

Week of Christmas

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: *Sixth Commandment and Meaning (Luther's Small Catechism)*

Hymn of the Week: *Thou Light of Gentile Nations; (TLH 138)*



Monday - Introit (Psalm 93:5, 2, 1, 3-4)

Read Psalm 93.

Your testimonies are very sure. These words, which come from Psalm 93, are how we begin this first Sunday of Christmas. Maybe you have heard the phrase, "Time will tell." Time will tell if someone's word is true. God testified -- he promised -- that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, the devil (Gen 3:15). He testified that the virgin would conceive and bear a Son (Is 7:14). Time would tell if God's testimonies were true. And time did tell. St. Paul writes (Gal 4:4-5), "When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

What St. Paul says is very profound. Time didn't tell that God's testimonies are sure in the same way time tells that any carnal predictions are valid. It didn't just happen by chance. God's testimonies were not merely probable. The Psalmist says that they are *very sure*. At the fullness of time the Son of God was born of a woman to redeem us from sin and death, giving us the adoption as sons. This means that God not only made a prediction. He actually worked history out in such a way that Christ our Savior would be born in Bethlehem two millenia ago. Therefore we confess with the Psalmist that God's testimonies are sure. Christ's testimony is very sure that his body and blood given to us to eat and to drink did indeed

avail before God when he made full satisfaction for all sins. God's testimony is therefore true that he works all things out in history for our good, who have been called according to his eternal purpose in Christ (Rom 8:28). He who is from everlasting established his throne in human flesh and blood. He has sanctified our very nature, cleansing it from sin by his own obedience under God's law. And this throne is established from of old, before the world began. Before sin even entered our human nature, he decreed -- he testified -- that our flesh would be his flesh, our blood would be his blood, our bodies would be his eternal house and dwelling place, and his majesty, his strength, his righteousness, and his life would be ours. How greatly must our God love us! We may depend on this sure testimony and depart in eternal peace.

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Tuesday - Old Testament Lesson (Isaiah 11:1-5)
Read Isaiah 11.

Throughout the Old Testament we follow the promise of the Seed, first given in Genesis 3:15 after Adam and his wife fell into sin. God said to the devil, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her Seed. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel." Later on, God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that this Seed would pass through their lineage and bring blessing to the whole world. The Seed passed through Judah, all the way through Jesse, his son David, and his son, Solomon.

But then something terrible happened. Solomon turned away from God, and after he died the kingdom of Israel was divided. Although it appears from his writings that Solomon repented in his old age, it was too late for the kingdom of Israel. After it was divided during the reign of his son, Rehoboam, it would never be the same. Kings from both the northern kingdom as well as the kingdom in Jerusalem were turning away from God's promise. God sent his prophets to declare that he would destroy both kingdoms. The house of David, the son of Jesse, was being reduced to a stump of a once healthy tree. It was a solemn message to hear. But then God makes this promise through his prophet: "There shall come forth a Rod from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." Here is the promise of the Seed restored. This Seed is the Lord himself who would fulfill his Word. He would branch out into a branch of righteousness, as Jeremiah foretells (Jer 23:5). And the Spirit of God will

be upon him. This is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who caused the Son to be conceived in the womb of the Virgin. The righteousness of this world only ends in stumps and decaying kingdoms. But the righteousness of the Branch bears eternal fruit.

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Wednesday - Gradual (Psalm 45:1-2)

Read Psalm 45.

The first chapter of Hebrews gives a comparison between Christ and the angels in which we clearly see that Christ is not merely one of the angels. He is the creator of the angels. He is God. The author then quotes from Psalm 45: "To the Son He said, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.'" Psalm 45 is where we get our *Gradual* for today. This Psalm is a song to the King, who is identified as God. And yet, he is identified as appointed by God. Here we find a clear teaching of the distinction yet oneness of the Father and the Son in the Old Testament. It is therefore appropriate to have it as our *Gradual*. We sing: "You are fairer than the sons of men; grace is poured upon Your lips. I recite my composition concerning the King; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer." This sets us up to hear about God sending his Son to be born of a woman, finally leading to our Gospel Lesson where Jesus is presented at the Temple.

Christ is fairer than the sons of men. He is not merely a man. He is God in the flesh. But what is the primary characteristic of him as God in the flesh? It is that grace is poured upon his lips. He is anointed with the oil of gladness. In other words, he is the God of grace and gladness, the God of good news of salvation. Jesus is not a king who rules with earthly force, swords, guns, and coercion. He is the King who rules with his grace. His peace guards our hearts. This sets him apart from all other kings and rulers. Simeon sang that he saw God's salvation. Anna spoke of him to all who were looking for redemption in Israel. This is the God we have. He is our Savior and Redeemer from sin. +++

Thursday - Epistle (Galatians 4:1-7)

Read Galatians 3:26-4:31.

During Christmas we celebrate that God, the Son of the Father, has come into the flesh to be our Savior. He has been born of a woman to share our flesh and blood eternally. The Savior has come. He has taken our sinful, human nature, united it to himself, paid the debt we owed, and made our nature pure and spotless. By making our frail flesh and blood his own, the Son of the Father has made us children of God and heirs of heaven.

But when we consider the sinful world around us and the corrupt desires that still cling to our nature, we often feel the bondage and slavery to sin within our sinful nature. This is because we have not yet reached maturity as God's children. St. Paul says that an heir, while he is still in the house, is no different than a slave. That is to say, as long as we have to live in our sinful flesh and in this sinful world, then we must still experience the slavery of sin. But thanks be to God that our inheritance doesn't depend on how we experience God. Even though we are not yet mature, even though we have not yet rid ourselves of our sinful nature, which is enslaved to unrighteousness, we have God's promise that we are free children and heirs of his kingdom through Christ our Savior. We are not in bondage to sin, even though we feel the bondage declared by God's law. Even though we must continue to learn to listen to God's Word through trials, temptations, and afflictions, we have God's promise that we are free from all of these things. Why? Because even though the fullness of righteousness has not yet appeared within us, it has been fulfilled outside of us. At the fullness of time God sent forth his Son, not only born of a woman, but also putting himself under the same law that holds sinners under the bondage of judgment. He fully bore all of this in our place. So even though we don't experience this fully yet, we have it fully in Christ. Even now, though we anguish against the sin of our flesh, the Spirit of the Son is given to us to cry out faithfully to our Father.

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Friday - Alleluia (Psalm 93:1)

Read Psalm 93 again.

Our *Alleluia* is a repetition of the *Introit* from Psalm 93:1. "The LORD reigns, he is clothed with majesty. The LORD is clothed. He has girded himself with strength." This sets us up for the Gospel lesson in which our Lord is presented to the temple for the first time. The temple represented God's presence among his people. In fact, it was where God had placed his name to dwell with them. His testimonies, which spoke of his desire

to dwell with them, proved to be true, when the Lord suddenly came to his temple. Here he was clothed with flesh and blood.

The LORD is clothed. He assumed our own flesh and blood at the fulness of time. And in our baptism he clothes us with himself (Gal 3:27). The Lord who is from everlasting, whose throne has been established from of old, not establishes his throne among men. He who sends the floods and controls the waves now comes in meekness to calm our sin-troubled hearts. He comes in such humility that Simeon may carry him up in his arms and rejoice that the glory of God's salvation has been fulfilled. The promised Seed has come. He is clothed in majesty, even as he hides himself under such meek attire.

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Saturday - Gospel (Luke 2:22-40)

Read Luke 2.

Why do we sing the *Nunc Dimittis*? You know, that song we sing right after the Lord's Supper: "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." *Nunc* is Latin for "Now," and *Dimittis* is Latin for "You let depart." Why do we sing this song after the Lord's Supper? This is the song that Simeon sang when he held the baby Jesus in his hands. He was told by the Holy Spirit that he would see the Lord's Christ before he died. And so he confessed that he could then depart in peace. In other words, he can die now!

So there you go! That's why we sing it after we eat the Lord's Supper. We are confessing with Simeon that we can die now! Because, even though we have not seen Jesus with our own eyes, we have truly eaten and drunk with our mouths the very body and blood of Jesus that he offered up for our sins. We are confessing that the bread and the wine are not mere representatives, but the very body and blood of Jesus as his words declare. We can't see and feel the body and blood of Jesus, but we take our Lord's Word for it, because, as we confess in the Introit, "Your decrees are very trustworthy. (Ps. 93:5)"

This body and blood was given up for all to pay for the sins of the Word. So Jesus offers it to us Christians to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. And, as we learn in the Small Catechism, wherever there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation (Small Catechism VI, 3).

We taste our salvation, hidden and wrapped under bread and wine. Our peace with God is declared to us when we, coming with repentant hearts

and faith in his promise, eat this body and blood. We therefore sing this song with Simeon as we confess the Lord's death until he returns (1 Cor 11:26).

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Thou Light of Gentile Nations

Luke 2: 32

Herr Jesu, Licht der Heiden

Johann Franck, 1674

Tr., Catherine Winkworth, 1868, alt.

7. 6. 7. 6. D.

Valet will ich dir geben

Melchior Teschner, 1613

1 Thou Light of Gen-tile na - tions, Thou Sav-ior from a - bove,
2 Yea, Lord, Thy ser-vants meet Thee In ev - 'ry ho - ly place
3 Be Thou our Joy and Bright-ness, Our Oheer in pain and loss,
4 Let us, O Lord, be faith - ful Like Sim-eon to the end,

Drawn by Thy Spir-it's lead - ing, We come with joy and love
Where Thy true Word has prom-ised That we should see Thy face.
Our Sun in dark-est ter - ror, The Glo - ry round our cross,
So that his prayer ex - ul - tant May from our hearts as - cend:

In - to Thy ho - ly tem - ple And wait with ear-nest mind
To-day Thou still dost grant us Who gath-er round Thee here
A Star for sink-ing spir - its, A Bea-con in dis - tress,
"O Lord, now let Thy ser - vant De - part in peace, I pray,

As Sim-eon once had wait-ed His God and Lord to find.
In arms of faith to bear Thee As did that a - ged seer.
Phy - si - cian, Friend, in sick-ness, In death our Hap - pi - ness.
Since I have seen my Sav - ior And here be-held His day." A-men.

5 My Savior, I behold Thee
With faith's enlightened eye;
Of Thee no foe can rob me,
His threats I can defy.
Within Thy heart abiding,
As Thou, O Lord, in me,
Death can no longer frighten
Nor part my soul from Thee.

6 Lord, here on earth Thou seemest
At times to frown on me,
And through my tears I often
Can scarce distinguish Thee;
But in the heavenly mansions
Shall nothing dim my sight;
There shall I see Thy glory
In never-changing light.