civil offices, possessing property, etc.]. Actually, true perfection consists alone of proper fear of God and real faith in God.” (Augsburg Confession V:4)

We should always look ahead to Christ’s return on the Last Day, and that should affect how we live day to day now. That doesn’t mean withdrawing from the world. Instead it means living not in selfish and sinful pursuit of pleasure but in faith toward God and in love toward our neighbors, particularly in the home. For by faith we know that when Jesus comes again in glory, we will “straighten up and raise [our] heads, because [our] Redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28)

O God, grant us faith to live in love and service toward our neighbors in those places to which You have called us. Amen.

MONDAY IN ADVENT 2

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Ephesians 5:25-28

Everyone seems to cringe when the first part of the Apostle Paul's great passage on marriage is read: "Wives, submit to your own husbands." Yet consider how great the task of a husband is toward his wife. He is called to love her as Christ loved the Church. That in itself may not sound too difficult but consider what kind of love is expected: "Christ...gave himself up for her." This love is not necessarily a matter of emotion but action, namely sacrifice. While this may include dying in order that your wife may live, more often it means setting aside all your own needs and wants for those of your wife.

What a difficult task for a sinner—to perform toward another sinner no less! And indeed, there will be times when husbands must love and give themselves for wives who does not want or appreciate their efforts (just as there are times when wives must submit to husbands who are less than Christ-like). Nevertheless, husbands are called to love their wives "as Christ loved the church," that is, as He has loved us all. He gave himself for us; He sanctified us. By His sacrifice the Christian husband has not only been reconciled to God but also filled with the love with which God calls him to love his wife. Christ shows His love for us, in that, while we were still sinners, he died for us. By the love that God supplies, may the love of husbands for their wives reflect Christ's love for us all.

Dear Jesus, give Your strength to all Christian husbands, that they may love their wives as You have loved us. Amen.

TUESDAY IN ADVENT 2

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph was a righteous man. This is evident in that he does not condone the sin of adultery, as he thought Mary had committed. Yet all the more, it is evident in his mercy toward her. He resolved to divorce her quietly, rather than seeking for her public punishment. But above all, it is evident in that he did what the Lord commanded. By faith Joseph took Mary as his wife and named her Son Jesus. Like his father Abraham long before him, Joseph believed the Lord and it was counted to him as righteousness.

May righteous Joseph serve as an example to all Christian husbands. May they acknowledge the Law of God as good and wise, not affirming but rebuking sin. May they show the mercy of God toward their wives and children, forgiving even as they have been forgiven. And may they live by faith in God, who gave His Son Jesus to save us from our sins.

Lord God, grant us true righteousness like Joseph, which does not come from our works but through faith alone. Amen.

WEDNESDAY IN ADVENT 2

Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep. Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

Psalm 127:1-5

While there are indeed some who view marriage and children as burdensome and unnecessary, for the most part, the world recognizes marriage and children to be good things, things that bring happiness to one's life. Unbelievers still throw baby showers and attend wedding receptions too.

However, the marriages and families of unbelievers are "in vain," that is, they have no permanence. What good is it to build a house, to watch over a city, to work hard and to eat the fruits of your labor when it is all swept away in the moment of death? No wonder there is increasing rejection of these very things!

Yes, all of this is vanity, writes Solomon, unless the Lord is behind it all. But when the Lord builds the house and watches over the city, children are a heritage and reward from the Lord, and the man who has them is blessed and not put to shame. There is no vanity when it comes to the Christian home, for the home in which the housefather leads his wife and children in prayer and the hearing of God's Word never is swept away. Even when the rain falls and the floods come and the winds blow and beat on it, it does not fall, for it is built by the Lord on the Rock Jesus Christ. And by faith alone, members of the Christian household are fellow heirs of an unfading inheritance: eternal life.

Lord Jesus Christ, may our homes be built securely on You as we hear Your Word and call upon You in prayer. Amen.

THURSDAY IN ADVENT 2

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.

Proverbs 5:15-23

In the first place, [God] has instituted [marriage] before all others. He created man and woman separately, as is clear. This was not for lewdness, but so that they might live together in marriage, be fruitful, bear children, and nourish and train them to honor God. Therefore, God has also most richly blessed this estate above all others.” (Large Catechism I:207-208)

The world, along with the devil and the sinful flesh, are constantly tempting the Christian away from the blessings of marriage to lewdness. They peddle the lie that a man can enjoy the intoxicating love of a woman who is not his wife without harm. But “in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol.” (Proverbs 5:4-5)

Instead, Christian husbands are called to delight in their wives. God did not intend for marriage to be curse, devoid of any happiness; He gives it as a blessing, an estate to be filled with joy. The man who sees his wife as God's gift to him thus will be satisfied, even intoxicated by her love, and God is well-pleased with their union.

O God, You have given us the gift of marriage. Help all husbands and wives to be faithful to each other, as You will. Amen.

FRIDAY IN ADVENT 2

“Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer.

Isaiah 54:4-8

The image of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church did not begin in the New Testament. Instead God declares Himself to be the Husband of Israel throughout the Old Testament. Yet Israel time and time again proved herself to be an unfaithful bride: “Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 3:20)

Israel’s unfaithfulness never negated God’s faithfulness. Though Israel committed adultery against God by chasing after idols, God loved her with an everlasting love; therefore, He continued His faithfulness to her. He pursued Israel and brought her back to Himself by bearing her griefs and carrying her sorrows, by being wounded for her transgressions and crushed for her iniquities. Through the suffering of the Son of God, Israel would no longer be ashamed or confounded or disgraced. Indeed, it was for this very purpose that Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth and was born of the Virgin Mary.

Christ, the faithful Bridegroom, has won this salvation for all: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. By His death we are presented to Him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and without blemish.

Praise to You, O Christ, for You have had compassion on us poor sinners with Your everlasting love. Amen.

SATURDAY IN ADVENT 2

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Ruth 4:13-17

In the beginning God instituted the estate of marriage. And to the man and the woman God spoke this blessing: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28a)

If this weren’t honor enough, God later promised the salvation of mankind through the bearing of children: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:16) Thus generation after generation, men and women had sons, through whom God kept His promise. At times, this was done outside of God’s intended estate of marriage (David and Bathsheba, for example), but ordinarily a man left his father and mother and held fast to his wife, and God blessed them with a son, through whom the line of the Messiah would continue, as with Boaz and Ruth.

But in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, who was conceived not in the union of man and wife but when the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary. The woman’s Offspring, Jesus, came to destroy the works of the devil. Through faith alone in Christ alone, we have become children of God, born not of blood nor of the will of men but of God.

O God, grant us faith to cling to your promise, which is fulfilled in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



Jesus Reveals the Father — Jesus reveals the presence of God the Father to the disciples in the form of a dove.

THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

“Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

Matthew 11:6

Today Jesus pronounces His blessing on those who are not offended by Him, or literally, those who are not *scandalized* by Him. What does it mean to be scandalized? To be scandalized is to be horror struck that someone has not lived up to expectation and then to lose all faith in that person. In short, to be scandalized is to fall away from someone. Certain people were expecting the Christ to have an unknown or impressive origin, and those in His hometown were scandalized because they knew Jesus' humble family (Matthew 13:57). Some were expecting Jesus to do signs on demand, some were expecting Him to agree with the teaching of the Pharisees, some were expecting Him to set up an earthly kingdom. They were all scandalized at Jesus.

Even now, many people expect Jesus to talk in the approved language of our day: Jesus must not only say that men and women are equal, but that men and women are equivalent and interchangeable. If Jesus says anything that even kind of hints at gender roles, then people get scandalized and fall away from Him.

But we must remember that there are two things that cause scandal. The first is when someone does not live up to proper expectation. The other is when we simply have a false expectation, and someone acts and speaks rightly regardless of what we delusionally expect. What Jesus said during this past week's Scripture readings about husbands would scandalize the world. What Jesus is saying in this week's Scripture readings about wives will scandalize the world even more.

Yet Jesus continues to pronounce His benediction: “Blessed is the one who is not scandalized by me.” Why is that person blessed? Because Jesus always does and speaks what's right, and they are blessed who take Jesus and His Word as they stand.

Dear Jesus, grant us always to love Your Word, and let us never take offense at You. Amen.

MONDAY IN ADVENT 3

“Let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.”

1 Peter 3:4-6

The duty of a wife is to submit to her husband. Submission to someone else has taken on many negative connotations. When we think of submission according to our sinful flesh, we think of being oppressed, losing our power or identity, suffering as a slave under a tyrant. In our day the world praises the “independent woman,” that is, the woman who doesn’t submit to her husband and who doesn’t need him. When the Church talks about wives submitting to their husbands as if this is a good thing, the world thinks we’re misogynistic, Greek for “woman-hating.”

But we must speak as Christ speaks, knowing that His Word is true and our flesh is wrong. It is a good thing when a wife submits to her husband—good not only for him, but even more for her. How can that be? This only makes sense when we consider the archetypal marriage of Christ and His Church.

The Church submits to Christ, that is, she takes her place under Him in God’s order. What happens to her when she’s under Christ? She receives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation from her Bridegroom. Christ showers His blessings down upon her, because He loves her. What would happen to her if she tried to be an “independent woman”? She would remove herself from under Christ and give up the place of receiving His grace and gifts. She would be stuck in her sins, lost in the world, destined for hell.

Since submitting to Christ is good for the Church, then it follows that it is good for wives to submit to their husbands. Tomorrow we’ll look at exactly what that means.

Lord Jesus Christ, give to all wives a gentle and quiet spirit, and order the households of Your Church in peace. Amen.

TUESDAY IN ADVENT 3

“And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’”

Luke 1:38

Yesterday we took up the topic of wives submitting to their husbands. We saw that such submission is good. It means that the wife takes her place under her husband, according to God’s order. And *she’s* the one who benefits most greatly from this, as we see when we look at the marriage of Christ and His Church. The Church is under Christ, and she despises it as little as the desert despises being under a raincloud or the deer despises being under the shade of a tree.

But what exactly does it mean to submit to one’s husband? This actually has less to do with *doing* the right things than it has to do with *believing* the right things. The Church believes, “My Bridegroom is the greatest Man in the universe. He is worthy of all honor and respect. He has given me many and good things. He is my life. Without Him I would be lost forever.” This belief leads to the “gentle and quiet spirit” that St. Peter mentioned yesterday. This belief leads to calling the Bridegroom “Lord,” showing Him all deference, honor, and respect, and finding peace and security in Him.

Because earthly husbands stand in the office of Husband that ultimately belongs to Christ, Christian wives act toward their husbands according to their beliefs about Christ. The earthly husband might not be the greatest man in the universe, or worthy of honor, or the life and salvation of his bride. But Christ is all these things, and the Christian wife regards her earthly husband with all honor for the sake of Christ’s office of Husband. Because she sees her husband standing in the stead of Christ, she can be glad at Christ’s Word to submit to her husband, and respond to that Word with the words of Mary: “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

Heavenly Father, grant wives to see their husbands standing in the stead of Christ in the office of Husband, and grant husbands to love their wives in this office. Amen.

WEDNESDAY IN ADVENT 3

**“Hear, O daughter, and consider, and incline your ear: forget your people and your father’s house, and the king will desire your beauty.”
Psalm 45:10-11**

The bride of Christ is like Abraham: she has forgotten her people and her father’s house. “Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods” (Joshua 24:2). But then the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). The Lord gave Abram a new name: “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham” (Genesis 17:5). And the Lord gave Himself to Abraham as his God in place of his former gods, saying, “I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Genesis 17:7).

Christ has given His name to His bride, the Church. Formerly she worshiped other gods and was called other things, as St. Paul writes, “Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you *were* washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Such were some of you. But you aren’t called those things anymore. You have been washed and sanctified and justified in a different name: the name of Jesus.

This is why, at the end of the wedding ceremony, the groom and bride are pronounced “Mr. and Mrs. [Groom’s Name].” It’s because the bride of Christ has a new name in Him. She has been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Every time a Christian wife is called “Mrs. [Groom’s Name],” it is a beautiful reminder of the Gospel.

Lord Jesus, make us see in marriage a picture of the Gospel and remember the great name You have given us in Baptism. Amen.

THURSDAY IN ADVENT 3

“The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.”

Genesis 3:20

Today is the commemoration of Adam and Eve, and this gives us opportunity to reflect on the unique gift that God has given to wives. In the Garden of Eden, before the fall of man into sin, Adam gave names to all the animals. These were general names, like dog and horse, not personal names like Fido and Black Beauty. Before the fall, Adam also gave his wife a general name: “she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23).

But after man ate from the tree of which God had commanded him not to eat, and after the Lord had given the promise of a Savior from sin and a Conqueror of the devil (Genesis 3:15), only then did Adam give his wife a personal name. Adam named his wife Eve, which is related to the Hebrew word for “life.” He called her Eve because she was the mother of all living. Specifically, through Eve the Savior would come. God had said that the seed of the woman would bruise the devil’s head, and Adam named his wife accordingly.

To this day, life comes from woman. When a wife becomes pregnant, she participates in something through which our Life entered the world. The “independent woman” seeks to prevent pregnancy at all costs. The Christian wife delights in pregnancy because she remembers that this was the very means through which Christ chose to enter the world and come to us. Christ honored the pregnancy of woman, and thus we honor it as well.

Heavenly Father, continue to give children to the families of Your Church. Give wives delight in the gift of pregnancy that You have given them and make husbands to show honor to their wives as the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7), especially when that vessel is with child; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY IN ADVENT 3

“Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.”

1 Peter 3:6

Today's reading is a continuation of Monday's. This verse highlights something fascinating about submitting to one's husband, and it has to do with fear. The world fears having to be under someone. The world fears losing autonomy. The world thinks the only life free of fear is the life on top, the life in which everything else is under us. So the world seeks to become God, and in so doing becomes afraid of nearly everything. Refusing to receive daily bread from God, the world fears for daily bread. Refusing exaltation in Christ, the world fears for its name and reputation. Refusing Jesus as a refuge, the world fears for its security. So much for the world.

But the Apostle Peter writes that women who are the children of Sarah, who submitted to her husband, “do not fear anything that is frightening.” Contrary to the assumptions of the world (and the inclinations of the flesh), a wife loses rather than gains fear as she submits to her husband.

This again makes sense when we consider Christ and the Church. When the Church has Christ as her head, what does she have to worry about? He is responsible for her and cares for her. He is not over her as a dictator, but as a shelter and shield from harm. He protects her, gives her everything she needs, sees to the devil and the world, and grants her the great gifts of his Word and Sacraments. Being under such a Lord, fear disappears. Under Christ, what is there to be afraid of? Nothing!

When the Christian wife recognizes by faith that her earthly husband stands in Christ's office of Husband, she has the peace of Christ in submitting to her husband and her fears disappear. Again, the character of the husband has little to do with this, and Christ's office of Husband has everything to do with it. The wife sees Christ through her husband, and wherever a Christian is under Christ, all fear disappears.

*Jesus, give us peace and let us not fear anything that is frightening.
Amen.*

SATURDAY IN ADVENT 3

“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’”

Matthew 25:6

We now arrive within four days of celebrating the coming of our Lord at Christmas. In the parable of the Ten Virgins, Jesus describes our anticipation for His coming as the anticipation of a bride for her bridegroom. A wife can identify very intimately with this anticipation. She knows what it's like to await the arrival of her husband. Any moment the door might open and there he'll be! When the husband comes home to his wife, suddenly everything seems right in the world. The cares of her day melt and every problem finds its answer in him.

Not that this happens every time a husband comes to his wife. Our Lord reminds us that the peace and delight of a husband's arrival won't be perfect until the Last Day. Nevertheless, our Lord gives us a foretaste of the delight of His coming with the reuniting of husband and wife. How gracious our Lord is in letting us poor mortals who are but dust have among each other things that properly belong to Him! We are unworthy of such joy when husband and wife reunite, yet of His great mercy Jesus has given us in this a glimpse of the joy we will have when He comes. Of this we sing:

Zion hears the watchmen singing,
And all her heart with joy is springing;
She wakes, she rises from her gloom.
For her Lord comes down all glorious,
The strong in grace, in truth victorious;
Her star is ris'n, her light is come.

(LSB 516:2, “Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying”)

Lord Jesus, come to us and turn our sorrow into joy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Witness of John the Baptist — John the Baptist preaches a message of repentance.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

And 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.” So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

John 1:19-23

The Jews had sent an investigation to find out what John was doing. Who was he? He answered by first affirming that he was not Christ, not Elijah, and not the Prophet. He then announces himself to be the forerunner. Christ later says that John was Elijah. John is not about John. The devotion to his task as forerunner wants all attention to be placed onto the One who comes after him, who was before him – Jesus. So also this devotion has repeatedly called out what marriage is and what it means for husbands and wives. These blessed gifts from God are not meant to be used selfishly, but selflessly. They are wonderful gifts which point to the glory of Christ, who instituted marriage, who blessed it, and who upholds it, all the while being the fulfillment of this profound mystery with His Church.

As you hear John’s words today, remind yourself of your sacred calling to be where God has placed you in the household. Remind yourself, that the places you are put by God are places in which you are to serve others. John let Jesus determine who he was (Elijah). Christ, by placing you where He has determines who you are. It is your identity – established and given by Christ so that in the end your conduct in those places would glorify Him in repentant and faithful living.

Lord Jesus, as You sent John to go before Your way, so also bless marriages to be sacred pictures of You and the Church. Grant repentance and faith to all people. Amen.

MONDAY IN ADVENT 4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7

Yesterday's Epistle lesson is a great help to us in relation to God's gift of marriage and how it is treated out there in the world around us. That last sentence about the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding is a wonderful reminder of what Jesus, the Bridegroom, has done for His bride, the Church. Peace of God. God's peace. How does that come to us? By the blood of Jesus who atoned for the sin of the whole world. That blood has bought peace with God and brings the peace of God. Your sins, even in the course of marriage or in relation to marriage – these sins were covered in blood – holy, precious blood. The Church has peace with God because the Bridegroom Christ gave Himself up for her.

St. Paul says something more about the peace of God. He says that it guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Why would your heart and mind need guarding? Just read the latest headlines to find out all that is around us. On top of this there is the constant onslaught of false teaching coming from the media that surrounds us. The peace of God guards our hearts and minds. It sets up a boundary against the onslaught of the world. It helps keep you in Christ Jesus. For you in His Church, and He as the perfect husband will not cease defending and keeping His bride. This is cause for great rejoicing and also brings confidence to pray to God.

Dear Jesus, thank You for making peace by Your sacrifice. Help us to always trust in the peace of God, to rejoice always, to pray for everything, and to be guarded in heart and mind by You. Amen.



Marriage — A minister marries a groom and his bride.



Mary and Joseph — Mary tells Joseph that she is pregnant from the Holy Spirit.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD – CHRISTMAS EVE

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

Joseph has faith and his works show that faith. He receives the Word of God from the angel of the Lord about Mary and the son in her womb – the Son of God. This Jesus will save His people from their sins. This is what St. Paul says when he refers to Christ as the husband to the Church – Jesus will give Himself up for the Church that He would sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Jesus saves His Church from her sins.

Lord Jesus, as You were born to save us, help us to see Your work for our sake and that of the whole Church. Amen.

Remember that tomorrow is Christmas Day, the day set aside each year for a church service on the feast of the nativity of Christ. Christmas is a shortened form of “Christ Mass”. Mass is the older term used for what we Lutherans now call “Divine Service”. The day is meant to be one on which Christians gather to hear the good news of great joy. All of our feasting and celebrating that day is meant to flow out from first receiving from God.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD – CHRISTMAS DAY

As you read the text for today pause to ponder how the roles of husband, wife, and marriage are all a part of the Nativity of our Lord. Christ the Lord is born for you. Here the Bridegroom steps into His own creation in humiliation in order to do the work required to present His bride to Himself in holiness and splendor.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:1-20



Shepherds Visit — The shepherds visit the baby Jesus in Bethlehem (front) after learning of his birth from the angel (rear).

HE WHOM THE SEA
AND WIND OBEY
DOTH COME TO SERVE THE SINNER
IN GREAT MEEKNESS.
THOU, GOD'S OWN SON,
WITH US ART ONE,
DOST JOIN US AND OUR CHILDREN
IN OUR WEAKNESS.

LSB 372:2



www.steadfastlutherans.org/parish