



Advent
Devotions
Inspired by
Handel's
oratorio
Messiah

Editor

Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Shelbyville, KY

Cover Art

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Contributors

Rev. Matthew Brackman
Peace Lutheran Church, Texas City, TX
Rev. Eric Brown
Zion Lutheran Church, Lahoma, OK
Rev. Richard Gizynski
Ebenezer Lutheran Church, Chicago, IL
Rev. Andy Guagenti
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Bardstown, KY
Rev. A. Daniel Guagenti
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Shelbyville, KY
Rev. William Sabol
Trinity Lutheran Church, Jasper, MN
Rev. Michael Salemink
St. James Lutheran Church, Lafayette, IN
Rev. Ray Salemink
Trinity Lutheran Church, Ellettsville, IN
Rev. Richard J. Serina, Jr.
Trinity Lutheran Church, Albany, TX
Rev. Charles St Onge
Memorial Lutheran Church, Houston, TX
Rev. David Tannahill
Saint Matthew Lutheran Church, Hazen, ND

November 30

The Feast of
Saint Andrew

John 1:41

He first found his
own brother Simon
and said to him,
"We have found the
Messiah" (which
means Christ).

It was like a treasure hunt stretched across millennia. The first clue about the Messiah was given to a confused couple, just beginning to know the effects of sin and shame. To Adam and Eve, the promise came that the serpent, their cruel tempter, would have his head crushed by their own seed, a child yet to come. So they watched and they waited. He did not come in their time.

Clues were given to Abraham and Sarah, clues in laughter and in the tears of sacrifice. Clues were given to Jacob in a helpless limp and in a bad son, who seemed least likely of twelve to pass on the holiest blessing. Clues were given to Moses on mountaintops and in arid wastelands. They all watched. They all waited. Still, He did not come in their time.

There were seekers of great faith—patient Job, brave David, wise Solomon, zealous Elijah. They were not given to cry out as St. Andrew was given, "We have found the Messiah!" Two brothers, unlettered fishermen, were given by the Father the great privilege of first proclaiming that they had found God hidden in the flesh of Jesus, the Nazarene.

When this Messiah comes again, nothing will be hidden. He will come on the clouds and in glory. No one will miss it. He will simply be here and our fears and shame and worries will be gone in an instant.

We watch and we wait. His return may come in our lifetimes. It may not. But we live in the age of His coming. We live when the mystery is revealed, that Jesus came to die, to rise, to come again—all for our salvation.

We, too, have found the Messiah, thanks in small part to Andrew; thanks in full to our heavenly Father, who together with the Son and Spirit are one God, forever and ever. Amen.

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

Prayer

*Dear Father,
we thank you
for sending
your Son to be
our Savior. We
pray for the joy
of Andrew in
finding Jesus,
that we may
share boldly
this hope with
all. Grow your
Word among us
until we are
gathered back
to you forever
and ever.
Amen.*

December 5

Haggai 2:6-7

For thus says the Lord
of hosts: Yet once
more, in a little while,
I will shake the heav-
ens and the earth and
the sea and the dry
land. And I will shake
all nations, so that the
treasures of all na-
tions shall come in,
and I will fill this
house with glory, says
the Lord of hosts.

Haggai prophesied to a people losing enthusiasm for the long haul of rebuilding the Temple in Israel. He told them he could foresee a day when the current world order would be shaken and the treasures of the nations would come into the Temple of Israel.

The stone and mortar Temple was rebuilt and the world order was shaken, but later Israel was conquered by Rome just like everyone else. Treasures were taken from Israel, not given as the spoils of victory.

The only way this prophecy was fulfilled was through Jesus Christ, who taught that His own body became the new Temple (Jn 2:19-21). That much is clear. What the "treasures of all nations" might be in particular has been debated. An early Christian teacher, St. Augustine of Hippo, believed the church could incorporate the philosophy of the ancient pagans, taking their "treasures" as the church's own. Other theologians pointed to Christian emperors who used their treasures to adorn the Body of Christ with cathedrals.

What about great works of art inspired by Christianity, from Handel's *Messiah* to Michelangelo's paintings on the Sistine Chapel to Dante's *Divine Comedy*? Are these not "treasures of all nations"?

All this is treasure which catches our eyes, treasure for which we must pay unthinkable sums to acquire. Not so for our God. The treasure for which He will pay the most is *you*. You are the treasure for which He paid the ransom of His own Son. You are the treasure He shook the world to acquire.

The Body of Christ has been filled with the glory of sainted believers of every tribe and nation. This is God's treasure, to see us processing into His Temple, into the body of Christ, by faith, singing His praise and glory.

By Rev. Daniel Guagenti

Prayer

*Dear Father,
you looked past
our sin and
shame to see us
as treasure.
You sent your
Son to acquire
us. May we be
yours, heart
and soul! May
we praise you
fervently and
live in grace to
the glory of
your name,
Father, Son,
and Holy
Spirit. Amen.*

December 4

Isaiah 40:5

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

The voices of the choir grow and soar as they sing, “The glory of, the glory of the Lord.” Oh, it is fantastic. It is glorious, for lack of a better word. This is one of the more recognizable parts of the Messiah. The glory of the Lord cascades over the listener. It is as if we are basking in His glory.

This seems quite a contrast to the scene of a baby in a stall, with His be-draggled parents and a few forlorn animals upset that He is in their feeding trough. This is a humble and a glorious scene. It is humble to us. It is glorious to God. This is where God enters this fallen world, taking on our weak flesh in order to deliver us from death. The scene of His glory is clothed in humility. There is the glory of God in this little child who cannot feed himself. This child who cannot protect Himself from a mosquito is the Savior of us all. He will give His blood so that we might live.

How many times have you heard, “His strength is made perfect in weakness,” while going through a rough patch? That is always good news. Sarcasm aside, it is. Our Lord’s glory shines in humility and weakness. When we can least take care of ourselves is when He takes care of us the most. It does not look like we are strong when we rely on Him just to make it through the day, but it is. It is God’s strength and glory coming to you and me through His Son. Bask in the glory of God. Let it cascade over you and be seen in your own weakness and humility.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

Prayer

Heavenly Father, reveal your glory to your people. Let us see how many great things you do through humble means and humble people. Grant us your strength through your Son and raise us up as your people so that your glory is seen. Amen.

December 1

Overture

Psalms 98:1

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.

This Advent and Lent we will be journeying through one of the greatest musical exhibitions of Biblical prophecy — Handel’s *Messiah*. The *Messiah* was composed in three parts containing 43 separate musical pieces. In this oratorio, Handel moved from prophecy to fulfillment, highlighting how Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised by the Prophets.

The words are not Handel’s; they are God’s. Every phrase in the *Messiah* is a direct quote from Scripture. Handel’s gift to countless generations after him was how he used music to interpret and illuminate the text.

The *Messiah* begins with the Overture, which as the title implies, provides a preview of the entire oratorio. It begins with a slow, tension-filled melody. This brings to mind both the longing of the Old Testament church for the promised Messiah and our own longing for Jesus’ return as we endure this sinful life.

About halfway through the Overture, the melody quickens, becoming joyful and triumphant, reminding us how Jesus has come and shall come again. He has overcome sin, death and the devil, and in Him we also have triumphed eternally.

I encourage you to listen to the selection of the *Messiah* that corresponds to each day’s devotion. Journey through the *Messiah* as we hear again the familiar account of our salvation set to the wonders of music.

By Rev. William Sabol

Prayer

All glory to the Son, who comes to set us free, with Father, Spirit, ever one through all eternity. Amen. (LSB 331:6)

December 2

Isaiah 40:1-3

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

The holidays are hard for a lot of folks. Comfort and happiness seem impossibilities for us. We have troubled hearts and minds concerning our families, work or faith—sometimes all three. We are unable to buy the gifts we would like for one another, and we are unable to see some of our loved ones due to distance, circumstances or even death.

Many of us also think that comfort equals comfortable, and being comfortable will make us happy. It is good we have these words from Isaiah for today. God does not promise us constant comfort. He does not promise us that we will be happy. God speaks comfort to his people. God gives peace and joy.

In the child Jesus we find peace—not in the cute picture of Mary holding her little baby, but in God taking on flesh to bring peace between God and man. In this child we find joy because in Him is our life. God gives us comfort and joy in our Messiah.

A lot of us think we will be comfortable and happy if we receive all our hearts desire. This is neither the comfort nor the joy God gives. He does not give us all the desires of our hearts. He gives us a new heart to desire all He gives.

We can find peace in the midst of family struggles. We can find comfort in the midst of a very uncomfortable sickness or situation. God's peace passes all understanding. We can find joy without presents. We can find joy without the presence of one we love. The joy of the Lord is something beyond any feeling of giddiness. The peace and joy of the Lord is eternal, and it is for us.

By Rev. Matthew Brackman

Prayer

O Lord, send your comfort and joy to your people. Open our hearts and minds so we desire all that you give. Let us know your comfort and joy that passes all understanding and lasts this season and for all seasons. Amen.

December 3

Isaiah 40:4

Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

There is much rugged beauty across our country, as anyone who has gone on a long car trip knows. There are "purple mountain majesties," the depths of the Grand Canyon, the badlands of South Dakota, the painted desert. They are wonderful places of beauty.

But they make travelling hard. Mountains are hard to cross; so are rivers. Going up and down hills is horrible on the gas mileage, to say nothing of the legs if you were walking. And even as we see their beauty, I think we can forget the violence of their creation. How many of these jagged peaks or torn landscapes were formed by the fountains of the deep opening and the raging waters of the flood? Boulders tossed about like pebbles, gashes carved into the earth, lakebeds now made high plains valleys—such a jumbled up landscape that we have had the past few thousand years.

God desires things to be straightforward. When it comes to understanding Him and His love for us, God much prefers a straight, flat path—one that we can see easily, as opposed to one that winds and wends and dips out of our sight. Sin, though, loves the crooked path; our sin loves to let God be out of sight, out of mind. And so God is determined to take on human flesh, to become our Brother and Savior, to be with us.

When Christ comes, the world is changed. He comes to make things right, to restore. Christ comes to redeem sinners, to win forgiveness, to do away with sin, to remove its impact. Of course the valleys will be lifted up, and the rough ground be level—for Christ restores His creation, and there will be nothing to hide His love from us. Indeed, because He came, He is by our side upon the plain, with His good gifts and Spirit.

By Rev. Eric Brown

Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant that all hindrances we face which would separate us from you and your love for us might be removed, so at all times we might clearly see your Son, Christ Jesus, and walk with Him throughout our lives. This we pray in the name of that same Jesus Christ, Amen.