

Stewardship by the Lectionary

*The Bible has plenty to say on stewardship. Enough, in fact, for stewardship-themed lessons every week based on readings from the lectionary. The following lessons tied to Years B and C of the three-year series can be incorporated into sermons, bulletin inserts, newsletters, prayers, or devotions. Each year a lesson is written for a different reading. All lessons available so far are included for each week.*

**Reformation**

Jeremiah 18:1-11

“Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand.” God is the potter. You are the clay. “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God made us for a purpose: to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to him—joyfully and thankfully obeying his commandments—proclaiming his Word, glorifying him with our actions, and showing his love to those around us. But as far as clay pots are concerned we are marred. Every year at this time we are reminded of God’s grace given to us through the Lutheran Reformation. Every year we are reminded to reform our hearts and lives. Just as a potter can reform clay into a new jar, so God graciously reforms us. He sends messengers who proclaim his Word: “turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and actions.” Through Scripture, by grace, through faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice, he leads us to repentance, reforms our ways and actions, and saves us from disaster.

Revelation 14:6,7

Do we ever connect our offerings with the word “eternal?” How long will my car last? How long

can I go before I have to replace the roof? My oven is about ready to fail—how long can I nurse it along? The money in our bank accounts and the things we own are far from eternal. The stock market dips and our money melts away. Our possessions in the garage and kitchen rust, leak, and eventually fall apart. Contrast that with the lasting effect our offerings have. When we share from the gifts that we possess, it enables pastors, teachers, and missionaries to proclaim the eternal gospel throughout the world. Can any other opportunity offer such a great return on our investment?

Mark 13:5-11

Praise the Lord that he has compelled us to believe that the Bible is the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Even though we live in a world that does its best to convince us to believe we have a lot to worry about, we know that wars, national conflicts, earthquakes, and famines are simply the birth pains of this world as it waits for its day of destruction. Earthly blessings are temporary. Through faith in Jesus we can confidently look forward to the day he will deliver us from this vale of tears and take us to a perfect heavenly kingdom. Meanwhile we will focus on what’s important, that our congregations and our church body have adequate resources to preach the gospel to as many nations as possible so that many other people may still be saved.

Psalm 46

Such a noisy psalm! Mountains crumble and crash into the sea! The sea roars and foams, crashing against the rest of the mountain range, trying to drag it down into the depths! In the middle of the deafening roar, a beautiful river gently winds through God’s city—a scene of incredible peace and quiet. We sit by the stream, surrounded by walls that cannot be shaken, and the quiet envelops us. We bolt upright, frightened as even more sounds crash all around us—the sounds of earthquakes and battles. With a word and a gentle hand, the LORD hushes us: “Be still, and know that I am God.” Our lives are in his hands, and we are content.

**Last Judgment**

Malachi 4:1,2

The last judgment is something unbelievers don’t like to discuss very much. It promises to shake the very foundation of their lives as all that “stuff” in which they have placed their trust will be destroyed in the fire. Considering this, the temptation is to “eat, drink, and be merry” because tomorrow everything could be destroyed. Praise the Lord for compelling us, his people, to “revere” his name. The “stuff” of this world is not something in which we place our trust. Instead we are to manage it during our life to God’s glory. May the way we manage our “stuff” reveal people as joyful and carefree as a calf leaping in the spring, since we are awaiting our joyful entrance into heaven.

Hebrews 9:24-28

“Once for all” Christ did “away with sin by the sacrifice of himself . . . and he will appear a second time . . . to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.” These words bring joy to our hearts. We can live without fear. Death is scary, but the verdict is certain: salvation to those who are waiting for Christ. This judgment frees us up to do great things for our Lord and Savior. Instead of spending all our time and energy and wealth trying to atone for our sins, we spend our time, our energy, and our wealth proclaiming his praise. We live for him who died for us. We live for him who now sits in God’s presence in heaven.

John 5:19-24

The father/son relationship is pretty special, especially when that son is the firstborn. Dad holds his little boy in his arms and sees that the family name lives on. As time goes on, dad teaches his son to do all kinds of things—play catch, change the oil on the car, basic home maintenance. The boy grows up, and everyone pays him the highest compliment: “He looks just like his father.” The longer we live in Christ, we honor our Father and his one and only Son and begin to look more and more like him! Our lives here on earth are a testament to the life that Jesus has given to us. The way we use every gift we possess shows the connection we have with our Father and our joy in the gift he’s given us—eternal life with him in heaven.

Psalm 90

Moses keeps us mindful of the shortness and frailty of this present life. As the Lord’s stewards, we pray for hearts of wisdom that cling to faith in Jesus, our Savior, so that we can use the time of our pilgrimage on earth to serve him with joyful hearts.

**Saints Triumphant**

Daniel 12:1-3

Whether we realize it or not, we are among those who “shine like the brightness of the heavens” and “like the stars for ever and ever.” We know what is going to happen when the end of this world comes. We are going to be among those whose name is written in the Book of Life, the registry of heaven. May the way we manage our money, our family, our business, and anything else we do in life reveal to those around us that we are the stars Daniel is talking about in our Old Testament lesson.

Hebrews 10:11-18

Lift your eyes heavenward! The saints triumphant stand before the throne of God worshiping their Savior. They are filled with joy for “by one sacrifice he [Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” Through Christ’s sacrifice our sin is taken away, forgotten, forgiven. No other sacrifice could do what we need. The thousands of Old Testament sacrifices couldn’t take away sin. Only Christ could, and he offered for all time one sacrifice for sins. Keeping the end goal in mind—eternal life—enables us to deal with the setbacks in life and live in joyful anticipation of heaven.

John 5:25-29

What have you done with the time God has entrusted to you? Have you spent it wisely? Sometimes. Have you done good, or have you done what is evil? Our answer to those questions has to be, “Yes.” We have done plenty of evil things. Just look at the carnage sin has left in our wake after a week filled with missteps, mistakes, and misstatements. When the Son of Man comes to judge, what will he say about all the time we’ve spent doing what is evil? He will pronounce us forgiven, for his sake. He spent his time perfectly so that all our missteps, mistakes, and misstatements can be forgiven. We can spend our time wisely. Everything we do glorifies our Savior, who will call our bodies from the grave to live in glory forever.

Psalm 118 (14-24)

On this joyous Easter Day we rejoice at the resurrection of Christ after his death on the cross. The message of Psalm 118 relates the Old Testament symbolic image that the “stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.” The gospels use this image to symbolize the humility and death of our Savior, Jesus, becoming the foundation “stone” of our Christian faith. The Easter season is one of setting priorities and reflecting upon the life, death, resurrection, and “new life” of Christ. We can find great strength and joy in knowing that Jesus loved us enough to pay the ultimate sacrifice for our sinfulness. No further sacrifice needs to be made. We are now freed from “payback” service. We can live our lives using all the gifts God gives, freely giving and serving. There is no worry that God will someday demand something unexpected of us. This is guaranteed through his resurrection.

**Thanksgiving**

Philippians 4:10-20

We need peace because our troubles threaten to rob us of our thanks for all God has done. Contentment, not possessions, fills our hearts and homes with thanks. When we trust our God to meet all our needs, we are free to thank him for all he has done without worrying about the future.

Luke 17:11-19

Ten lepers are healed, but only one comes back to say thank you to Jesus. Sadly, isn’t that still the norm today with us, as we so easily forget to thank our Lord for all he has done for us? Thankfully, we have a national day of Thanksgiving to remind us of our forgetfulness. As we grow in our understanding of God’s blessings, we’ll also understand that Christian stewardship is simply our way of saying thank you to God. What we give to him serves as an acknowledgment of all that he has given to us. It’s the Christian thing to do.

Psalm 100

Worship the Lord with gladness. Why? Because he is good and his love endures forever. Give him thanks and praise every day. Let your life be one long joyful song as you worship the Lord with your clock and calendar, your wallet and checkbook, your energy and abilities.

**Christ the King**

Daniel 7:13-14

Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. His rule transcends time and space from beginning to end, from earth to heaven. He is the thread that ties all history together, the focus of all history, the ruler of all eternity. As you ponder this truth, consider how prideful, selfish, and foolish we can be to consider that our relatively brief moment in history is all about us. If that is our self-centered view, then our impact will be fairly minimal, and our purpose will be drastically diminished. But when we view life properly, we’ll see a King who has done everything for us so that we may “live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” What a blessed truth that will spur us on to faithful stewardship!

Revelation 1:4b-8

Grace and peace are yours. To the Triune God be glory forever and ever! Why? Our Heavenly Father loves us. Christ Jesus, the firstborn from the dead, has freed us from our sins by his blood shed on the cross. The Holy Spirit has brought us into a special relationship with God—giving us a unique status and service. In response to God’s love we glorify God with thanksgiving. We glorify him through our service, worship, and offerings. This glorifying of our God is not just a Sunday morning task. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God. It permeates our life. It shows itself in our love for people. Christ the King is coming. To him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

John 18:33-37

Praise the Lord for our God-given faith that compels us to know and believe the answers to Pilate’s questions. Jesus is the king of every human being. Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. Jesus’ is the epitome of truth—not one deceitful, inaccurate word has ever flowed from his mouth. Jesus has seen fit to place us *on the side of truth*. We live with the absolute confidence that the Lord is taking care of us every moment of our lives. May our lives and our giving reveal this confidence.

**Advent 1**

Jeremiah 33:14-16

Unfulfilled expectations and broken promises are so common in our modern world that we’re amazed when we experience someone who actually lives up to their word. In fact, we likely offer them our heartfelt thanks. How refreshing! So, what’s our reaction when the holy God offers the greatest of promises—that of a righteous Savior who will be Our Righteousness? We watch in holy wonder and joy-filled amazement as God fulfills that promise to the letter in Christ. May that wonder and amazement be reflected in our lives as we offer ourselves as expressions of thanks to him!

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

How can we thank God enough? A thousand thank yous won’t cover all he has given us—lives, homes, families, jobs, health, friends, the Bible, the freedom to worship him, and, above all, the gift of his Son’s death on the cross for our sins and his resurrection so that we can have eternal life with him. We can thank him by returning all that he has given us, prayerfully determining a percentage of our income to be given as soon as we receive it, before we pay our earthly obligations—and then using the remainder in ways that will glorify him. We can thank him by using our lives and talents and possessions in ways that will please him and let others see God’s Spirit in us, praying that he will guide us daily to serve him by serving others.

Luke 21:25-36

Are you ready? Have all your moments of all your days been spent in preparation for the end? Or, as Jesus said, are you weighed down with all the things that seem so important but really aren’t? There is only one way for us to be prepared for Jesus’ return. The forgiveness Jesus earned on the cross makes us ready. We are clean. We are perfect. We are holy. We can stand up and hold our heads high because we belong to him. Meanwhile, we wait. We wonder when he will come. We take care of the things he has entrusted to us, knowing that we can’t hold onto them forever. The only thing that will last, the most important thing that we possess, is Jesus’ promise. He’s coming, and he’s coming soon. Amen! Come soon, Lord Jesus!

Psalm 25

There is something we never want God to remember, namely, our sins. There is something we never want Jesus to forget, namely, his great mercy and love. It is the forgiveness that comes from God’s great mercy and love that prepares us to serve God with our lives. What a great honor God has given us that he accepts our gifts of love and our acts of service.

**Advent 2**

Malachi 3:1-4

It’s been rightly stated that even the most pious of Christian good works is tainted by sin in some way, small though it may be. If so, then how can God’s people ever bring to our Lord and Savior gifts that please him? Only through the refining, purifying, cleansing love of Jesus. When the Holy Spirit brought us to faith in Jesus, he also sanctified us—set us apart in body and soul— for lives of service to our God. We continue our Advent preparation knowing that we are acceptable to our God by faith in Jesus and so are our gifts of love to him.

Philippians 1:3-11

Paul prayed that the congregation at Philippi would “abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.” We need to pray this for ourselves and our fellow Christians, to stay in the Word in order to learn God’s will for our lives. We know it is his will that we use our gifts to serve and glorify him, but we need the guidance of Scripture and the encouragement of other Christians to identify our gifts and how and where we can best use them. God loved us so much that he sent his Son Jesus to die for our sins. We have done nothing to deserve this gift, and everything not to deserve it, yet he continues to bless us with peace and hope if we put him first in our lives, serving him with the first and best part of our incomes, our talents, and possessions.

Luke 3:1-6

Repentance is key to our preparation for the coming of our Savior. But repentance without a corresponding change in life is no repentance at all. There will be fruits of repentance. God’s forgiving grace changes us from the inside out. That change will be evident to those around us. Ultimately our Lord uses us as agents of his grace to change others, as our entire lives and all the blessings in them become dedicated to service in God’s kingdom.

Psalm 24

What makes something “ours”? Is it because it was handed down to us from our ancestors or because we received it after an investment of sweat and labor? David reminds us that “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it,” that the only one who can truly claim ownership of anything in this world is the one who “founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.” As we handle the possessions in our care, may we always remember who has entrusted them to us!

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

The congregation at Corinth had fallen into the sin of pride and it was wrecking the church. Some felt they were more important and should be honored because they were followers of Apollos or Peter or Paul. Paul strongly encourages the congregation to realize that the truth of God’s Word is what’s important—regardless of the person sharing it. During the Advent season today the same is true. What is important are the truths God brings us from his Word. Everything else is secondary. If we want our preparation for Christmas to be a blessing, let us focus on Jesus’ grace and repent of sinful pride that can cause divisions. Remember that making Christmas plans for our family and church celebrations, buying gifts, making financial decisions about those gifts and about our offerings, is all about Jesus. He loves you! He forgave all your sins! He offers you a life with him forever through faith in his full atonement for your sins. That is the best reason of all for Christian unity and love no matter what time of year it is.

**Advent 3**

Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sin’s guilt enslaves us. It leads us to cower in fear of the holy God. It drives us to despair, to lose all hope of anything good coming from the Almighty. But the gospel’s saving good news in Christ fills us with spiritual hope and joy, freeing us from guilt, driving away despair, and filling us with the power and desire to live our lives out of love for the One who first loved us and gave himself for us. We “sing” and “shout” our praises to our God with deeds of love toward others and offerings of love toward God.

Philippians 4:4-7

How can God’s people be calm and comfortable, even full of joy in this life, especially at this time of year? We deplore what our world has made of this holy season. We regret what our own lives have become as holiday stresses mount higher and higher. How can we rejoice? In the Lord! We find our comfort in the gracious, eternal peace that our Savior has established by his life, death, and resurrection. That peace stands as God’s sentry at the door of our hearts, enabling us to reflect Christ’s love in our lives, even during the stressful moments of life.

Luke 3:7-18

John the Baptist gave some pretty specific instructions to the crowds on how to produce “good fruit”: Share with those who have less, don’t cheat anyone, be fair and honest, be content. These are good stewardship guidelines for us also: Give to God the portion we have set aside; then serve him by serving others with the remainder. Have a generous attitude. Don’t give anyone reason to question our faith by questioning our honesty. Give thanks to God for everything he has given us, especially the gift of eternal life through the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection on the third day. We should always pray that God will send the Holy Spirit into our hearts to produce “fruit in keeping with repentance,” to glorify him in all we do.

Psalm 130

Waiting for someone to arrive or for something to happen can seem like an incredible waste of time, yet that’s exactly what the inspired writer of Psalm 130 instructs us to do. When troubled by a recent tragedy or burdened by our countless sins, the Christian cries out to the Lord for help and forgiveness. The forgiveness is ours already by faith in Jesus. The Lord’s help may linger, but that’s not wasted time, for he has promised to help us in the way and at the time that is right according his plans, not ours.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Psalm 14

Psalm 14 confesses universal depravity and the Lord’s salvation. One would think that at this time of the year, people would become nicer, more loving, and more peaceful to their family and friends. But is that what we get? Hardly. What we get are amazing actions that prove the total depravity of man. Christmas is portrayed as a time to be good for goodness sake or to give to others. When the focus is on man and his giving and goodness it is not on Jesus. Christmas is not about our giving, it’s about God’s giving himself when we did not deserve it. By nature, we are not good people. Goodness or holiness is credited to us with Jesus’ holy life and his payment for our sins. True joy comes from knowing that, through faith in Jesus, God took me from a state of depravity to a state of holiness and, with it, eternal life. Psalm 14:7 says, “Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!” Now that is Christmas joy! What a reason to express that joy in our worship, our offerings, and in our whole lives.

**Advent 4**

Micah 5:2-5a

Wonder of wonders, our God takes the lowly and despised things of this world and exalts them in service to his eternal and saving kingdom! He did that with lowly Bethlehem, elevating it as the town in which the God-man entered our world. He does the same with his people. He has completed a spiritual makeover in us. He has made condemned sinners into royal priests who have the privilege of serving him, offering him the sacrifices of our lives.

Hebrews 10:5-10

God doesn’t want our stuff! He doesn't want our money, our houses, our cars, our boats, our cell phones, or any of the things that are so important to our everyday lives. Besides, it is all his anyway. He gave it to us. He wants our hearts. He loved us enough to sacrifice his Son for our sins. His is a greater gift than any earthly thing we can imagine, and all we have to do is acknowledge it and believe it with our whole hearts. When we realize how much God loves us, it is only natural to show our love to him. We do this by living our lives in ways that glorify him, using our money, possessions, talents, and time in service to others and to spread the gospel.

Luke 1:39-55

When the God of salvation acts, his people respond with praise and thanksgiving. When Elizabeth greeted Mary as the mother of the promised Savior of the world, Mary did what comes naturally to Christians who are impressed with the Lord’s love and faithfulness—she glorified the Lord. Keep that response in mind and heart as you ponder the Christ-filled manger. Here is God’s greatest gift to you! How will you thank him?

Psalm 85

“You, Lord, showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.” With these words the psalmist helps us see just how tremendously blessed we are as God’s children. He then leads us by the hand to show us the greatest gift we’ve ever received: “You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.” Throughout human history, God has called messengers, like John the Baptist, to herald this good news. Through their faithful preaching, we have come to know and trust the certain hope made available to us through Christ. We are richly blessed by a God who truly gives us all that is good. Such goodness moves our hearts to respond with joy and gratitude to our gracious Father in heaven.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Revelations 12:1-6

When we think of Christmas, we tend to think of peaceful situations, angels appearing to shepherds, the manger scene, and wise men bringing gifts. But, behind the scenes there was a huge struggle. Satan and his demons tried to kill Jesus through Herod. Throughout Jesus’ ministry they tried to make him fail. Ultimately there was the battle at the cross. Satan lost because the Son of God paid for our sin. Today Satan does his best to try and take that sweet peace of Christ’s victory away by leading us away from faith in the forgiveness of our sin. Believing the gospel of forgiveness through Jesus merits leaves the devil without power. In our text, the woman, or the church, is led to safety. Through faith in the forgiveness of sins we will end up in heaven. Peace through Jesus—what a reason to sing, “Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright!”

**Christmas Eve**

Isaiah 9:2-7

“To us a child is born.” That’s the very heart of the gospel—that God sent his Son into this world as a baby boy to be our Savior. We have heard that good news and we believe it. Now, what will we do with that good news? God help us share it!

Titus 2:11-14

On this Christmas Eve night when “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light,” we focus on the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior. We have vital choices in life—to grow toward the “light” or the “darkness,” toward “ungodliness and worldly passions” or “self-controlled, upright and godly lives.” We strive toward the example that Jesus gave us, lived for us, died for us—of faith, hope, and love, “eager to do what is good.” As managers of our life choices and all of the concerns and resources of our lives, we strive toward wellness and balance of body, mind, and spirit. “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” The “blessed hope” of this free grace is a gift given to us—the blessings and benefits of which we must share with all men, so that they will know Jesus and his unconditional love. As stewards also of the gospel message, there is no time like the present to share this best of news!

Luke 2:1-20

If the Baby Jesus was the first Christmas gift, then the second would have to be the glorious news the angels told the shepherds, that a Savior had been born. Once they had seen and worshiped him, opened the Gift, did they hide it, hoard it, and keep it to themselves until the newness wore off? No, they spread the Word to everyone. We have received the same Good News: Christ the Savior, God’s Son, came to earth as a baby, and lived among us without sinning. He died on the cross as the spotless sacrificial lamb for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day to defeat sin and death. We can no more keep it to ourselves than the shepherds could. We have to share the Good News in everything we do and use every word we say to bring the unsaved to Christ.

Psalm 96

There are two activities that are inseparably linked to our celebration of our Savior’s birth—joyful words and songs of praise, and the giving of gifts. Don’t take those two activities for granted! Let this psalm remind you of the many ways and reasons for praising your Savior God, then “bring an offering and come into his courts.” His Gift to us at Christmas inspires our gifts to him all year long.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

1 John 1:1-9

In this reading John describes one of the most precious times of his life, the time he spent with Jesus. It is obvious that John is very thankful to God and still wants to share what he was given even though many years have passed. He tells us in 1 John 1:3, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” John’s purpose in life was to share the good news of Jesus and what it meant to him. You and I also have seen Jesus through the words of Holy Scripture. What a reason for us to do as John did: pass the message on to others. Salvation is free. Jesus did everything we need to save us from hell and give us eternal life with him. So many think salvation is not free. What a privilege of grace to be God’s instruments, living lives of faith, speaking the truth in love and generously sharing of our wealth in our mission offerings so that more can know what salvation is and that it is free! Sharing the gift of Jesus is the best gift you can give to someone. It is a lovely way to celebrate Christmas. It is what the shepherds and wisemen did. It is why we are alive. May God bless you as you share his love!

**Christmas Day**

Isaiah 52:7-10

When I think of beautiful parts of the body, I don’t think of feet. But these feet mentioned by the prophet aren’t beautiful because of their appearance; they are beautiful because of their purpose—bringing the Good News. God has blessed us with everything we are and everything we have. Some of these things may not seem especially beautiful to us until we acknowledge that they are undeserved gifts from our Heavenly Father. By the power of the Holy Spirit, our response should be to use everything, our humble possessions and homely qualities, as well as those that seem more attractive and presentable, to glorify our Creator and display to others the love of Jesus. His death on the cross was certainly not beautiful to see or experience, but it was beautiful because of its purpose, to redeem us from our sin.

Hebrews 1:1-9

Christmas means we don’t have to wonder who God is, what he says, or what he does. Because of Christmas we have God in human flesh. We belong to him and he belongs to us. Jesus is the greatest gift God could give us. What will you do with that gift?

John 1:1-14

These first words of John’s gospel reveal to us that we are celebrating more than the birthday of a little baby who was born in Bethlehem. We are celebrating the visible entrance of God’s Son into our sinful world and personal lives. We are celebrating the entrance of the one who also gets the credit for the creation of the world, for the light of salvation that has been turned on in our lives, for our adoption as children of God. This morning’s message gives us all the motivation we will ever need to join the wise men in bringing gifts to our Savior’s church. Our gifts are turned into gospel action in our local congregation and through our worldwide church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Psalm 98

By our Lord’s gracious coming into the world he destroyed death and made all things new. This motivates us to never tire of proclaiming his salvation to the ends of the earth, but instead to always “sing” and “shout” his praises in the way we use our treasures, our time, and our talents. Proper Christian stewardship will always be a direct result of recognizing just how much our Lord has done for us.

*Christian Worship: Supplement*

Exodus 33:18-23, 34:5-7

It is Christmas Day, a great day to celebrate! But, will we see the glory of God—the glory that we will see in heaven and on judgement day? Probably not. In today’s lesson Moses asks to see God’s glory. God puts him in the cleft of a rock and only lets him see his back. Yet, in the last two verses God explains who he is: A God rich in faithfulness and love, forgiving wrong. At Christmas God did not reveal his full glory. He humbly came to us in human form. Yet he reveals in his Word who he is: merciful and just, loving and compassionate. He showed his justice and love by becoming our substitute, taking our sin upon him and dying for it. At the same time, he took his holiness and freely gave it to us so that we could have eternal life with him. Have a joyful Christmas as you celebrate what God has revealed to you about himself. Soon, when God calls us home, the full glory of God will be ours. What a celebration that will be!

**Christmas 1**

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

It’s true that the boy Samuel gives us a picture of Christ, who also “grew in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men.” But it’s also true and a saving blessing for us that Jesus represented Samuel, and not only Samuel, but every sinner. Christ is our Substitute, our perfect representative before God. So now our God sees us dressed in the holiness of Christ by faith in him. Our God now views our deeds of love through the holiness of Christ. We, too, have the favor of God! A glorious transformation! And now we have the opportunity to show it each day of our lives.

Hebrews 2:10-18

Why do we go to church, communion, and Bible study? Why do we share our offerings of time, talents, and treasure with the Lord’s church? Why do we strive to live a Christian life at home, school, work, and play? Why do we turn to the Lord with penitent hearts after we have sinned? The answer is found in our epistle lesson this morning. We are no longer estranged from our Heavenly Father through our sins. Instead Jesus has made us part of God’s family—his own brothers and sisters!

Luke 2:41-52

What was it like to experience Jesus growing up, to raise a perfect child, to have a perfect friend, to enjoy a perfect student? Luke tells us that everyone was amazed at him. He even understood his purpose for being on this earth. How astounding! And yet he was just like any other Jewish boy: “he grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” He was just the Savior we need: true God and true man. Because he perfectly carried out his Father’s plan of salvation, we now have the power and motivation to use our gifts and abilities to carry out his kingdom work.

Psalm 111

“Praise the LORD!” The psalmist begins with these words and provides plenty of evidence why we need to praise the LORD. The LORD has done powerful deeds. Praise him! He is gracious and compassionate. Praise him! He provides food. Praise him! He remembers his promises. Praise him! He has redeemed us. Praise him! The LORD has done everything worthy of praise—not you and me! That changes the way we look at ourselves and the gifts we bring him. We don't give because we must give something up or hand something over. We give because we have another opportunity to praise him!

**New Year’s Eve**

Isaiah 51:1-6

As we look back on the year nearly past and look forward to the next, we may have our doubts and concerns to say the least. It may be more accurate to say that we’re filled with fear. But recall the God of your salvation. He took an unlikely couple (Abraham and Sarah) and produced a great nation through whom he sent the Savior. His promises are rock-solid and divinely sure. His Word cannot fail. May his Word of love in Christ erase your fears and empower you with hope as you commit your life to him.

1 Peter 1:22-25

We are but blips on history’s monitor, and pausing on New Year’s Eve to consider that truth is helpful. We’ll pass away and soon be forgotten. So, what’s worthy of our time and attention? The living, eternal Word of our God. May love for our Savior cause us to evaluate our use of that Word in the past, confess our misuse of the Bible, and, assured of our forgiveness through Christ, boldly honor and cherish that Word in the future.

Luke 13:6-9

The vineyard owner felt like he was wasting his time. For three years they had worked around that fig tree, and for three years the tree didn’t produce any fruit. Yet, how does the caretaker of the vineyard respond to the owner’s request to cut down the tree? He urges the owner to wait one more year. As we prepare to enter a new year of God’s grace, what a blessing it is that we have a God who is patient with us. He doesn’t rush to judge us, but instead he continues to work diligently on our hearts to lead us to repentance and godly living. Yet God’s patience is not an excuse for a Christian to ignore our Savior’s call for us to repent and bear “good fruit.” As we enter a new year, what a perfect time for us, as Christians to begin anew by repenting of our sin and seeking to live as children of God, bearing much fruit!

Psalm 90

Moses keeps us mindful of the shortness and frailty of this present life. As the Lord’s stewards, we pray for hearts of wisdom that cling to faith in Jesus, our Savior, so that we can use the time of our pilgrimage on earth to serve him with joyful hearts.

**New Year’s Day**

Numbers 6:22-27

It’s common for us to place our names on items we value. It’s a good way of marking them as belonging to us. At our baptisms, our God placed his name on us—Child of God. He did that to bless and save us, to grant us eternal life with him, and to fill us with eternal hope and joy. He also made us his own to glorify him with all that we are and have. May everything we say and do reflect the truth that we are his!

Philippians 2:9-13

Names are hugely important. That’s why large corporations dole out millions of dollars to get their names placed in large letters on highly visible places. But there’s no name that comes close to the importance of the name “Jesus.” It’s the only name by which we’re saved, the only name that guarantees us life with him in heaven. By God’s grace you know his saving name. He placed his name on you at your baptism. Each day of your life is an opportunity to honor his name by the way that you live and by what you do with what he’s given you.

Luke 2:21

Today we not only celebrate a new year, but we also celebrate the special name given to our Savior. Jesus’ name was no accident. God had sent an angel to tell Mary that her baby’s name would be “Jesus,” which, when translated, means “the Lord saves.” Right from the start, God wanted Jesus’ purpose for coming to this earth to be crystal clear. The Lord had come to save, just as he had always promised. Mary and Joseph celebrated Jesus’ naming day with an offering of thanksgiving to God for bringing the baby Jesus safely into the world. Just like them, we can also can respond with thanksgiving and praise that Jesus, “the Lord saves,” has come to rescue us from our sins.

Psalm 8

The majestic name of the Lord deserves our unending praise! Look at the creation the Lord has made. Consider the redemption Jesus has brought. Recall this through the faith the Holy Spirit has given you. All these blessings are from your majestic Lord.