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Christ Shows Up _____

Essay by Rev. Chad Kyler



Every Advent, we speak of Christ's coming. We strike matches, light candles, sing our way through hope and longing. Christ came once in flesh, born of Mary, laid in a manger. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

But what about the long stretch in between? We spend so much time rummaging around in nostalgia for Bethlehem or nervously scanning the horizon for the end. Meanwhile, we overlook the most startling thing of all: Christ comes now, every week, right here, in Word and Sacrament.

We are not abandoned to drift between two distant bookends of history. The same Christ who once came lowly and will one day come blazing comes to us today in sheer mercy. He comes in preaching and in the Supper. Not as a memory or metaphor, but as the living Lord who insists on being present through the very means he chose.

It is both unsettling and comforting. Christ does not come because we have managed to impress him. He comes by invading our ordinary lives again and again with something as plain as speech, bread, and wine. We shuffle into church thinking we are doing our duty, singing, giving, showing up, but the truth is the reverse: God is acting on us. Every Sunday, the rhythm of Advent beats on: Christ comes to us.

The Christian life is not a climb up some spiritual ladder. Heaven has already dropped down into our world. The incarnation was not a moment trapped in the past. The same Word that became flesh in Bethlehem now becomes audible in preaching. The same body once nailed to the cross is placed into our hands in the Sacrament. The same Spirit who overshadowed Mary awakens faith in us. One story, one movement, one continual coming of Christ.

Advent is not simply a line on the church calendar. It is the shape of life together. We gather, wait, listen, receive. We admit we are not what we should be, that the world still groans in darkness. And then, right there in the midst of it, the light breaks in. The Word is spoken: "Your sins are forgiven." The table is set: "Take and eat, this is my body." People sitting in darkness are met by the Lord who comes to them. That is Advent. That is worship. That is the Christian life.

If we dared to see Sunday this way, perhaps we would stop treating church as a chore. It is not our performance; it is God's intervention. Preaching is visitation, not a lecture. The Sacrament is communion, not a symbol. The liturgy is the living God doing what he promises to do now, not a museum of religious nostalgia.

The first Christmas was never about human accomplishment. It was about God breaking in, uninvited, unasked, unearned. That is still how he works. Christ does not wait for our readiness. He creates readiness by coming. He breaks open our self-made righteousness, forgives our sin, and lifts us by grace. Every Sunday is a small Bethlehem, the unassuming place where the mighty Lord arrives hidden, where salvation takes flesh again in Word and Sacrament.

We wait for Christ's final coming, yes. But we do not wait alone. The One who will come in glory is already here in mercy. The Christ once laid in a manger now lays himself upon the altar and into our ears. The hope of Advent is not only that Christ will come again, it is that he comes now. Every week. For you. **N**

Rev. Chad Kyler is pastor of [St. Paul's Lutheran Church](#) in West Falls, New York. He writes weekly at [WordAlone.Substack.com](#) sponsored by Sola Publishing.

Journey Through the Psalms

Mini Bible Study Installment



PSALM 12

Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone; for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man. Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak. May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, "With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?" "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise," says the Lord; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs." The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times. You, O Lord, will keep them; you will guard us from this generation forever. On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the children of man.

“Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone, for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.” This hymn isn’t exactly “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen.” Instead we hear echoes of John the Baptist on a riverbank, shaking his fist and asking who told us to flee the coming wrath. In a season of Christmas letters, its not exactly comfort to hear the psalmist cry for the Lord to “cut off all flattering lips.” Given the ever-increasing division in our world, our countries, and our homes, we do not need the psalmist to remind us that “on every side the wicked prowl.” No, Psalm 12 is not a Christmas psalm. It’s an Advent psalm.

Advent is a season where our need for God is laid bare. We recognize that our world, our relationships, and our own hearts have been broken by the wickedness of sin, and that we are unable to save ourselves. So in this season, we cry out as those who are poor, as those who labor for the little food that we can place on our table or the few gifts we’re lucky to have under the tree. We cry out as those who are needy, as those in search for salvation and a place of safety. In this season, we begin to recognize a pay raise and a family meal will offer us comfort and joy, but salvation is only found in the pure words and promise of the Lord, who has abandoned the safety of heaven for the hay of a manger and the flesh of man. It is around that manger and the throne of heaven where we find the promise of our deliverance.

Read the Psalm and reflect upon the following questions provided for personal devotions or in a short Bible study session with group discussion.

1. Consider the sins and suffering that the psalmist describes. How does the worldly culture that surrounds the “holiday season” encourage us to pursue these sins or contribute to the suffering of our neighbor?
2. The Lord says he will come for the sake of the poor and the needy. Why is that good news for your neighbor?
3. How are you “poor”? How are you “needy”? How does God’s promise offer you deliverance?
4. The psalmist ends with a promise that the Lord will “keep” us. Can we keep ourselves? What happens when we try? What does it mean for God to keep us?
5. Can we earn or purchase the Lord’s promise? How does this reframe the “holiday season”?

PRAYER

Holy Father, you have sent us the forerunner of the psalmists and John the Baptist to declare the coming of your son. Prepare our hearts for the arrival of your beloved Son, Jesus, who offers to us deliverance from the sin of our neighbors and the sin of our own hearts. Amen.

The author of this installment, **Rev. Taylor Rister-Stempniak** of Fresno, California, is pastor of [Immanuel Lutheran Church in the community of Easton](#).

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Still Pointe
SOUL SHEPHERDING

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StillPointe: Soul Shepherding

Ministry Partner Focus by Rev. Dona Johnson



MARGIN FOR REST AND SOLITUDE

Psychologist, spiritual director and Pastor Bill Gaultiere says, "The priority of Jesus' solitude and silence is everywhere in the Gospels. It's how he began his ministry. It's how he made important decisions. It's how he dealt with troubling emotions like grief. It's how he dealt with the constant demands of his ministry and cared for his soul. It's how he prepared for his death on the cross."

When was the last time you said no to something in order to give yourself a margin for rest and solitude all in order to give renewed energy and vitality to your ministry?

StillPointe: Soul Shepherding guides people in any stage of faith and life circumstances into a place of prayerful awareness and discernment by creating an intentional open space free from all the distractions and competing voices that sometimes confuse rather than bring clarity. A spiritual director helps to create a wide-open space where one can better hear the voice of God, be curious about what God might be up to, and provide a tender and caring communal relationship. This is the still point where God's heart meets our hearts.

The Psalmist tells us about God's desire to bring us into a wide-open place: "He stood me on a wide-open field; I stood there saved" (Psalm 18:19 The Message).

Our perspectives become narrow from fear of loss, fear of unknowing and uncertainty or feeling stuck at an impasse with those deep unspoken longings and desires we hold in our hearts. Jesus himself, took time away from the intensity of his ministry to sit in silence and solitude before he Father. These quiet retreats with his Father refreshed and filled his soul with spiritual strength, it made things much clearer to him.

Spiritual Direction is about stepping into what God is already doing. It is more about listening than it is about talking. It is not counseling, it is not giving advice, it is not a Bible study, it is simply a holy space to speak in the presence of God what is stirring in one's soul. Spiritual direction



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What to expect? Direction sessions are one hour once per month, or more if needed, and can be in-person or online. Spiritual direction helps you, the directee, have more empathy in other relationships. It helps you have more grace for yourself — self-love. It helps move one's faith from being purely transactional to a place of heartfelt transformation where we come to know God in more intimate ways which opens up for us our true selves — the self that is formed around the character of Christ. If you are curious about spiritual direction, please contact Rev. Dona Johnson, a Selah trained spiritual director, at revdonajohnson@gmail.com. All denominations are welcome.

Rev. Dona Johnson of Sedona, Arizona, is trained through Selah as a spiritual director in the Trinitarian tradition and is a stewardship specialist and generosity coach for the North American Lutheran Church.

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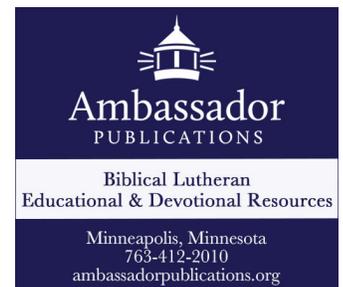
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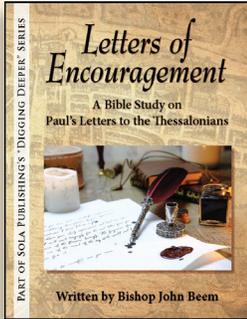
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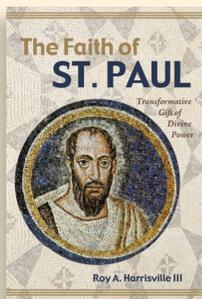
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... AND A GAME

Reading on paper? Complete this word search using the bold words from Luke 1:41-45. Reading online? [Play this game](#) there, too!

*And when **Elizabeth** heard the **greeting** of **Mary**, the **baby** leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the **Holy Spirit**, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "**Blessed** are you among women, and blessed is the **fruit** of your womb! And why is this **granted** to me that the **mother** of my Lord should come to me? For **behold**, when the **sound** of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for **joy**. And blessed is she who **believed** that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." — Luke 1:41-45*

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