

God's Year of Grace
Divine Service Narration
 Rev. James Fritsche

Welcome and Opening Narration

Good afternoon and Welcome! Each year Redeemer Lutheran Church invites friends and members of the community to a special program of lessons and carols and once again we are very pleased to welcome you this afternoon as we celebrate **God's Year of Grace**. The Season of Advent marks the beginning of a new church year. The church's calendar, like the secular calendar, is divided into a colorful variety of seasons, festivals, special occasions and days - all meant to mark significant events in the life of our Lord and his church. The first part of today's festival is an opportunity for us to sing our way through the church year and affirm with one another the blessings we share in this "communion of saints", the family of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we move through the service we will point out connections between the church year and the liturgy of the Divine Service and, in particular, how each Sunday's worship service is, in fact, a re-inactment of the church's calendar in miniature. The second part of our program is a more traditional reading of lessons and singing of carols. We are joined today by Redeemer's Choir, the Seminary Singers and several instrumentalists. Our first hymn this afternoon is a wonderful, uplifting song reminding us that even as Jesus was greeted by the pilgrims at the gates of Zion on Palm Sunday, so we also welcome Him into our hearts and lives during the coming year of God's Grace. Let us stand and sing #339, Lift Up Your Heads

Hymn: Lift Up Your Heads # 339

Narration for Advent

The festive half of the church year focuses on two great events in the life of our Lord, His incarnation at Bethlehem and His suffering, death and resurrection in Jerusalem. The first festival, centered in Christmas, deals with the Person of Christ and answers the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?". The second, which culminates with Holy Week and Easter Sunday, focuses on the Work of Christ and answers the question, "What has he done that we should worship him?" Each of these two remembrances has a season of **preparation**, a season of **celebration**, and a season of **reflection**.

The season of preparation for the Christmas cycle is the four weeks of Advent. Advent reminds us that the world needed a Saviour. The sin of Adam and Eve had plunged the world into a darkness of sin and violence, misery and death. Helpless humanity waited for deliverance. In Jesus day, there were so many -- the ten lepers, blind Bartimaeus, the crippled man at Bethesda's pool -- so many crying out the same desperate plea of the ages, "Kyrie Eleison", Lord, have mercy.

"Lord, have mercy", is the cry of Advent. It is also the first song in our liturgy. It signifies a people waiting for deliverance from God. But it is more than just a helpless plea. It is hopeful cry as well, hopeful because of God's promise to send a Deliverer. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel." (Genesis 3:15) Because of that first glimmer of Gospel, the world could wait in the hope that one day God would fulfill His promise to overcome the power of Satan and restore life and salvation to mankind. The liturgical colour for the season of Advent has been

changed from purple to blue, reflecting this hopeful plea for God to fulfil his promise and send the world its Saviour.

Choir Anthem: *“Lo He Comes With Clouds Descending”* (Choir)

Narration for Christmas

In our liturgy, the Kyrie immediately gives way to the Gloria, the song of the angles: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill to men”. And suddenly in our worship it's Christmas! God has heard the cry of His people in their distress and fulfils His ancient promise: Unto us a Child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

During Advent, the church waited with restrained anticipation, in sharp contrast to the secular onslaught of Christmas weeks before its arrival. But now, the 12-day season of Christmas releases the joyful celebration of our Lord's Incarnation. God has come in the flesh to visit and redeem his people. The colour of the pastor's stole and the paraments is white, suggesting the purity and holiness that only the presence of God can afford. The time of waiting is finally over. Christmas is the season to pull out all the stops and celebrate with the utmost joy, for the fullness of time has come at last. “Now sing we, now rejoice with heart and hands and voice!”

Hymn for Christmas: Now Sing We, Now Rejoice (St. 1 Seminary Singers, Cong. St. 1 & 2) LSB 386

Narration for Epiphany

The 12 days of celebration is followed by a season of reflection. “What child is this?” the world wants to know, this child of Bethlehem. What makes this child so extraordinary that Angels proclaim his birth and billions throughout the world would give Him their allegiance? In the season of Epiphany we see God the Father drawing the world's attention to his Son. And so, the Father prepares a heavenly spotlight to point the Magi to the place where he lay. Thirty years later at His baptism in the Jordan River the Father is still pointing out His Son to people, declaring “You are my Son, whom I love; with whom I am well pleased”. At the end of Epiphany from the Mount of Transfiguration we hear the voice from heaven again, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” And in those weeks in between we see further evidences of His divine glory as he changes water into wine, and his disciples believe in him; as he preaches in the synagogue and proclaims Himself the fulfilment of the prophets; as he heals the sick and casts out demons and calls his disciples to follow him and as he teaches the multitudes the wonderful truths that can only come from God. All of this is to say that “this child is different”. This is no ordinary man. Here is one who is special. In the history of the whole world there is no one like Him. He is indeed the God-man, Jesus, the Christ!

In the Divine Service, it is in the reading of the Holy Scriptures and in the sermon that God continues today to reveal His Son to mankind. The colour of the season is Green, reflecting the colour of growth as faith is kindled and disciples today are nurtured in the Word. It's no

wonder that Epiphany is also the season to stress the work of world missions as we continue today to make this child known throughout the world.

Hymn for Epiphany: Songs of Thankfulness and Praise (St. 1 all; St. 2 Solo; St. 3 Choir, St. 4 all) # 394

Narration for Lent and Holy Week

The forty days of Lent is another season of preparation. Beginning with the account of the Temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness, Lent is call for us to examine our own times of testing and failure. We are called to self-examination and repentance. We see that it is our own sins that led Jesus on his journey to the cross. Here we begin to focus on the **work** of our Lord -- his journey to the cross for the sake of all sinners. The colour of the season, purple, reflects the attitude of repentance and contrition for sin. The 40 days of Lent are followed by Holy Week – a time to celebrate the events of our Lord’s Passion, death and resurrection.

In the liturgy, we move to the Service of the Sacrament and we are reminded of the events of Holy Week first in the Sanctus, where we sing “blessed his He who comes in the name of the Lord”, sung by the pilgrims on Palm Sunday; then, in the Words of Institution, recalling the Lord's Supper with His disciples on Maundy Thursday; and in the Agnus Dei, where the Lamb of God gives up His life on Good Friday's cross. The sorrow, the agony, the pain and passion -- our Lord's loving sacrifice for the sins of the world. A new Hymn, What is this Bread? teaches us the meaning of the Sacrament.

Hymn for Lent/Holy Week: What is this Bread? (St. 1, 2, & 5) LSB 629

Narration for Easter

The Resurrection of our Lord is the greatest event in all history. Without it there would be no church of Jesus Christ, but more importantly, there would be no hope beyond this life. Because of Easter, not only is there hope, but there is victory -- Christ's victory over death and the grave and our own victory over sin and death. The seven weeks of Easter is the season to celebrate and reflect on the presence of our living Lord -- His presence among His disciples for 40 days following his resurrection, and his presence among us still in His Word and Sacrament.

In the Divine Service, Easter is reflected in the distribution of the Sacrament. Here the living Saviour is among us once again as we eat His body and drink His blood. Here He forgives our sins and strengthens us to live daily as His own dear children. The colour of Easter is again white reflecting the purity of our Savior’s life and atonement for sin.

Hymn for Easter: Now All the Vault of Heaven Resounds (St. 1 & 4) LSB 465

Narration for Pentecost

Jesus promised to send the Counsellor to his disciples - the Spirit of Truth who would lead them. That promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost while the disciples were waiting as Jesus had instructed them. But they wouldn't be idle for long. There was a great explosion

that day -- the day when they left their upper room and went out into the world with the message of salvation. Jesus had told them that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And that's what they did. They preached and taught and travelled and brought the Gospel to all who would hear.

At the end of the Divine Service the pastor speaks the Benediction and the people leave the service, but their service to their Lord is just beginning. Strengthened by His Word and Sacrament they also go out into the world in the strength of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the Gospel through their words and actions.

The colour for the day of Pentecost is red, the colour of blood. Tradition tells us that all the disciples, except for St. John, died the death of the martyr. Our witness to Christ may well cost us dearly, for the world and the devil can mightily oppose the spreading of the Gospel. And yet, such opposition cannot deter us, for the Lord's own promise remains firm: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." A new hymn for Pentecost, originally written in Spanish, reflects the excitement of the work of the Holy Spirit: # 502 Holy Spirit, the Dove Sent from Heaven .

Hymn for Pentecost: # 496 *"Holy Spirit, Light Divine"* (st. 1 All, st. 3 choir, st. 4 all)

Narration for End Times

In the church year, the Sundays after Pentecost are all green -- once again representing our growing in Christ. Growing in Christ is a life-long adventure. Daily we are confronted by challenges to our faith, so daily we need to seek strength and guidance from God's Word. Throughout our life, we are to feed on God's Word and Sacrament, and as we do, we grow in faith and in the image of Christ. As we travel through summer - the growing season - and into fall - the harvest season- we realize that there will be an end to our life on earth and a time when God will bring all things to an end. During such turbulent times, we need the reminder that the Lord has promised to come again, to fulfil all things and restore paradise. So, at the end of the church year, we have come full cycle, once again waiting in hope for the Lord to fulfil his promise. To Him who is the Alpha and Omega, the church's waiting prayer is "Maranatha - come, Lord Jesus"!

Closing Hymn: Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise (St. 1, 2 & 5) LSB 680