

St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)
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December 13, 2023

Midweek of Advent 2

*The order of worship is based upon **Evening Prayer**, from Hymnal Supplement 98 (CPH, 1998)*

Service of Light

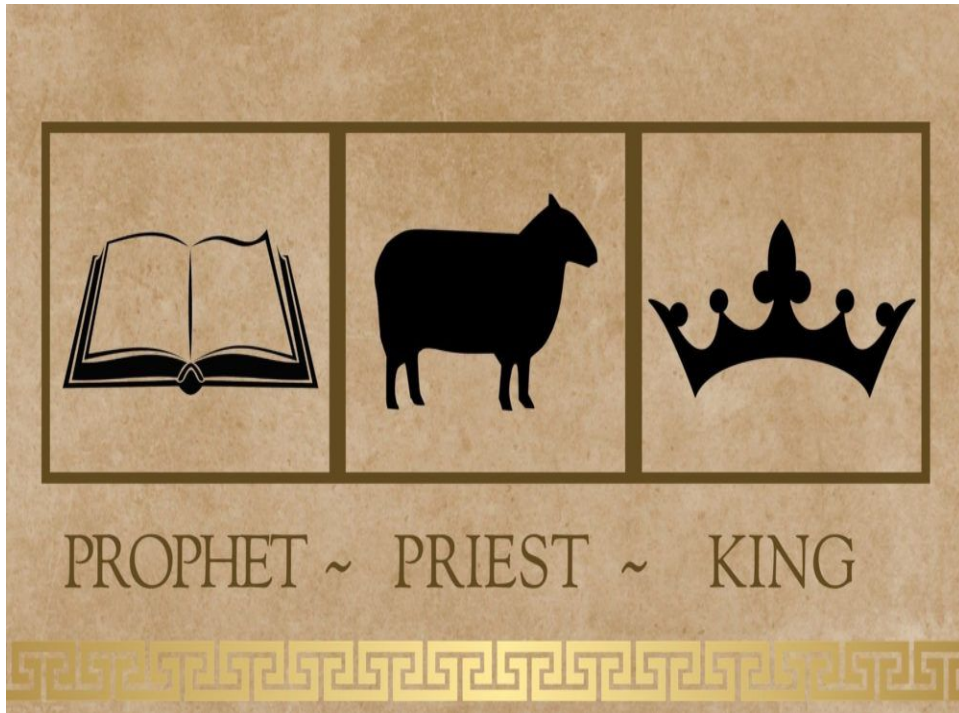
- P** The Spirit and the Church cry out:
- C** **Come Lord Jesus.**
- P** All those who await His appearance pray:
- C** **Come Lord Jesus.**
- P** The whole creation pleads:
- C** **Come Lord Jesus.**

Hymn of Light 890 O Blessed Light, O Trinity

- P** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
- C** **It is right to give Him thanks and praise.**
- P** Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who led Your people Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Enlighten our darkness by the light of Your Christ; may His Word be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path; for You are merciful, and You love Your whole creation and we, Your creatures, glorify You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- C** **Amen.**

Psalm 126

- ¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
- ²**Then our mouth was filled with laughter,**
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”
- ³The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.
- ⁴**Restore our fortunes, O LORD,**
like streams in the Negeb!
- ⁵Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!
- ⁶**He who goes out weeping,**
bearing the seed for sowing,



ADVENT MID-WEEK SERVICE II
2023

shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.
Amen.

Readings

Old Testament: Psalm 110:1, 4

¹ The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool”... ⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Epistle: Hebrews 7:11-28

¹¹ Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? ¹² For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. ¹³ For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.

¹⁵ This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become a priest, not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent, but by the power of an indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is witnessed of him,

“You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”

¹⁸ For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness ¹⁹ (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God.

²⁰ And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, ²¹ but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him:

“The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind,
‘You are a priest forever.’ ”

²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.

²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were

prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

P This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

P In many and various ways God spoke to His people of old by the prophets.

C But now in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.

Litany

P In peace let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For all pastors in Christ, for all servants of the Church, and for all the people, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For our public servants, for the government and those who protect us, that they may be upheld and strengthened in every good deed, let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who work to bring peace, justice, health, and protection in this and every place let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For those who bring offerings, those who do good works in this congregation, those who toil, those who sing, and all the people here present who await from the Lord great and abundant mercy let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For favorable weather, for an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and for peaceful times let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For our deliverance from all affliction, wrath, danger, and need let us pray to the Lord.

C Lord, have mercy.

P For the faithful who have gone before us and are with Christ let us give thanks to the Lord.

C Alleluia.

P Help, save, comfort, and defend us gracious Lord.

Silence for meditation.

P Rejoicing in the fellowship of all the saints, let us commend ourselves, one another, and our whole life to Christ, our Lord.

C To You, O Lord.

P O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments; and also that we, being defended from our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, God forever.

C Amen.

P Lord, remember us in Your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

C Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be 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. For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

P Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Presentation of the Offering

Office Hymn 351 Creator of the Stars of Night

Sermon

Prayer

P Jesus Christ, King of glory, who in great lowliness came to earth to bear our sins, to suffer our hell, and die our death, we thank You for Your promise to come again—not as the Bearer of our sins, but as our Deliverer to take us to heaven, our fatherland. Help us look with longing to that day of power when we will see You face to face, and look upon Your glory. May the promise of Your coming drive sorrow from our hearts and fill us with abiding joy.

Lord, grant that when we stand before Your throne on the Last Day, we will all joyfully hear Your invitation to inherit the kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Keep us from backsliding lest we lose our hold on eternal life. Grant us a rich measure of the Holy Spirit and His grace. May He keep us from putting our trust in any but You to save us. May He keep us from becoming indifferent toward Your Word and Sacraments. May He keep our souls filled with faith and the hope of heaven that we remain watchful for Your sudden reappearing. Through the Spirit empower us to demonstrate with wholesome and honorable Christian lives that we truly are God's children by faith in You as our Lord and Savior. Grant those whose faith has been slothful and sluggish repentant readiness. Chasten and discipline those who have fallen into sin before they drive the Spirit from them.

Forgive all unbelief and doubt that still clings to us and every failure to fully live a godly life for our sinful flesh has no good in it. Forgive us for neglecting the blessed privilege of prayer that You have honored us with. Restore the joy of salvation to us through the pardon You so graciously bestow and through the confidence You give us that, through repentance and faith, we are heirs of the Kingdom of Glory.

O everlasting Lord, our hearts' desire is that all people may share the wondrous privilege of knowing You by faith as You are revealed in Your Word. To this end, fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that we become more diligent and skillful in bearing witness to the salvation You have won for the world by Your life, death, and resurrection. Let not the word of our testimony return to You empty, but use it to work Christian conversions so that people are rightly prepared for the great Day of Your return. Hear us, our precious and only Redeemer.

C Amen.

P Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

Blessing

P The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the ✠ Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C Amen.

Closing Hymn 878 Abide with Me

Silent Prayer

Second Advent Midweek
December 13, 2023
Texts: Psalm 110:1, 4; Hebrews 7:11-28

“The Priestly Office of Christ”

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father who has given us His Incarnate Son as Priest and Sacrifice, even our Lord Jesus Christ.

The office of Christ/Messiah (Anointed One) has traditionally been distinguished as a threefold office, that of Prophet, Priest, and King, so for our Advent series we are focusing on each of these in turn. So for our meditation tonight, we will consider our Lord’s Priestly Office.

The Bible refers to Jesus as a priest numerous times. In addition to what we heard in our readings, Scripture also calls Jesus “a merciful and faithful high priest,”ⁱ “the high priest of the good things that have come,”ⁱⁱ “the apostle and high priest of our confession,”ⁱⁱⁱ and the “great priest over the house of God”^{iv}. But what does the priestly office of Christ consist of? To answer that question, we first must consider the duties of an OT priest.^v

It was the role of a priest to act as a go-between between God and the Israelites. Only the Levitical priests were allowed to enter and carry out the required ministrations and offer the proper sacrifices on behalf of the people within the tabernacle/temple and only the *high* priest could enter the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. The whole ceremonial system laid before the people the fundamental truth that they could not approach the Holy God on their own for they were unholy by nature as revealed by the Law. It revealed that they needed another to stand in their place (the priest), and that they needed the shedding of another’s blood *if their own blood* was not to be required of them due to their sins, if they were to be forgiven, be declared holy, and so be able to receive God’s blessings.

Yet, two things gave evidence that this system was imperfect. First, the priests, even the high priest, needed to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well, so they really were not capable of being the intermediary needed, but could only foreshadow Him. Second, the fact that the same sacrifices needed to be made day after day, year after year, indicated that even the sacrifices themselves were only valuable because of what the sacrifice they pointed forward to. And so already King David prophesied of His Lord, the Messiah, “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind, ‘You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.’”^{vi} And based upon this prophecy the author of the letter to the Hebrews insightfully asks,

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood...what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?^{vii}

Who is this Melchizedek? He is a mystery to many Christians, but don’t feel bad because he’s meant to be! We are told that he was both the king of Salem (later called Jerusalem) and priest of God Most High.^{viii} But nothing is revealed of either predecessors or successors. As such, he is unique and so is the perfect type, picture, of Christ Jesus as the true High Priest.

For Jesus is in a class all by Himself. As Melchizedek's origin is unknown, so Christ, with respect to His deity, originates in the mystery of eternity. As Melchizedek's successors are not named, so Jesus neither has, nor needs, any successors. First, because He is risen to never die again, as we heard from Hebrews, "The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but [Jesus] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever."^{ix} Second, because the cycle of ongoing sacrifice has come to an end by *the* sacrifice offered by this great High Priest of the new covenant. Again, from Hebrews,

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true from of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins...And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single sacrifice he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.^x

And that single sacrifice He offered as our High Priest, is nothing other than His own Self.

[John the Baptist,] "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"^{xi}

[St. Paul,] For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.^{xii}

[St. Peter,] knowing that you were ransomed...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb, without blemish or spot.^{xiii}

[And so heaven rejoices in praise saying,] "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!"^{xiv}

So Jesus is our High Priest in life and death. Just as the sacrificial animals were to be without spot or blemish, so Jesus was without the blemish of sin. Without original sin, because He was not conceived in the natural way by a sinful man, but instead by the Holy Spirit's miracle in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Also without actual sin. Certainly by "not sinning," but also by His constant, willful, faithful obedience to His Father's will, both as a man in general, following the Law of God, and in His office of Christ specifically. And this was for us, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."^{xv}

As Protestants, we find it easy to focus on the Prophetic Office of Christ as it deals with the preaching and teaching of God's Word, which we are all about! So also the Kingly Office of Christ is one that we uphold and readily proclaim. But likely due to the abuses of the clerical office, "priests," under the papacy, historically we have faced the temptation to downplay His priestly office. But while recognizing that the Office of Christ consists of prophetic, priestly, and

kingly duties, all of which are necessary, honestly the priestly office *is the most critical of the three, the one that is the center of the Gospel of God's grace and favor towards sinners.*

For as the Prophet Christ Jesus certainly proclaims the Gospel of grace, but so also the Law and God's wrath. Again, as the King Christ Jesus rules in grace to protect His people, a gracious Gospel truth, but clearly as King He is to be obeyed, the Law. Now the Law is good! It is God's holy will. But it would ever and only condemn us if Christ Jesus was not our Priest!

Jesus offers Himself, as the hymn says, "Himself the victim and Himself the Priest."^{xvi} He offered unto the Father His sinless life of perfect obedience as well as His innocent suffering and death as our sin-bearer. Offered Himself, not on a stone altar to be consumed by fire over burning wood, but on the wood of a cross under the burning wrath of God and then placed in a stone tomb. And it is this by this sacrifice He satisfied the holy justice of God and so earned the grace, mercy, forgiveness and salvation that He proclaimed in His prophetic office. Again, it is by His priestly office that He won a people and brought them into the kingdom that He may be our King, not only in power, as He rules all of creation, even unbelievers and the demons, but rules us in grace and love here on earth and finally in glory in heaven and the new creation.

Hearing this, we recognize that it is His priestly office that we primarily remember in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Not as our sacrifice to God, as no more are needed. But instead as the precious Sacrament in which He gives to us His offered body and His shed blood for the forgiveness of sins so that our faith in His once-for-all, perfect sacrifice is strengthened again.

Truly, the only Law in His priestly office is His perfect obedience to it for us because of the sickening reality of the depths of our iniquities and sins, yes, our corrupted nature, which cost such a price, requiring the sacrifice of God's only-begotten Son. Yes, that truth should lead us to sincerely repent of our sins which caused Him such agony of body and soul, cost the life of the Lord of glory. But as our Priest He willingly pays the price and so our sins fully forgiven, the gates of paradise open to all who repent and believe in Him.

There is one more thing we must say. Just as Christ's prophetic and kingly offices continue even in His state of exaltation, so also does His priestly office. For one of the duties of a priest is that of intercessor, to plead for the people with God. Our High Priest, who entered the true Holy of Holies, the very presence of God Himself, by His own blood, now lives forever and pleads for the world as a whole, and His people in particular.

Jesus pleads that those who have not yet received the forgiveness of sins that He purchased for them would be brought to saving faith. He pleads that we who have received it may ever retain it, never losing our faith. He pleads that the Father would forgive our sins, holding up His resurrected hands which still bear the nail scars. He knows our weaknesses for He is true man, so He pleads for us that the Spirit would support us in our pilgrimage. He brings our prayers to the Father (why we say "in Jesus' name"), assuring us that they are heard in grace. As we heard tonight, "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."^{xvii} We could have no confidence in our prayers without this High Priest, but due to Him, as our catechism instructs us, we can pray "with all boldness and confidence...as dear children ask their dear Father."^{xviii}

Dear fellow redeemed, receiving the blessing of faith that can securely rest in Christ's completed work of salvation, in thanksgiving let us actively live for Him now. He has anointed us in Baptism "to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."^{xi} So let us heed the holy apostle and "present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship."^{xx} Let us, with gentleness and respect, bear witness in word and deed of the hope that is in us,^{xxi} the hope founded on Jesus, who died as the perfect Sacrifice, and who lives forever as our own High Priest. Amen!

ⁱ Hebrews 2:17. Scripture quotes are taken from *The Holy Bible English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱ Hebrews 9:11.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hebrews 3:1.

^{iv} Hebrews 10:21.

^v There is no value in comparing to pagan priesthoods as they are idolatrous and of the devil.

^{vi} Psalm 110:4. This psalm is quoted in the Hebrews text as well.

^{vii} Hebrews 7:11.

^{viii} See Genesis 14:17-20 for the account of Abraham and Melchizedek.

^{ix} Hebrews 7:23-24.

^x Hebrews 10:1-4, 11-14. We hear a reference to Psalm 110:1.

^{xi} John 1:29.

^{xii} 1 Corinthians 5:7.

^{xiii} 1 Peter 1:18, 19.

^{xiv} Revelation 5:12.

^{xv} Galatians 4:4-5.

^{xvi} "Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord," *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB) 637:1.

^{xvii} Hebrews 7:25.

^{xviii} *Luther's Small Catechism*, Introduction to the Lord's Prayer and meaning.

^{xix} 1 Peter 2:5.

^{xx} Romans 12:1.

^{xxi} 1 Peter 3:15.