

Advent 1

November 29, 2026 (Year B)



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Not only have such great strides been made in the world of commerce, but also in the spiritual field have there been great changes. Error, sin, and falsehood have never held sway in the world as in these last centuries...

*such sins cry to heaven, and so provoke
and defy the last day that it must
soon break in upon them.*

– Martin Luther –

Sermon, Second Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9

Israel had rebelled against the Lord God and things were getting ugly between Creator and creature. In the previous chapter of Isaiah, God had left Israel to the devices of their enemies because of their idolatry and distrust of him. His judgment against them was like grapes being trampled in the winepress (Isaiah 63:3). But then the Lord relented from his anger as his people cried out to him to remember them, even as they remembered all that God had done for them in the days of Abraham and Moses. They cried out to the Lord to come down from heaven and save them from their enemies. They acknowledged the wonders of the Lord Almighty who had done great things for them, things they never imagined or dreamed possible. The people affirmed God's patience and God's care for those who wait patiently for him to act.

- *Why are we humans so impatient for God to act even as we know that God will act in his own time?*

Isaiah 64:6-7 is a confession of sin, "in our sins we have been a long time... we have become like one who is unclean... there is no one who calls upon your name." Their confession of sin was followed by an acknowledgement that God is the potter and Israel is the clay that is formed by his hand.

- *In what ways does God form us through forgiveness and mercy?*
- *How is our acknowledgement of our sin an invitation for the potter to shape us into who he wants us to be?*

Psalms 80:1-7

The psalmist centered this hymn around Joseph, son of the patriarch Jacob. Joseph had an important role in feeding the tribes of Jacob during the famine in Egypt. God led young Joseph through the bitterness of sibling rivalry, and his brothers' plot to do away with him for good. Out of this Joseph and his brothers, God created his vine that was led through the wilderness and replanted in the promised land.

- *How was Joseph's life important for the sustainability of Israel?*
- *Why is our family history important for our lives today?*

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Spiritual gifts have often been a source of strife within the church, debating over who has what and who doesn't. Assessing the giftedness of others or taking pride in our own gifts all too often creates a hierarchy among believers. This was certainly the case among the Christians in Corinth.

Their constant ranking and comparison led to endless conflict in their congregation. Addressing that conflict was a key purpose of Paul's letters to the Corinthian congregation. Right at the beginning he made a declaration about spiritual gifts, giving thanks that they are not lacking in any spiritual gift. He started right out by leveling the hierarchy the Corinthians had so carefully constructed.

- *What comes to mind when you hear a term like "spiritual gifts"?*
- *Do you think of some people as more spiritually gifted than others?*
- *How do you understand the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit?*
- *How do the gifts of the Spirit aid us during this time of waiting for the kingdom to come?*

Mark 13:24-37

Speculation about the end times has been a preoccupation of Christians since the day of Christ's ascension. Wondering, watching, and waiting have been the lot of the people of God. In every generation there has been someone who couldn't resist the temptation to interpret signs and events and start the clock running on Christ's return. And every generation has passed on, still waiting for the day of the Lord.

- *In what sense can a preoccupation with time-lines and prediction of the end times stem from a lack of faith?*

As he was approaching his crucifixion, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the coming of a new age, but he did not give them many details. He warned them of signs and spoke of budding trees heralding spring, but he gave them no timeline. He simply told them to stay awake, keep their eyes open, and to be ready. There are no days off for God's chosen ones. We are called to be in a perpetual state of readiness.

- *What does it look like to be ready for the return of Christ? Is the coming of Christ something for us to fear?*
- *What kinds of signs do you expect to signify Christ's return?*

Jesus spoke of the angels coming to gather in his elect. The image of election can be disconcerting at times. It carries with it the fear of being absolutely without control of our situation. It certainly sounds as if everything, the timing of the new kingdom, the signs that will precede it, and who will be received into it, is in God's hands.

- *Why does the notion that the future is in God's hands and not ours cause us to worry?*
- *In what sense is God's election and control the only thing that can provide any real hope in the face of the future?*



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Some here take the “land” in a single sense... to mean the blessed Virgin...I believe that the word of the Holy Spirit is not thus to be limited to one of these three earths but refers to all three at once: the Virgin, mankind, and the literal earth. For in fact all three have been blessed at the same time...

*– Martin Luther –
Lecture on Psalm 85*

Isaiah 40:1–11

After dire warnings of the punishment that was about to be inflicted upon God’s chosen ones, Isaiah shifts gears in chapter 40 with a word of comfort. God’s wrath has an end date. He will not punish his people forever. And when their term of punishment is over, they will return to their homeland. The highways prepared by the Babylonians for their pagan festivals will give way to the royal highway of the Living God, and all the nations will see the glory of the God of Israel.

- *In what ways does judgment always come before comfort?*
- *Reflect on the context of our culture that despises “judgment.” Why is judgment necessary in our lives? How have you experienced God’s comfort in the face of your own sin or in the face of corporate sin?*

Isaiah compared God’s people to grass. Their faith was fleeting. It withered away when they came into contact with the breath of God. In contrast to the inconstancy of his people, God’s word endures from age to age. The punishment he inflicted on his people did not (and does not) mean abandonment of his people. God’s enduring promise will be revealed to God’s people once again; that is why it was necessary to send a voice into the wilderness – to grab the attention of God’s children and urge them to prepare for his coming into their midst.

- *Does this passage reinforce or undermine the notion that God is merciful? How does this declaration of God’s enduring Word bring comfort?*
- *How does this passage relate to the promise of the Messiah?*

Psalm 85

Part of being the people of God meant not only living in a covenant relationship with him, but also inhabiting his holy land. The psalmist praised the Lord for his providence concerning the house of Jacob and the land of Jacob. God’s forgiveness covered the sins of his people who had been serially unfaithful. To be apart from the land that was given to Israel was as much of a curse as to be separated from a relationship with God. Luther discussed the idea that “land” in this psalm referred to the Virgin Mary who was the fertile ground that bore the blessed fruit – Jesus. (Lecture on Psalm 85, LW, Vol. 11)

- *In what ways does God’s forgiveness and mercy create a mutual faithfulness between Creator and creature?*
- *In what ways is God’s sending of his Son a reflection of his mercy?*

2 Peter 3:8–14

Most of us do not specialize in waiting. Impatience and instant gratification have come to define us as a people. Waiting in traffic, waiting in the checkout line, or waiting for our problems to cease and desist bring out the worst in us. But Peter reminds us that our time is not God’s time. Our sense of how and when things ought to happen does not control God’s action. God works on his own timeline with his own purposes that are beyond our limited understanding. Our desire to speed things along is nothing more than original sin at work, pushing us, once again, to doubt that God actually knows how to be God.

- *What sinful inclinations reveal themselves in you when you are forced to wait? How do you handle that?*
- *How might you offer care for those who are playing an anxious waiting game themselves?*
- *Given our problem with waiting, when we stop to consider how long the church has been waiting for the new kingdom it causes us some concern. Sometimes it even causes doubt. What if our waiting is in vain?*
- *Does the delay in Christ’s return impact your faith in any way?*
- *How is our witness during the waiting shaped by our hope for the coming kingdom?*

Mark 1:1–8

Mark’s Gospel opens with a strange fragment of a sentence. “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” It sounds more like a chapter heading than an opening line to a narrative. And from there, Mark tells us, not about Jesus, but about John the Baptist. The beginning of the good news of Jesus actually begins with the story of John.

But that opening fragment tells us a great deal. The One whose story is about to be told is the Christ. He is the Messiah of God, the Anointed One, the One who will redeem Israel. And, more than that, he is the Son of God. He is no ordinary prophet. He is not one among many. Everything else we read in this gospel will be shaped by the fact that we, the readers, already know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

- *How does the knowledge that Jesus is the Christ affect your understanding of the events described in Mark’s gospel? Does it affect your views of the other people we meet in the gospel?*
- *If Mark didn’t begin his gospel this way would it be obvious to you that Jesus is the Christ based on the events that unfolded?*

Advent 3

December 13, 2026 (Year B)



Through faith our sins become, not ours but Christ's, upon whom God laid the sins of us all and who bore our sins. He is the Lamb of God which bears the sins of the world. All the righteousness of Christ, in turn, becomes ours.

– Martin Luther –

On the 37th of the 95 Theses

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Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

This is the passage that Jesus would use in the synagogue as his public ministry begins in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). The prophet Isaiah spoke here of the year of the Lord's favor for his people. God's will is for his people to experience healing, wholeness, and freedom. The poetic language of this passage depicts a nation rising up out of the ashes of shame and destruction. Out of ruins will the Lord rebuild his people. Justice will reign over those who have been neglected, injured, and cast aside. Israel will turn away from their unjust actions and turn to the Lord who will renew his covenant with them. Salvation is made possible because of God's great love for his people who will be known because of the work of the Lord who is faithful.

- How are God's people known only because of what he does and has done in the world?
- Why is it never about what we do, even if we do good things in his name?

Here in Isaiah and in other places in the Scriptures, the idea of being clothed in salvation connotes a change of reality for those who wear "robes of righteousness," "armor of God," (Ephesians 6:11-17), and "humility" (1 Peter 5:5).

- Why are images of fine and fancy garments representing God's will in our lives something that we can all relate to?
- How does the image of bridal clothing signal that Israel is of the utmost importance to God?

Psalms 126

This psalm points to the changing circumstances God has in store for his people. The Lord is at work restoring the fortunes of his people. The psalmist began, not with a prayer, but with a remembrance of times gone by where God's people rejoiced in the Lord's restoration. Even the nations surrounding Israel noticed that something good was happening.

- Is it easier to see God's hand in the lives of others than it is in your own? Why or why not?
- When you see the goodness of God in the lives of others, in what ways does that bolster your faith in him?

The psalmist continued by mentioning the plight of the sower. Those who planted seeds in sorrow will reap a bountiful harvest in joy. For Israel this psalm points to their sinfulness that was the direct cause of exile to Babylon. Even so, the Lord will bring them back home and there will be joyful celebration and a new beginning.

- How does our sin cause us sorrow, pain and exile from God? Where does the joy come from in the aftermath of separation?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Paul concluded his first letter to the Thessalonians with a word of commendation, instructing believers on how to conduct themselves as they awaited the coming day of the Lord. Their lives were to be defined by prayer and thanksgiving. This, Paul told them, is God's will for them. And because God is faithful, even these tasks are in his hands. Even their prayer, thanksgiving, and blameless conduct, is only accomplished through the Lord's faithfulness.

- What does it mean to pray without ceasing? How are the lives of Christians shaped by prayerfulness?
- What does it mean for us to "abstain from every evil"? Is this something we are capable of?
- How does God's Spirit keep us sound and blameless?

John 1:6-8, 19-28

In this week's Gospel we get another glimpse into the work of John the Baptist. Unlike Mark, John does not give much information about how successful John's ministry at the Jordan was. There is no talk of massive crowds from Jerusalem and the Judean countryside. Instead, John's interactions are with priests and Levites sent out to question him.

But John's purpose is consistent in both Gospels. He is not the light. He is not the Messiah. He is not the one they should be looking for. He is simply there to prepare the way for one much greater than he is. He is a voice crying out in the barren places, speaking God's word to herald the coming of God's anointed one.

- Why do you think the priests and Levites wanted to know more about John?
- How important are credentials when determining who has the authority to speak God's word?

John's purpose was to testify to the light that all might believe through him. But over time John's testimony became of less and less significance. Believers came to know Jesus through the work of the Spirit in Him.

- Did John fail or succeed in his mission to make Christ known? What obstacles stood in the way of his proclamation? What ultimately came from John's teaching?
- What was John able to proclaim about Jesus? What are we able to proclaim about Jesus? How are these proclamations similar or different?

Advent 4

December 20, 2026 (Year B)



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

(Mary) might have doubted, but she shut her eyes and trusted in God who could bring all things to pass, even though common sense were against it; and because she believed, God did to her as he had said.

– Martin Luther–

Martin Luther's Christmas Book, p.14

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

King David is a complex figure in Scripture: at once a heroic leader, while at the same time a shameful sinner. He is the perfect example of what Luther meant when he wrote that believers are “*simul justis et peccator*.” He was both a beacon of faithfulness and a complete moral failure. But again and again he reflected a faith and trust in the God of his fathers that defined his character.

Here in 2 Samuel, David declared to Nathan his intent to build a temple for the God of Israel. David now rested comfortably in a palace and found it unseemly for God to continue to have only a tent. But God was not interested in any temples David might build for him; He was perfectly content to dwell among his people in a tent. God had other plans in the works; God was going to build a kingdom, an everlasting house for David. It is God's building, not David's, that will stand the test of time.

- In what ways are we like David in wanting to build dwelling places for the Lord? In what ways do our concerns for the trappings of religion reflect our original sin?
- How did David's plan for a temple reflect his desire, not simply to honor God, but to rein God in?
- What was the “house” that God would build for David and his ancestors? Why would God make everlasting promises to such profoundly sinful people – both then and now?

Psalms 89:1–5 (19–29)

Psalms 89 is a song of praise in response to God's everlasting covenant with David. The promises of God moved David to sing with joy and thanksgiving. Here the right relationship between God and his chosen ones is reflected. David does not point to the work of his own hands as the offering of something to God. He does not point to a temple he has built and bear witness to his own faithfulness and piety. Rather, he points to the unwavering faithfulness of the only one who knows what true faithfulness is.

- In what ways does God's faithfulness inspire his people to be faithful? Have you seen that in your own life of faith?

The Hebrew word that is translated in verse 1 as “steadfast love” is *chesed*. *Chesed* has a depth of meaning that encompasses not only unswerving and unfailing love, but also loyalty, faithfulness, mercy, and kindness.

- Which of these qualities of *chesed* do you find lacking in our world today? Why do you think that is?

Romans 16:25–27

This doxological ending to Romans is unique among Paul's letters. It may reflect the fact that the letter to the Romans had come to be used in the public worship of the church and the formal words of praise in these verses served a liturgical purpose.

Among the many things to be said about God here is that he strengthens his chosen ones and brings about the obedience of faith. As we near the end of the Advent season, and as we anticipate continued waiting for the new kingdom, these words remind us that we are not the source or our strength or the source of our faith. Our hope is entirely dependent upon the wisdom of God through Jesus Christ.

- What are some of the claims this doxology makes about God?
- What is the mystery that was kept secret but now has been disclosed? How have the mysteries of God been disclosed to you? How does the Gospel strengthen you?

Luke 1:26–38

Of all the words that might describe this visit from the angel Gabriel, “perplexing” seems especially apt. Here we have a young girl, likely a teenager, engaged, but not yet married, and with no advance warning, no prior indications, she was selected to be the mother of the Lord. She was selected to bear the incarnate God. Gabriel called her “favored one” and Mary wondered what that could possibly mean. Her life to that point had not provided evidence of favored status.

- To be “favored” does not mean you are better than others, it means that someone has “done you a favor.” In what sense was Mary favored (shown grace) by God?

As if the greeting itself weren't perplexing enough, the message the angel brought raised things to a whole new level. The child she would bear on behalf of the Living God would reign on David's throne forever.

After hearing all that Gabriel had to say, Mary uttered one of the most astounding sentences in all of scripture. “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” She did not protest. She did not put on a display of humility; she did not ask more questions. She simply entrusted herself to God's purposes.

- Where do you think Mary's faith came from? How did she find a way to entrust herself to God? What does her response show us about faithfulness and obedience?