

## Second Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11

*“She has received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”* (vs. 2)

The prophet Isaiah had told God’s people in and around Jerusalem that their sin was great and that their punishment for rebellion against God would be terrible. However, in this chapter he begins to tell the people how God would miraculously comfort and restore them.

So, at the very beginning of this passage, of which is Isaiah speaking? Does he speak of the punishment they have received or does he (as prophets often did) speak in the past tense of the grace that they will receive?

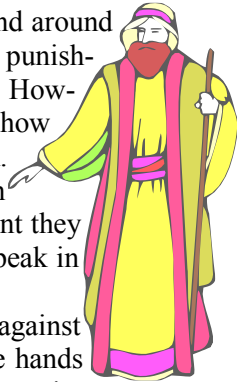
How could God’s people pay for their sins against Him? Did the punishment that they suffered at the hands of their enemies pay the price for their rebellion against God? Of course not. We know that even our physical deaths cannot repay God or erase our evil nature. The punishment that wars had brought upon God’s people was the result of their turning from God’s wisdom and will to their own. God used the enemies of His people to demonstrate to them that without Him they were unable to function. The warfare helped them to see their plight, but it could not erase their sin.

So God did what God always does. He looked at His people with love and compassion. Through the prophet He tells them that though their time of discipline has been great and painful, His love for them has not died. This was a wonderful message for them, but the problem of their sin still remained. They still could not rejoin Him in His eternal kingdom.

Thus His message through Isaiah is one of double grace, not double anger and punishment. Though they could not understand it fully, God promised that He would take the burden of paying the price for their rebellion. We know that the Shepherd described in verse 11 is Jesus, God’s own Son. “Double” indicates a great outpouring and what greater outpouring of grace could we imagine than God’s own free gift of salvation to us through the death of His own Son on the cross?

***Have you ever been in a study of the Old Testament?  
It’s full of God’s love!***

(A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee)

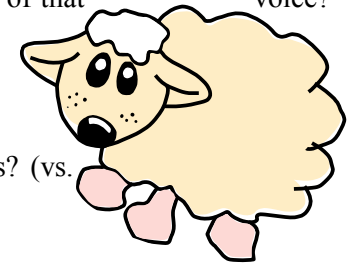


## Second Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11

1. The first words of the text describe God’s sentiment for his oppressed people. What does God offer to Israel (and to us)? Why is the word “comfort” included twice? See LW, hymn #28, for a musical expression of this verse.

2. What “voice” is being prophesied in vs. 3? (See today’s Gospel lesson in Mark 1) What was the message of that voice?



3. How are people like grass and flowers? (vs. 6-7)

4. Who is the perfect Shepherd prophesied in vs. 11? (See John 10:11-16)

5. According to verse 8, what constant does God offer in times of change? How is God’s unchanging Word a blessing to you?

6. Think of times when life has been uncomfortable for you. How has God offered His comfort to you?

## Second Sunday in Advent

Malachi 3:1-4

In these verses we hear the words of God's anger and of God's love. To the people who have consistently failed to worship Him and follow His will, He does not send a sword and axe, but soap and refining fire.

The prophet says, "Who can stand...?" None can stand before the coming Lord on his own. Only the Lord Himself can cleanse and purify the sinner.

John the Baptist, the "messenger" of the first sentence, called on the people of God to repent; to prepare for the coming of the Lord (the second "messenger" mentioned by Malachi). His was an announcement of joy and of warning. His message was that the people could not stand on their own; that the Savior that so many of them yearned for was coming. Yet, those who stood confidently watching what they considered the spectacle of John were the ones whom Jesus would expose for what they were. Their self-confidence would not be able to stand in the presence of the One who was God and Man; whose light exposed their folly. Some of them would recognize Him after their opposition failed or, like Nicodemus, their confrontation with Him served as soap and fire in their hearts. He would accept them and clean them for His own.

How do we as Christians, saved by Jesus' sacrifice, deal with the concept of being refined in fire? Are we ever taken through a process of refinement? Perhaps sanctification is our refining process. Growing up in Christ, our journey of sanctification, is not an easy path. Our faith is challenged every day by the culture in which we live, by the priorities of our peers, even by our own egos and emotions. God does not pick us up bodily out of our problems and set us down in a safe place. He graciously allows us to rely on His strength and wisdom and teaches us His way through our trouble. He is at our side with soap and fire to make us into wiser, more faithful believers every day.



*Have you ever been in a study of the Old Testament?*

*It's full of God's love!*

**A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee**

## Second Sunday in Advent

Malachi 3:1-4

1. Who is the first "messenger" prophesied by Malachi? (see Mark 1:2-4)
2. Who is the "messenger of the covenant" prophesied by Malachi?
3. Why will some have to fear the coming of this messenger? (vs. 2)
4. Why is refinement and purification necessary in our lives? How has God accomplished that for us?
5. Read Psalm 24:3-4. How does this message correspond to Malachi 3:3-4?
6. Malachi also means "messenger." Find out more about this Old Testament prophet. When did he live? To whom was he God's messenger? What does he have to say to us and our time?



## Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10

In today's lesson Isaiah seems to speak of two times of advent. The Branch from Jesse refers to Jesus' birth and much of the passage refers to His work during the years before He was crucified. However, beginning in verse 6 Isaiah returns again to the second coming of Jesus and the glorious peace that will reign.

Jesus first brought us peace through His death on the cross. Not only did He conquer death and Satan, He promised us a personal peace beyond comprehension. In Isaiah's picture of the animals living together, we see the wonderful contentment of the future that can be ours even today. God wants us to turn to Him with all of those things that cause us stress, burnout, high blood pressure, tantrums, frustration, and just plain overwhelming fatigue. We not only don't have to worry alone, we don't have to worry at all. God is right here with us. The Holy Spirit dwells within us offering all the comfort and aid that we need.

Yet, it isn't easy to rest in the peace of the Lord. Even St. Paul said that he had to "learn" to be content. It is so easy to rely on our own strength. We say that we don't want to bother God, but often we just don't really think that we can trust Him as much as we can trust ourselves. That's just a part of our sinful nature.

Perhaps as a reassurance that peace is possible, Isaiah tells us about the power and authority of our Savior in the first part of today's passage. There is no one who can better care for us than God. There is no one who wants to help us more than He. We can be the infant playing by the hole of the cobra who is not harmed. By the love and power of Jesus we can live our lives innocently from any evil deed done toward another. We can live in joy and peace. Turning every moment of every day over to Jesus will give us peace that is beyond comprehension. We can do that not by our strength, but by the strength of the Holy Spirit who enables our every action that is within His will.

**Learn more about Jesus' first coming and second coming in a Bible study this week.**

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10

1. God's people look for hope from the family of Jesse. Who was Jesse? (see 1 Samuel 16:10-13; Matthew 1:5-6) Why was this family history significant?
2. When did the Spirit come upon the Messiah? (Matthew 3:16) What role would the Spirit have in Jesus' earthly ministry?
3. According to vs. 4 and 5 with what qualities would the Messiah rule? How would these qualities be different from the earthly rulers of that day?
4. What picture is painted in the illustrations of vs. 6-8? Why are the illustrations so extreme?
5. Who is the "Root of Jesse"? (vs. 10) How is this illustration used in the Advent hymn "Oh, Come, Oh Come Emmanuel?" (LW#31, vs. 4)
6. Isaiah prophecies "a little child will lead them." (vs. 6) Who is the Child of Advent? How can we make the advent season meaningful for the children in our family and our congregation?

## Second Sunday in Advent

2 Peter 3:8-14

Peter, in verses 10-12, presents a pretty scary view of the last day, one of fire, heat, and destruction. This may be because earlier in the chapter, he referred to those who would always mock God's promises, especially the promise that Jesus will return in glory. The destruction described should cause fear in the unbeliever. One does not mock God without reaping very unpleasant consequences. Perhaps Peter hoped that in describing the fate of those steeped in sin and rebellion, some might be brought to an understanding of its reality and its consequences.

As Peter writes in verse 9, God is "slow" not because of His forgetfulness or inability, but because He wants to allow as much time as possible for all people to be saved. God loves all people—He does not eagerly look forward to the final destruction of those who continue in disobedience and unbelief.

In our world today, the Last Day is rejected by unbelievers and, amazingly, by some Christians. People like to think that man will be able to conquer the universe, his own sin, poverty, abuse, war, and unhappiness in general. While this goal is one that the Christian strives to attain, along with the world, we know that only God will finally end the power of sin in our lives and world.

For the Christian, Peter's message in verse 13 is one of hope and glory. Instead of dwelling in a world where sin causes daily grief not only to people, but to nature itself, we will dwell in a magnificent and perfect world. The old world will end and the new world begin. It will be a glorious day for all who eagerly anticipate His coming. Even the things of nature will be restored.

This is Advent and, like us, our neighbors and friends are beginning to anticipate Christmas with all of its celebrations. For non-Christians this will include only parties, gifts, vacations, and preparations. For many of them, however, there will also be thoughts about a baby born in the little town of Bethlehem. Perhaps, this is the perfect season to invite them to share a worship experience with you. That simple invitation could lead to their own joyful anticipation of Jesus' return.

Learn more about Jesus' return to our world in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Second Sunday in Advent

2 Peter 3:8-14

1. How do vs. 10 and 12 describe Jesus' return? (See the Concordia Self-study Bible notes or other commentaries for notes on this description.)
2. According to vs. 13, what will be the blessings of Jesus' return?
3. According to vs. 11 and 13, how should we wait? Give examples of Godly and holy waiting?
4. It took thousands of years for God to fulfill His promise to send a Savior. It has taken thousands of years for God to fulfill His promise to come back to earth. Is God slow? (vs. 9) How is God at work in His seeming slowness?

### For Family Reflection

5. Is it hard for you to be patient? When have you hoped that God would hurry? How was God at work in your waiting?
6. "I'd like a new \_\_\_\_\_." We think of new items especially as we anticipate Christmas gifts. What Gift did God send at Christmas? What gift does God ultimately have for us? (vs. 13)

## Second Sunday in Advent

Philippians 1:2-11

In today's lesson Paul speaks of peace, grace and abounding love. All three sometimes seem far away. Our nation is at war and even our culture seems to be exploding around us. Fights break out at children's sports events; abortion continues; euthanasia threatens; "road rage" is commonplace; popular novels unashamedly belittle Christianity; political battles digress into heaps of mud and misinformation; etc. How can we experience peace, grace, and abounding love in the midst of such craziness?

Paul would understand our question. His world was as chaotic as our own. Imprisoned when he wrote to the Philippians, he had already experienced beatings, sickness, rejection, and even stoning in his life. A government whose power and cruelty could rival the most wicked modern dictatorships ruled over Paul and his friends. Within the churches false teachers worked to discredit Paul and the gospel. Untreatable disease, accidents, and wars dictated a life expectancy in Paul's time that was decades shorter than our own.

So, how could Paul experience grace, peace, and love? Because, as children of God, we are different from the world! As Jesus promised, we do know the Truth and the Truth has set us free! We are free to love a world filled with unlovable people; free to know God's grace and peace! We are free to work at making a difference; to rejoice that we know that the Answer has come into our world and that He is the Master of history.

Because of Jesus we can keep on hoping and working. We can know peace, grace, and love in the midst of chaos. Like Paul, we can confidently confront and change our world with God's love.

As Paul tells us in his letter to the Galatians, we can live the fruit of righteousness—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."—because the Holy Spirit lives within us. In this season of Advent we await the return of our Lord and we contemplate His birth in Bethlehem. In this season we will not only see the secularization of the holiday, we will see people change for a time—and know that for some the change will be eternal. That is God's grace, peace, and love at work.

Learn more about knowing peace in chaos in a Bible study this week.

*A message from your Iowa District West Education Committee*

## Second Sunday in Advent

Philippians 1:2-11

1. What was Paul's situation as he wrote this letter (vs. 7)? What was Paul's attitude (vs. 3-4)?
2. Is salvation our work or God's work? Is the completion of salvation our work or God's work? How does this text help answer those questions (vs. 6)?
3. One of the themes of Advent is Jesus' second coming? In what ways does this lesson direct our thoughts (and actions) toward Jesus' return?

### For Family Reflection

4. What your favorite fruit? What is a "fruit of righteousness" (vs. 11; See also Galatians 5:22-23)? Where do we find these fruits?
5. Paul celebrates the faith friendships of the Philippians congregation. Who are some of the faith friends and partners for whom you give thanks?
6. What is Paul's prayer for his friends? What is your prayer for your family? What is your prayer for your friends?

## Second Sunday of Advent

Matthew 3:1-12

In next week's Gospel lesson (Matthew 11:2-15) Jesus says that John lacked something that all Christians after him would have. Reading this week's lesson gives us a clue as to what John lacked. John taught the people that they needed to repent, realize their hopeless condition, change their attitudes and actions, and expect judgment from God. He called the people to "make ready the way of the Lord" and "make his path straight." The reference is to Isaiah 40:3. In Isaiah's time the passage indicated repairing the road for a dignitary to travel; making it smooth so that the trip would be easy. John called the people to make their lives ready to be ruled by Messiah. He wanted to see them respond to God's commands; to repent and welcome Messiah.

What John said was true! He knew the plight of the world—but he hadn't seen the answer. His concern was valid. He knew God's love, but he couldn't see how even God could remove the evil in men's hearts. Surely judgment was the only answer to sin.

John died before he could see God's answer to man's sin. Less than three years after John's death, Jesus demonstrated just how much God loves His creation. He died on the cross, suffering complete separation from God, His Father, so that all believers could spend eternity with Him instead of an eternity in condemnation. It was a plan and gift beyond John's vision—the Cross came after his death. He looked toward God's promise; he trusted in that promise; he was saved because of the promise but did not fully understand it.

We are blessed. We look back to the cross, the horrible, yet wonderful, evidence that through Jesus' death we have eternity with God. As we celebrate Advent, we understand the joy of the cross and the joy of anticipating Jesus' return. What we do now to "prepare the way of the Lord" is to tell the world what we know to be true. We commemorate Christ's birth by telling our friends that He is the reason for the season; We celebrate the coming of Christ by sharing Him with those around us; We demonstrate Christ by living our faith every day.

Learn more about Jesus' birth and return in a Bible study this week.  
*A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee*

## Second Sunday of Advent

Matthew 3:1-12

1. Review the birth and childhood of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25; 57-80). Who were his parents? What was unusual about his birth and boyhood?
2. Describe the lifestyle of John the Baptist (vs. 4). Summarize John's message (vs. 3, 7-8). How do you think you would have reacted to John's appearance and John's message?
3. Why was he called "the Baptist"? Where did he baptize? Why did he baptize?
4. What was John's role in relationship to the Messiah (vs. 11-12)? (Also note John 1:29-31.)

### For Family Reflection

5. What does it mean to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (vs. 9)? Are your words and actions consistent with your confession? What are you producing?
6. John's words and actions pointed to Christ. How can your words and actions point to Jesus?

## Second Sunday in Advent

Mark 1:1-8

John was a man of commanding presence. He sounds like the Billy Graham of the New Testament—only John was more offensive to more people. The Holy Spirit filled John with an abiding certainty about the coming of the Messiah. The Bible doesn't tell us if John grew up knowing that his cousin was the Christ, but it does say that, as a babe in the womb, John "leapt for joy" at the approach of Mary, a few months before she and Martha each gave birth. We do know that by about age thirty, John was certain of God's message.

Imagine, for a moment, going out to see John on a summer afternoon. He is "scruffy" to say the least, yet crowds gather to hear him preach a message of repentance in preparation to meet the coming Messiah. John is the dominant presence at the riverside, yet he speaks of One who is coming "who is mightier" than he. Is it possible that he is right? Could the wait be almost over? Your heart leaps at the prospect of meeting the One whom God promised so long ago. As the breeze comes off the water, you feel its coolness, and strain to hear John over the sound of the wind. Unlike some of your friends, Rome doesn't really bother you that much. Daily life in the small town where you do business is pretty comfortable, but what if Someone is coming who can lift your uncertainty about God? Someone who will be able to tell you if God really loves you, or if He even knows you're alive?

Today, Christians wait eagerly for Jesus' Second Coming to our world. But there are also millions like the person in our momentary visit to John's world. They wonder if there is Someone who can show them how to know God. They know that their own godhood just isn't working out. They still need to hear of Jesus' First Coming to our world. Have you told them? Are you occasionally the "voice of one crying in the wilderness" of our world?

John sounds so special that we may be tempted to think that he was the one and only person who could proclaim the Messiah, but he did not do it on his own. Like John we have the Holy Spirit to guide us, give us courage at the right time, and give us the confidence to speak to those who need to hear.

**Share your thoughts with others in a Bible study this week.**

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Second Sunday in Advent

1. Review the introduction in vs. 1. Who is this "gospel" about? Using the Concordia Self-study Bible (or another reference) find out more about the author of this book. To whom was the Gospel originally written? How is this gospel different from the other three gospel books?
2. Describe John the Baptist as a person? How would he be received in today's world?
3. Summarize the message of John the Baptist? How is his message pertinent to today's audience?
4. Note the prophecies of vs. 2-3. What is the source of the prophecies? Why is the quotation of Old Testament prophecies significant in this (and the other) gospels?

### For Family Reflection

5. John emphasizes (vs. 7) that His role is to always point to Jesus. What is our role? How can we point others to Jesus?
6. We are introduced to John, "the Baptist." Reflect on your baptism. What blessings did you receive? Did you receive the Holy Spirit at your baptism?

## Second Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:1-20

Luke wrote his story of Jesus to the Gentile world. He first sent the story to an official named Theophilus (or “Friend of God”). Though today’s lesson continues a story of the Jews, Theophilus would have recognized his own people in the crowds surrounding John. Even today, there are many who search for answers to their inner turmoil; to their questions about the way the world is. John proclaimed that he was preparing the people to meet the Answer in person. Greek, Jew, American—we all need that hope and assurance.

We live in a society in which millions of people don’t know who Jesus is or that He came to save them. How do you tell the story of Jesus? Can you say, as Luke did, that you have “investigated everything carefully from the beginning” (Luke 1:3)? When you tell the story of the Gospel, is it a personal story?

In Advent we celebrate the second coming of Christ, as well as the first. Luke was willing to tell the story of Christ to his friends, even the skeptical, the unbelieving, the seeking, and the fearful. Are we?

John preached the same message to all of his listeners, tax collectors, soldiers, or religious leaders. God is sending the Messiah. Salvation is at hand.

“Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance....” The repentant tax collector would not only apologize to the people he had cheated, he would stop the cheating. Repentant soldiers stopped bullying the common people. Repentance meant stopping selfish practices and beginning a caring life. Verse 18 says that this was part of the Gospel, the Good News from God.

Do we take our salvation for granted? Do we consider responding to God’s grace? Do we practice repentance by serving instead of being served? These questions require looking honestly into our hearts. What better time to do that than during Advent as we celebrate the coming of our Savior? We have a Helper in the task of examining our own hearts.

The Holy Spirit enables real repentance. As Ephesians records, we are saved for a purpose: “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” In this season of Advent, each Christian has the opportunity to take *repentance* seriously. How will we change in response to God’s call?

### *Is reading the Bible a part of your Advent season?*

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

## Second Sunday of Advent

Luke 3:1-20

1. Luke, the inspired historian, includes historical contexts (vs. 1-2). Why are these details included in his Gospel account? How are they helpful?
2. Who was John the Baptist? (read Luke 1:5-25; 57-66 for his background and birth) What was his role in respect to Jesus? (vs. 16-17)
3. What question was repeatedly asked of John (vs. 10, vs. 12, vs. 14)? Summarize John’s response.

### For Family Reflection

4. Review vs. 3 of this chapter. Have you received a baptism of repentance? Have you received God’s forgiveness in your baptism? Review Luther’s answer (Small Catechism) to the question “What benefits does Baptism give?”
5. What else do you know about John the Baptist (clothes, lifestyle, location)? See Matthew 3 and Mark 1.
6. Look at the Advent hymns in your hymnal. Do you find any references to John the Baptist? How does John’s message speak to us today?