

Christmas Eve

December 24, 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.

Joseph had nothing to go by save the Word of God
and he accepted it. A godless man would have
said it was just a dream, but Joseph
believed the word of God and
took unto him his wife.

– Martin Luther –

Martin Luther's Christmas Book

Isaiah 7:10–14

Isaiah's message came at a time when the people of Judah feared an impending conflict with the Syrians, along with the northern kingdom of Israel that sided with them. The plot of Israel's enemies was to conquer and replace King Ahaz with a king of their choosing. God's message through his prophet was that Judah need not fear: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass" (v. 7:7).

King Ahaz was invited to ask for a sign by which God might prove the truth of His promise. Strangely, Ahaz responded "I will not put the Lord to the test" (v.12). Nevertheless, God proceeded to offer the sign of Immanuel, "God with us." These words turn out to be a prophecy, not only of God's deliverance in Israel's present conflict, but also a prophecy of God's final deliverance in the coming of Christ.

- When Ahaz declined to ask for a sign, was it out of faithful humility before the Lord or was it a sign of his lack of trust in God? How do you read the situation?
- Why is it that, sometimes when God gives us the promise of his protection and deliverance we find it hard to believe? How does God's Word work to create faith in us, in spite of ourselves?

Psalms 110:1–4

In this psalm we hear the promise of God to bless the kingly line of David. David was both servant of the Lord (*Adonai*) and the predecessor of the Messiah who will be a priest of the order of Melchizedek. This is a promise that was irrevocable, "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind." (Psalm 110:4a)

As Christians we hear this prophetic worship psalm as the union of king and priest in the person of Jesus Christ. Not only is Jesus a descendant of King David, he is also David's Lord and God.

- Ponder the relationship between David and Jesus. In what sense does Jesus have both a human and divine relationship with us? What does it mean to you to think about God's promises as irrevocable? How does this allow us to trust in God when our own self-confidence fails?

1 John 4:7–16

"Love" is a word that gets tossed around fairly freely in our culture. But not all "love" is the same. The love that is mentioned in this passage is not simply a taste for, or a passing interest in something. The love that John speaks of is a self-giving, unconditional kind of love that was shown to us by Jesus on the cross. This is what is referred to in the

Greek language as *agape* (a-GAH-pay), or "sacrificial love."

John asserts that without intimate knowledge of God and his *agape* love in our lives, we are unable to love similarly. To love sacrificially comes from knowing God himself.

- How might God help us to love those that we otherwise deem "unlovable?" How does God's love in us change the way we look at those who have been outcasts and strangers?

Luke 2:1–14 (15–20)

Imagine Mary as she makes the long and difficult journey to Bethlehem with Joseph. No one can predict the exact time a child will be born; only God knows that information. The birth of any child is a miracle, but this one who will be the Messiah of Israel is like no other. He is the promised King of kings and Lord of lords, and he will save his people from the power of sin, death, and the devil.

- What about Mary's faithfulness and circumstance inspire you?
- In what ways is Mary just like any other mother? In what ways is she different?

In saying that the time had come for Mary to deliver her baby, Luke uses the Greek word *pimpremi*, meaning "filled" or "swollen" (see Word Study). Not only was time "swelling" to fulfillment, so was Mary's womb. Matthew uses this same word in the story of the crucifixion in describing how a sponge was "filled" (swollen) with sour wine and given to Jesus on the cross (Matthew 22:10).

- In what sense is a sponge soaked in liquid primed and ready for its intended purpose? How was that true of Mary here, and of Jesus on the cross? In what sense are we both soaked and filled in the waters of Baptism? With what does God fill us to make us ready to serve the world?

Birth is a difficult matter for both mother and infant. It is always a struggle — and a potentially dangerous time — when labor sets in. Christmas is a wonderful time to think about birth and new life. But in this case, we are not thinking of just any new baby. This baby is God's only-begotten Son.

We are so accustomed to the sterility of the hospital setting that to think that Jesus was born in a stable (likely a rough cave or outbuilding) is scandalous. Instead of sterile instruments and gloved hands to help deliver the child, there are animals, manure, feeding troughs, soiled straw, an inexperienced father and a very young mother.

The lowliness of this scene reminds us of the lengths God will go to in order to save his people. Through Jesus' birth in the stable, God not only shows his solidarity with humanity by becoming one of us. He also shows that he is willing to get his hands dirty to accomplish our salvation.

Christmas Day

December 25, 2026 (Year B)



*If the Word of the prophets has been received,
the Gospel of Christ should be received all the more,
since it is not a prophet who is speaking but the Lord of
the prophets, not a slave but a son, not an angel but God,
not to the fathers but to us ...*

– Martin Luther –

Lectures on Hebrews, LW Vol. 29

PROCLAMATION POINTS

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Isaiah 52:7-10

The great city of Jerusalem sits just over 2600 feet above sea level. There are considered to be seven different mountains surrounding the city, though they might more properly be called “hills” due to their relative size compared to other mountains in the world. When a messenger came to Jerusalem, they would have to cross the mountains that surrounded the city, thus the words given to the prophet Isaiah, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...” (v. 7).

The messenger of which Isaiah speaks is one who pronounced victory over Israel’s enemies and a new beginning for God’s people. The news the messenger brought was the promise of salvation, happiness and peace. Upon receiving this news the people lifted their voices in joy.

- *Have you ever felt a spontaneous impulse to “sing for joy” (v.8)? What were the circumstances? In what sense is joy an expression of praise and thanks to God welling up in us?*

Isaiah proclaimed the good news to the people Israel, but its impact was not only on them. “All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” God’s peace and salvation is for the whole world. There will come a time when all people will know the Lord and rejoice in his saving love (Philippians 2:10-11).

- *When you hear the word “salvation” or the phrase “being saved,” what is the first thing that comes to mind? How is the salvation of Jesus a past, present, and future reality for us?*

Psalms 2

The Lord sits in heaven and laughs at the plot against his anointed one. What do the people think they can do to hurt the Almighty? Just his words uttered in rage terrify them.

- *Do you ever think that the world has lost appropriate fear of the Lord’s power? Have we turned the Almighty into a big “teddy bear”? What is the danger in this?*

Psalms 2 carries a message that, at first glance, comes across as pure threat. Scripture says that the Lord will come in wrath and fury against the unfaithful to “break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (v. 9). But at the same time, the psalm announces that “Blessed are those who take refuge in him” (v.12).

- *In what ways is it hard to fully comprehend what the psalmist is saying when in one verse he spoke of being dashed and in the next he says to take refuge in the one who is able to crush?*

In this Old Testament psalm, written centuries before the birth of Jesus, we hear reference to God’s anointed (Messiah) and to God’s only begotten Son.

- *In what sense is Jesus the fulfillment of this prophetic psalm? Why is it important to know God spoke this in advance?*
- *As Christians, we acknowledge that our sin has brought God’s wrath upon us? In this context, what does it mean to “kiss the Son”? (Compare Romans 5:6-11.)*

Hebrews 1:1-6 (7-12)

The author of Hebrews is one of the primary places in the New Testament where the topic of God’s living Word comes up (another is the Gospel for today.) God has spoken to his people throughout time in many ways by the prophets. The author of Hebrews proclaimed that in these last days God has spoken to us in an even more important way – through his Son who is the exact image of the Father.

- *How does God speak to us not simply through Jesus’ words and teachings but through the person of Jesus himself? How does Jesus’ life and mission convey the promise of the Gospel?*

The author goes on to contend that even the angels cannot compare to the Son of God. He is the one who will sit at the right hand of the Father while the angels praise him for his glory. When all things perish on the earth, the Son will remain forever, righteous and holy and without end.

- *God’s Word assures us that his Son is the victor over all principalities and powers of the universe. How does this bolster your faith in times of trial, weakness, and crushing pain?*

John 1:1-14 (15-18)

Children often ask the question, “If God created everything then who created God?” The only way to respond to questions like this are to affirm the one-and-only uniqueness of God.

- *What does it mean to say that God alone is unique in being immortal and eternal? (1 Tim. 1:17) Can you imagine a time when there was nothing except for God?*

Another question that humans struggle with is the one that John addresses in this first chapter, “Where was Jesus when God created everything?” The answer: The divine *Logos* (the Word) existed in the beginning with God, is, was, and ever shall be God. All things were made through him and not one thing was created without him.

- *In what ways does John use the “Word” to explain the complex theological reality of Jesus’ true identity? If only God is eternal, and Jesus was there before time, what does this prove to us?*

Christmas 1

December 27, 2026 (Year B)



*When Mary heard such things spoken first by the angels,
then shepherds, and now by Simeon, she wondered
greatly. Wonderful indeed, it was that such lowly
and despised folk as Joseph and Mary
should be the parents of such a Child!*

– Martin Luther –

Martin Luther's Christmas Book

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.

Isaiah 61:10–62:3

Marriages that are based in faith exemplify the way two people share an intimate covenantal relationship for life. In this passage of Scripture, the prophet uses this as a way to describe God's relationship with us. Jesus used similar imagery of bride and groom to describe to his followers what the kingdom was like (Matthew 9, Mark 2, and Luke 5).

- *In what ways is God's love for his people like a bridegroom preparing to marry his lovely bride?*
- *Why do you suppose the Scriptures are filled with this sort of marriage imagery? What does it say about God? What does it say about the sanctity of marriage from God's perspective?*

Moving on to chapter 62, the prophet says: "For Zion's sake, I will not keep silent." Isaiah declares that soon the nations would see how precious God's people were to him as he restored them to their homeland in Jerusalem. This return from exile would be a time when all the peoples of the world would see the glory of the Lord and the righteousness of his people.

- *In what way(s) was this righteousness not something the people had earned, but one that was conferred upon them because of God's love and forgiveness?*
- *What words in this poetic passage capture your attention? What do such phrases as "crown of beauty" and "royal diadem" tell you about God's love for you?*

Psalms 111

This psalm is a wonderful expression of faith in the goodness of God and his power to make things right. God is described as purposeful and active, not only at work in the universe as a whole, but in our individual lives as his people.

- *How would you describe the emotions expressed in this psalm? When would the words of a psalm like this be important for you to hear?*

For many, this psalm brings up the age-old question of theodicy — that is, "If God is so good, why does he allow evil to exist?" It is a natural question to wonder, especially when evil and suffering touch our lives in devastating ways. As Martin Luther pointed out, God's ways are often "hidden under the form of opposites." When we are weak, He is strong. When we are in the midst of death, God brings about life.

- *Why is the question of theodicy always with us in this world? Is there a time when our questions will be answered? Or will there simply come a time when we no longer need to ask?*

- *How might the words of this psalm give us strength in the face of what we cannot understand? In what sense does God's Word always have the "last word"?*

Galatians 4:4–7

Paul asserted that those who are children are no different than those who are slaves. They have limited rights and resources of their own, being under the care and instruction of managers, teachers, and supervisors. In terms of the inheritance, they may "own" everything, but they have no say in matters.

- *In acknowledging that children are subject to others, does that necessarily mean they are not loved?*

This reality is the same for us who are born under the law. We were like minor children before Christ came and redeemed us. Now with this new reality of our life in Christ, we have come of age. We are no longer slaves to the law but have been granted our inheritance as sons and daughters of the king, free to live in Him who redeemed us.

- *Apart from faith in Christ, why is it that we do not have any rights of our own? In what sense does faith alone inherit the promise?*

Luke 2:22–40

Understanding this text requires some knowledge of the law of Moses. Two different Old Testament laws are being cited here: 1) The sacrifice of redemption for firstborn males (Exodus 13:1–16) and 2) The purification of a woman after childbirth (Leviticus 12:1–12). Both these acts show the obedience of Mary and Joseph to the law of Moses and were sacrifices made according to the old covenant.

- *Some Evangelical Protestants who deny infant baptism like to claim "we dedicate infants, like they did in the Bible." Is their practice really the same as what's happening here, or is it something quite different? Why?*
- *Roman Catholics claim that Mary was without sin. Does this text from Luke support that claim? Explain.*

Amazingly, a man named Simeon had been waiting for many years. He had received from the Holy Spirit a message that he would not die until he saw the Lord's Messiah. Likewise, Anna revealed this same promise was being fulfilled.

- *In what ways does God always offer more than one witness to his actions? Why does he do this?*
- *What was Simeon referring to in his prophetic words to Mary (verse 35)? How does this set the stage for Jesus' mission?*

Christmas 2

January 3, 2027



... Solomon calls folly all that which proceeds without God's word and works. A wise man, then, is one who guides himself by God's word and works; a fool is one who presumptuously guides himself by his own mind and notions.

— Martin Luther —

LW 35:262

PROCLAMATION POINTS

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1 Kings 3:4-15

How often have you imagined that someone would show up and grant you your deepest desire like some genie out of a bottle? What would you request? A million dollars or more? A bigger house or a sports car? Perhaps you'd like to live forever.

God is no genie; he is not offering young Solomon three wishes. But he tells the king to ask for whatever he wants, knowing that Solomon's heart was in the right place.

- God gave Solomon what he asked for and what he didn't ask for: riches and honor. In what ways has given you what you've asked for but also what you didn't ask for?
- Why is wisdom one of the greatest gifts we can receive from God? Are there other, more important gifts in your opinion?
- Read what Jesus says to his disciples in John 14:12-14. How can we learn from Solomon's example what it means for us to pray in Jesus' name?

Psalms 119:97-104

Psalms 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible. It is an extended poem in praise of God's Word. This lesson is just a small portion of that psalm.

Here the psalmist asserts something that all who believe in God should know, namely, that contemplating on God's holy Word brings us a deeper connection with the Lord and gives a wisdom we would never have on our own. In this section of the psalm, the writer maintains that this wisdom is greater than the wisdom of his enemies, and it is always with him.

- In what ways do those who dwell in God's Word gain a greater insight and wisdom about the ways of God and the ways of the world? Have you ever found yourself to be hungry for such understanding?
- In what ways do we come to carry God's Word with us wherever we go? When have you found that to be helpful?

In verse 101, the psalmist claims, "I hold back my feet from every evil way." In verse 104, he says "I hate every false way."

- How does faith in God not only lead us to what is good, but also lead us away from evil? In what way does repentance figure into all this?
- If it is true that we hate evil, why do we still succumb to it? What is our underlying problem? Read what Paul says in

Romans 7:14-25. Where does he find hope?

Ephesians 1:3-14

Paul used some descriptive words to characterize the believers in Ephesus: chosen, beloved, holy, blameless, predestined, adopted, forgiven, sons and daughters. He says that all of this work on God's part is according to his will and desire. Paul also asserts that God has made known the mystery of his will to those he loves.

- How do you understand what is the mystery of God's will? How can you be sure?

Because it pleased God to choose believers, he gave the church all of the spiritual blessings needed for his purposes. No one person has them all individually, but collectively we possess all the gifts needed to do God's will.

- How is ministry like being a part of an athletic team? On this team does the coach make any cuts?

Luke 2:40-52

It was time for the Passover festival and Jesus and his family went to Jerusalem to the temple. The 12 year old boy remained behind, but his parents didn't realize it until days later. When they returned to look for him they found him in the temple talking with the religious leaders. The leaders were amazed at Jesus' wisdom and understanding, even as his parents were shocked by his level of comfort among them.

- Do you think Mary and Joseph were at all impressed with Jesus' wisdom? Why or why not?

Luke tells us that when Jesus' parents found him they made it clear that it was time to return home.

- Have you ever lost a child for a period of time (even a few minutes)? How did it make you feel?
- In what ways did Jesus submit to his parents' authority? Why is this impressive? Should it be impressive?
- Why do you think we, as human beings, often have a negative view of authority?

In Ephesians 5:22 where Paul speaks about wives "submitting" themselves to their husbands as they do to the Lord, it's the same verb used in this story about Jesus.

- How is the submission of faith a positive trait and not the description of a weak or timid character?