

St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)

8948 N 1900 Ave Geneseo, IL 61254

309-949-2516

December 20, 2023

Midweek of Advent 3

\*\*\*\*\*

*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 891 O Light Whose Splendor**

- 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 24**

<sup>1</sup>The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,  
the world and those who dwell therein,

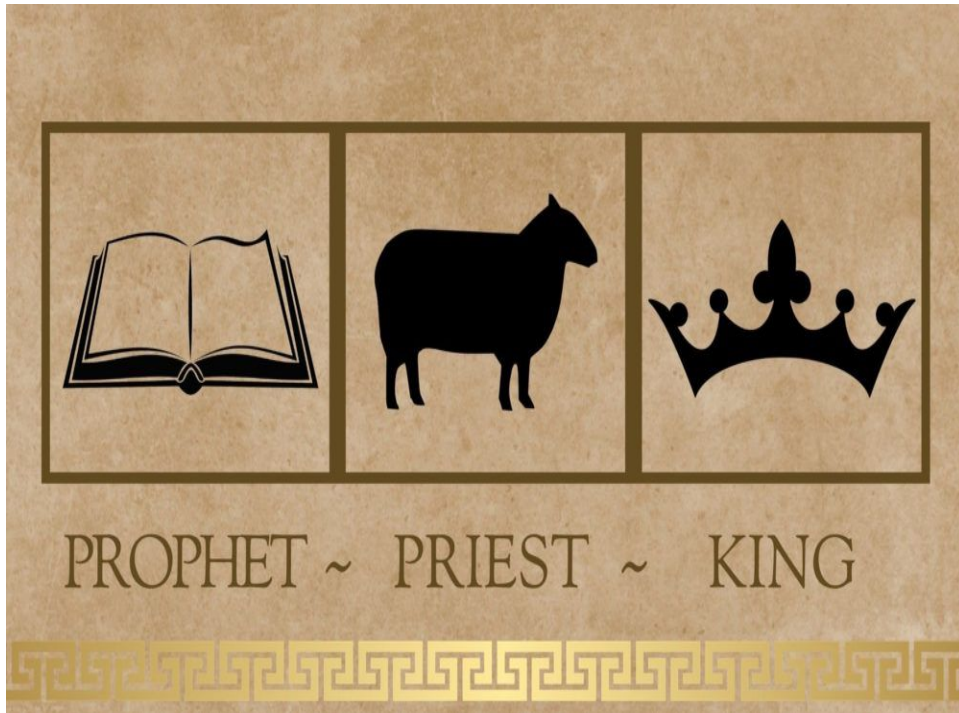
<sup>2</sup>**for he has founded it upon the seas  
and established it upon the rivers.**

<sup>3</sup>Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?

<sup>4</sup>**He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not lift up his soul to what is false  
and does not swear deceitfully.**

<sup>5</sup>He will receive blessing from the LORD  
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

<sup>6</sup>**Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.**



**ADVENT MIDWEEK SERVICE III**  
**2023**

<sup>7</sup>Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.

<sup>8</sup>**Who is this King of glory?**  
**The LORD, strong and mighty,**  
**the LORD, mighty in battle!**

<sup>9</sup>Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.

<sup>10</sup>**Who is this King of glory?**  
**The LORD of hosts,**  
**he is the King of glory!**

**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: Daniel 7:13-14*

<sup>13</sup>“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup>And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

**P** This is the Word of the Lord.

**C** Thanks be to God.

*Epistle: Ephesians 1:15-23*

<sup>15</sup>For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, <sup>16</sup>I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup>having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup>that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head

over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

**P** This is the Word of the Lord.

**C** Thanks be to God.

*Holy Gospel: John 18:33-36*

<sup>33</sup>So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” <sup>35</sup>Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” <sup>36</sup>Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”

**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 341 Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

#### Sermon

#### Prayer

- P** Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Son Jesus Christ, whom You so graciously sent to earth and offered as the Lamb of sacrifice to atone for our sins. Holy Jesus, true Son of God and true Son of Mary, we thank You for demonstrating God's love for us by coming here as our Brother to die for our sins on the cross. As we return in spirit to Bethlehem's stable where You first appeared in human flesh to be our Savior, lend us Your grace to rededicate ourselves in body and soul, in thoughts, words, and deeds, to You our King. Holy Spirit, we thank You for giving us the faith that believes and confesses that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Bring forth from that faith in Your promises true joy and peace this season and the rest of our earthly pilgrimage.

O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in this season when we are reminded so much of the precious gift of salvation which Your divine love has given us, stir up in our hearts a deep sense of brotherly love towards our fellow believers and a deep concern for the welfare of all people. Give to each of us a spirit of generosity toward those who are in need.

Holy Trinity, bless us—the lambs and sheep under Your care—with every needful blessing. Grant us good health this winter season, and keep every kind of disease and illness from us. Watch over the children, and protect them from all harm and danger. Keep under Your mercy and special care the aged and those who are suffering weakness in their bodies. When the winter weather becomes severe, keep us safe and warm. Protect us at all times in our travels. Stand guard over our homes, churches, schools, and places of employment. Grant these and all other needful blessings to us according to Your good pleasure and gracious will.

Eternal God, forgive our many sins, for it was because of them that Christ had to come down among us to die. Have Your Word dwell in us richly to grant us continual growth in grace, in the knowledge and wisdom of our Savior Jesus Christ, and in holiness of living. We ask all things in Jesus' name.

**C Amen.**

- P** Lord, we thank You that You have taught us what You would

have us believe and do. Help us by Your Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to hold fast Your Word in hearts which You have cleansed that thereby we may be made strong in faith and perfect in holiness, and be comforted in life and in death.

**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 880 Now Rest beneath Night's Shadow**

*Silent Prayer*

Third Advent Midweek

December 20, 2023

Texts: Daniel 7:13-14; Ephesians 1:15-23; John 18:33-36

### **“The Kingly Office of Christ”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father who has given us His Incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Prince of Peace and Mighty King.

As we have heard the last two weeks, the office of Christ/Messiah (Anointed One) has traditionally been distinguished as a threefold office, that of Prophet, Priest, and King. For our meditation tonight in our final Advent midweek, we will consider our Lord’s Kingly Office. To begin, let’s consider some of the times that the Christ is called a king in Scripture.

Some texts refer to Him directly as king or a similar title which clearly indicates royalty. Consider a few Old Testament prophecies. Zechariah calls Him a king;<sup>i</sup> Ezekiel writes, “David...king over them” and “David...their prince forever” (indicating the Messiah as David had died 400 years earlier);<sup>ii</sup> Daniel refers to Him as “an anointed one, a prince;”<sup>iii</sup> Micah declares Him “ruler in Israel,”<sup>iv</sup> and Isaiah calls Him “a leader and commander for the peoples.”<sup>v</sup> Then at the Annunciation, the mighty angel Gabriel proclaims to the Virgin Mary concerning her Son, “The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”<sup>vi</sup> And the ascended and exalted Christ Jesus is shown in St. John’s Revelation to be “King of kings and Lord of lords.”<sup>vii</sup>

Other texts refer to His mighty rule. Tonight we heard from Daniel that the one like a Son of Man was given an everlasting dominion, a kingdom that shall not be destroyed.<sup>viii</sup> And the Epistle specifies that the exalted Christ is seated at God’s right hand “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion...not only in this age but also in the one to come,”<sup>ix</sup> and again “[the Father] put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.”<sup>x</sup> We also recall the Lord saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”<sup>xi</sup>

Clearly, Christ the King’s authority extends over all and includes, well, *everything*! So because of this, just as the office of Christ has been considered as a threefold office of Prophet, Priest and King, so also the kingdom over which King Jesus rules has, for the sake of teaching, been further distinguished as a threefold kingdom. *Not three kingdoms*, as there is only one King who rules all, *but three different perspectives of His one kingdom*, based upon the diverse nature of the subjects of the kingdom and, accordingly, the nature of the king’s rule over them.

The first is *the kingdom of power*. This is called such because it includes His almighty rule of the universe as a whole, and this world in particular. It includes both the preservation of, and the governing providence over matter, energy, and time as well as the subjection of all creatures on earth from microscopic to man to Him. More, it includes His dominion in the midst of His enemies, both spiritual and earthly, whom He represses, coerces, and punishes, limiting the evil they can do, forcing their worst to always work according to His plan and so bring good out of it.<sup>xii</sup> Much of this is exercised directly by His omnipotence, hence kingdom of power, but He also limits the spread of chaos, sin, and evil through the divine ordinances that He has established for

this life as well, including marriage and family, civil government, labor and property, and by civil righteousness through the law on the heart and the God-given conscience.

Don't fail to see how this is of the utmost practical value to us! How comforting to know that the galaxies, stars, planets, and comets, the air, earth, and water, the winds and storms, the fires and earthquakes, *everything visible and invisible*, all are under His sovereign rule. How much more comforting to know our enemies, the world of unbelievers and false believers, of heretics and atheists, of persecutors subtle and overt, yes, even the demons and their prince, all must obey the will of Christ. Of course they are still in open rebellion. But a rebellion that was lost before it began, of which there is no hope for them to even survive, of which their most violent opposition is forced to further His almighty and, more, His *gracious* will *for His people*.

And so, as we just heard, Christ rules the kingdom of power, but for the sake of His people, His Church. This part of His kingdom, the Church, is the result not of bare omnipotence, though His omnipotence stands behind it as well, but is first and foremost due to His grace towards sinners, and hence is called the *kingdom of grace*. One is born into the kingdom of power through natural birth, but one is born into the kingdom of grace through spiritual birth, that is, being brought to saving faith by God's grace in Christ crucified through the Gospel.

So this kingdom is brought about by King Jesus' gracious working to convert men from sin and unbelief to faith. His ruling in this kingdom is His expanding, maintaining, and governing His Church by calling, converting, regenerating, renewing, illuminating, gathering, sanctifying, and preserving His people through the Holy Spirit. And as in the kingdom of power He has chosen to regularly work through means, so also in this kingdom of grace He works through His chosen means of grace, His Word and Sacraments, and has, in particular, instituted the Office of the Ministry to administer these means as His ambassadors and under-shepherds.

But now we see how His kingdom is in, but not of, this world as Jesus told Pilate. It is hidden, ruled by Christ through His Word *within* faith-filled hearts. It is not advanced by earthly means, but only by the proclaiming the Word and truly, when it looks the best by worldly standards it may well be at its sickest state by heavenly ones! Being a rule in the soul, it neither undermines nor overthrows any worldly government; it is not revolutionary. While Christians, for the sake of love, will seek to protect the innocent, uphold the victim, and generally look out for the betterment of others, this kingdom is not found in social change, liberation from any governmental, economic, or social tyranny, or in the creation of a "Christian nation" as that only brings harm to both the church and state as the duties of both get confused and so are impeded.<sup>xiii</sup>

How critical this ruling of Christ over us in the Church is! For here on earth we are in the Church Militant, in spiritual warfare with the devil, the world of unbelievers, and the sinful nature that remains attached to us. Because of our corrupted nature we are easily misled and quickly fall to their attacks. Therefore, we need a King to both graciously forgive us our sins and lead us to our heavenly home, defending us each step of the way. And this our mighty King does by way of limiting evil by His rule in the kingdom of power and illuminating and enlivening us through the Word by His rule in the kingdom of grace that we would know His will, know good from evil, resist the devil and the world, and crucify our sinful nature until we are safely in glory.

And that brings us to the end of our pilgrimage, to the final aspect of Christ's kingdom, the *kingdom of glory*. While in the Church Militant, believers are under the cross, enduring temptation, trial, and suffering. Yet, by faith we know that God is bringing us into the Church Triumphant, that when we die our soul will be in paradise with Him and finally, at our Lord's return, salvation will be fully realized with the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting!

On that day this corrupted creation will be purged by divine fire, all of Christ's enemies, whether demonic or human, will be cast into the pit of hell forever, and a new, perfect heavens and earth, an Eden restored and even greater, will be created. Then we will no longer see indirectly as through a mirror, that is, through Word and faith, but we will see Jesus face to face.<sup>xiv</sup> Then we will radiate the fullness of what it means to be God's children, being like Christ, raised in His resurrected image.<sup>xv</sup> We will finally be done living as strangers here, entering the fullness of the heavenly kingdom of which even now we are citizens.<sup>xvi</sup>

Dear fellow citizens of Christ's threefold kingdom, it is very true that, right now, it is only by faith we know that Christ is King. In the kingdom of power, it so often seems like evil and the devil is ruling and not Christ. In the kingdom of grace, the means of Word and Sacrament appear so weak, and the kingdom, already invisible because it is faith in the heart, sadly is hidden even more under the weaknesses and imperfections of us Christians who still fall short of the glory of God. And obviously, the kingdom of glory is yet beyond our sight. But Christ would make our faith in His kingship strong, and that is why His Word proclaims Him as King of His threefold kingdom so powerfully. And our faith *is* strengthened by that Word!

Now hear one more great truth. Not only is Christ your King, but in Him, you are also kings and queens as well, for you are a *royal* priesthood.<sup>xvii</sup> So live in faithful obedience under your glorious King *as the heavenly royalty you are in Him!* Do such by ruling over your own sinful nature, having dominion over sin and evil desires, executing the old self and the sinful filth that fills it, and bravely standing firm in the full armor of God resisting the devil so that he must flee from you. But do more. Live towards others as your King lives towards you. Sacrifice for them in gentleness and love. Be forgiving and being merciful towards them, even as He sacrificed His life for you on the cross, forgives you and deals with you in mercy every day.

Dear Christian kings and queens, do all this in the certainty of your mighty King's ongoing provision, protection, and guidance for you in this life. Do this in the hope of your final deliverance into the life to come, when He gathers you into the new creation, the kingdom of glory, which is the very reason that Jesus came as the Prophet, Priest, and King. Amen!

---

<sup>i</sup> Zechariah 9:9.

<sup>ii</sup> Ezekiel 37:24, 25. It is important to realize that King David had been dead for about 400 years when God spoke these words through Ezekiel. Clearly then this is a reference to the Messiah, David's son and Lord, as proven by the angel Gabriel's message to Mary (Luke 1:32).

<sup>iii</sup> Daniel 9:25.

<sup>iv</sup> Micah 5:2.

<sup>v</sup> Isaiah 55:4.

<sup>vi</sup> Luke 1:32b-33. Scripture quotes are taken from *The Holy Bible English Standard Version* (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>vii</sup> Revelation 17:14; 19:16.

<sup>viii</sup> Daniel 7:14.

<sup>ix</sup> Ephesians 1:21.

<sup>x</sup> Ephesians 1:22.

<sup>xi</sup> Matthew 28:18.

<sup>xii</sup> Romans 8:28.

<sup>xiii</sup> This doesn't mean that Christians are not active in society to uphold God's will. We remember that the natural law is written on people's hearts and we rightly speak such in the public square. But we are not trying to run the nation through "Biblical principles," as such fails to distinguish God's distinction of Church and State, as well as using the Law as coercion to make people into Christians, which not only fails, but also inhibits the Gospel.

<sup>xiv</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2.

<sup>xv</sup> Philippians 3:21.

<sup>xvi</sup> Philippians 3:20.

<sup>xvii</sup> 1 Peter 2:9.