

Last Sunday of the Church Year

First recite the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the weekly section of the Small Catechism. Then read the Proper and assigned Scripture reading followed by the devotion. Conclude with singing the hymn of the week.



Weekly Catechism section: *Seventh Petition*
(*Luther's Small Catechism*)

Hymn of the Week: *Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying* (TLH #609)

Monday - Introit (Jeremiah 29:11-12; Psalm 85:1, 7, 9, 11)

Read Psalm Jeremiah 29.

Our *Introit* is taken from Jeremiah 29 and Psalm 85. Jeremiah 29 is a letter to the children of Israel who were carried from Jerusalem to Babylon. They were hoping that they would be able to return very soon, but Jeremiah was warning the people that because of their idolatry God was sending the King of Babylon to destroy completely Jerusalem and the temple. So Jeremiah sends a letter to the captives in Babylon, urging them to settle in for a long wait. Build houses and live in Babylon. Pray for the welfare of Babylon, he says. Jeremiah explained to his captive brothers that they being chastised by God, but he did not leave them without hope. He assured them that God knows the plans he has for them. God would work all things out for their good, who have been called according to his purpose. After seventy years God would bring a remnant of his people back to Jerusalem as a sign of his promise to all who fear him that he will hear their prayers and pleas for mercy.

So this brings us to Psalm 85. This is a Psalm written by the sons of Korah, a line of priests whom David put in charge of music in the temple. They likely wrote this after the temple was rebuilt, or perhaps while the temple was being rebuilt. The Psalm praises God for bringing his people back to their land, for turning his anger away, and for revealing his salvation to those who fear him. These saints prayed this Psalm with a fervent hope in the coming Savior who would bring righteousness down from heaven, who would make atonement for our sins, and who would cause truth to sprout up from the ground, raising us from the dead, even as he died and was raised for us. As we look to the last Day, we live in our temporary homes. We build houses, work, and pray for the country where we live. But the true righteousness we look to is not in civil affairs. It is the righteousness of our Savior, Jesus, which covers all our sins. This is the righteousness

by which he will come to be our Judge and return us fully to the land around the throne of God the Father and of the Lamb. Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly! Amen.

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Tuesday - Old Testament Lesson (Isaiah 65:17-25)

Read Isaiah 65.

Part of the curse of death is that we must labor in vain. A farmer plans, plants, and spends hours, days, weeks, and months preparing and working, and then a flood comes and wipes out his crop. Or it doesn't rain, and his crop dries up. A woman cares for her unborn child the best she can, staying as healthy as she can while she is pregnant. Then there are complications, and the child is not responding. The child is dead. They labored in vain. All their work was for nothing. This is another name for death. You see, death is not just what we each experience at the end of our lives. We must experience it throughout our lives. This is why we pray the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90, "Teach me to number my days, that I may gain a heart of wisdom." We are always in the midst of death, and the evidence is all around us. When we recognize this then we will not be overcome with surprise when the final day comes. We know that all things are passing away. So when the Bridegroom, Jesus, comes to judge the living and the dead, we have not been standing in the dark, unaware that this world is dying.

And as we recognize the death of this world we hope for the new life to come where there will be no death. Isaiah describes it as a new Jerusalem where a child will no longer live only a few days. Instead the child shall live 100 years. That is a figure of speech, simply meaning that the child will fulfill his days. He won't die. The sinners who do not take refuge in God's mercy in Christ will be cut off. But those children who have been born of God's Word will find eternal life in full through Jesus. This is God's promise to us. And this is why St. Paul says (1 Cor 15:58), "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." Your tears over death are not in vain. Your repentance and regret over your sin is not in vain. Your toils to do your duty are never in vain when they are done with faith in Christ. Because while our works are always unworthy and deserving of the vanity of death, Christ establishes the work of our hands (Ps. 90:17). And he will establish us finally in the end.

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Wednesday - Gradual (*Psalm 45:14-15*)

Read Psalm 45.

Our *Gradual* comes from Psalm 45, written by the sons of Korah. This is a royal love song, similar to the Song of Solomon. It portrays the King as well as the princess who is brought to the King, accompanied with her maids. This Psalm makes abundantly clear who the King is. He is the Lord. He is God. He is God whom God has exalted. In other words, he is the Son of the Father, very God of very God. So this royal daughter or daughter of a king is the church. She is royal not by natural birth, but by adoption by God himself, being wedded to the Lord the King. So the Psalm says, "Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him."

The bride of Christ is the daughter of God and the mother of all spiritual children. These are all titles given to the church. The church is the whole collection of believers gathered together by the Word of God. They are washed clean by the blood of Christ through baptism (Eph 5:26). They are begotten of God through the Word, born of water and the Spirit (John 1:13; 3:5). And in this church each Christian is nurtured with the Word of God proclaimed by her ministers and confessed by her members. As a mother guards her children, so does the church guard the truth which makes her free (Gal 4:26; 1 Tim 3:15). This church will be ushered into the wedding feast, the eternal banquet of the Lamb. The virgins and companions who accompany her represent all those who love her. These are the true members of the church. They are looking forward to the coming of the King with joyful anticipation. It's good for us to consider ourselves as both the royal daughter being brought to the king as well as her virgin companions. In the first image we consider ourselves together as his church. But as her virgin companions, we consider ourselves individually as ones who watch and pray, waiting for the consummation of God's promises. So even as you watch, rejoice! Rejoice not only for yourself, but for the whole church, all those called to Christ and nurtured by his Word.

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Thursday - Epistle (*1 Thessalonians 5:1-11*)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5.

Those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. Sleeping and getting drunk represent two things. Sleeping obviously is not itself a sin, but it represents the negligence to pay attention to God's

Word. Getting drunk is a sin, but it has a much deeper significance than the vice of overindulging. Drunkenness is a sign of God's wrath. This sign is given throughout the Scriptures (Job 21:10; Ps 75:8; Is 51:17; Jer 25:15, 27). People who drink of God's cup of wrath stagger and stumble like they are drunk. So drunkenness is much worse than simply having two or three too many drinks. It is a foretaste of wrath and eternal slavery to sin. So stay awake and be sober! This is the warning we get from St. Paul. But St. Paul doesn't warn us in order to bring us to despair. Quite the contrary! He says: "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."

So our staying awake and being sober is not based upon our own ability to stay out of trouble. It is based upon the fact that God has set us free from condemnation. God has made us alive. By the death of Christ, Jesus drank the staggering cup of God's wrath in our place. And it is on the basis of this that we are given the strength to watch for the coming of our Lord in sobriety. Nothing we can do will increase our love and longing for our Lord's appearing. Only the blood of Jesus, which cleanses our consciences of guilt can turn us from dead works to serving the living God (Heb 9:14). Only the anticipation of that crown of righteousness that Christ has promised to us can make us lovers of his appearing (2 Tim 4:8). Only the preaching of the gospel can fill our lanterns with the oil of faith, keeping us alive together in Christ whether we are awake or sleeping. So as children of the light and not the darkness, may we always live in the light of God's grace by which he has set us free from sin and wrath.

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Friday - Alleluia Verse (Revelation 21:2)

Read Revelation 21.

One of the most direct attacks on the gospel today is known as dispensationalism. This is the teaching that God has dealt with people in different ways depending on the era of time or dispensation. It teaches that God provides different avenues to salvation depending on the dispensation. So the Jews have a special dispensation through the law of Moses and the covenant God made with Abraham, and, at least for now, the other nations have Christ who gives everyone the opportunity to come to the Father through faithful obedience to him. The dispensationalists vary from sect to sect, but this false teaching reveals itself especially in the idea that the physical, political state of Israel and Jerusalem as we know it today is where Jesus will rule here on earth, overcoming the rest of the nations with physical force.

This teaching is that it clouds our eternal hope of salvation with an earthly hope. It turns our battle of faith into a political battle. Now, it's true that God made physical promises, protecting Jerusalem many times, bringing his people back from Babylon as he had promised (Jer 29:10). But his promise to bring all nations to Jerusalem is not a physical promise of political success. It is a promise that God's Word will go out to all the nations -- "The Law shall go forth from Zion, the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Is 2:3; Mic 4:2)." So in our *Alleluia* verse from Revelation 21, Jerusalem is described as the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26). She is a bride adorned for her husband, a description of the holy church, the bride of Christ, purchased by his own blood (Eph 5:25ff). God kept his earthly promises to Jerusalem. But attached to those earthly promises were eternal promises. This means that the earthly Jerusalem and the earthly temple were only shadows of God's eternal promises. So thank God he brought a physical remnant back to Jerusalem by the decree of King Cyrus (Is 44:28; Ezr 1:1). But understand that this was all part of his plan to bring his Son into the world. This was God's original promise (Gen 3:15). Therefore, we look for the new Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven. Today it is seen only by faith. But when the Bridegroom appears, she will be revealed.

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Saturday - Gospel (Matthew 25:1-13)

Read Matthew 25.

Both the wise and foolish virgins fall asleep. But Jesus tells us to stay awake. What did the wise virgin do that the foolish did not do? They simply took oil with them in their vessels. But they both dozed off and fell asleep. At the end of the day some had oil while others didn't. Everyone gets set in his ways. Everyone dozes off and gets tired. This parable is not so much of a great example from the wise virgins. It is rather a warning that we know neither the day nor the hour of Christ's return.

So stay awake, just as Jesus says! The oil is such an essential part of the lamp, and yet it is so easy to take for granted. And this is how faith and God's Word are. Of course we believe in Jesus! Of course we are Christians! We learned this stuff in Sunday School, VBS, Christmas programs, Bible Camp, and Catechism class. How easy it is to treat it as such a little thing! As Jesus warns his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Stay awake! For the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Even the wise virgins have the weakness of their flesh. Even they doze off, not thinking so much about what the sermon was about or what God's Word says about this or that topic. Even Christians have the weak, sleepy

flesh, which sinks into the comfort of preoccupation with a game or a pointless conversation. But when they are woken, will they have the oil? When the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth? If this causes you discomfort and uncertainty in yourself, then good! It should! This is the urgency of the message of Christ! Now is the day of salvation! Now is when God's Word is still being proclaimed! The day will come when people will run to and fro and will not find the Word of the Lord (Amos 8:11-12). Until then, may we and our children find our only comfort and our only security in the gospel, which freely fills our lamps with oil! God's Word is certain. It teaches us the riches of God's mercy in Christ who gave his life into the depths of degradation for our sins. When we learn not to find certainty and security in anything else, then we learn to rest only in this sure Word. So whether we are awake or asleep, we live with him.

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609

Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying

Matt. 25: 1-13

8. 9. 8. 8. 9. 8. 8. 6. 6. 4. 4. 4. 8.

Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme

Philipp Nicolai, 1599

Tr., Catherine Winkworth, 1863, alt.

Wachet auf

Philipp Nicolai, 1599

1 "Wake, a - wake, for night is fly - ing," The watch-men on the
 2 Zi - on hears the watch-men sing - ing, And all her heart with
 3 Now let all the heav'n's a - dore Thee, Let men and an - gels

heights are cry - ing; "A - wake, Je - ru - sa - lem, a - rise!" Mid - night hears
 joy is spring - ing, She wakes, she ris - es from her gloom; For her Lord
 sing be - fore Thee, With harp and cymbal's clearest tone. Of one pearl

the wel - come voic - es And at the thrill - ing cry re - joic - es:
 comes down all - glo - rious, The strong in grace, in truth vic - to - rious,
 each shin - ing por - tal, Where, dwell - ing with the choir im - mor - tal,

"Oh, where are ye, ye vir - gins wise? The Bridegroom comes, a - wake!
 Her Star is ris'n, her Light is come. "Now come, Thou Bless - ed One,
 We gath - er round Thy ra - diant throne. No vi - sion ev - er brought,

Your lamps with glad-ness take! Hal - le - lu - jah! With bri-dal care
 Lord Je - sus, God's own Son, Hail! Ho-san-na! The joy-ful call
 No ear hath ev - er caught, Such great glo-ry; There-fore will we

Your-selves pre - pare To meet the Bridegroom, who is near."
 We an - swer all And fol - low to the nup-tial hall."
 E - ter - nal - ly Sing hymns of praise and joy to Thee. A-men.