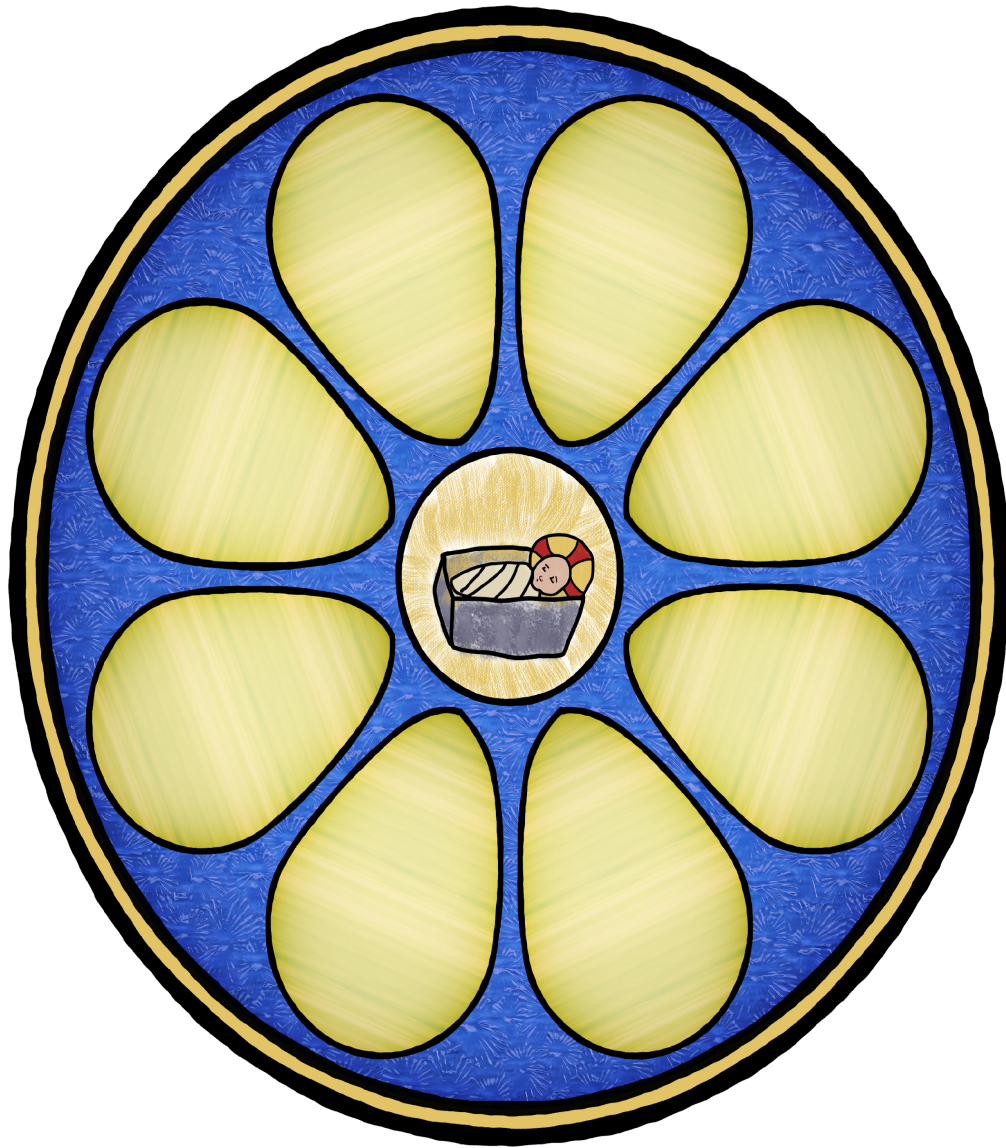


Advent Devotional 2022

Miraculous Savior



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A Note from Rev. Franson (Nythrius/Rev Franson):
You will need your Bible! This devotional is a study
on the miracles of Jesus, but we cannot possibly fit all
the readings about each miracle in this booklet. With
every devotional, there will be a selection from the
Gospels that contain the account of each individual
miracle from the different views of the different Gospel
records. Please read those passages to get a full
understanding of what the devotional writer is saying.

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November 27–Advent I: Wedding Feast at Cana

John 2:1–12

John 2:11 This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

This beginning of signs is truly a marvel for the faithful. Not only does our Lord make manifest his sovereignty over all of creation by turning simple water into the king of beverages—wine—he also lets it be known that He wishes us to have joy. Not the passing joy of a night spent in drunken, immodest revelry, but the all-surpassing joy of the wedding feast of the Lamb and His bride, the Church.

As the Lord began his ministry, so he shall also end it, with a celebration. But what an end, an endless end! The last celebration vastly outshines the first one. All of history is but a modest prelude for this joyous eternity. Do not be fooled; do not let yourself be convinced that God is letting you down in the present. This eternal feast begins on earth in the Divine Service, which is exactly why we call our holy days “feasts.”

Come, join us in this feast. Let us leave behind the sad drudgery of the world, for the mirthful din of the wedding hall, the sanctuary. Let us repent, and cast away these soiled rags of sin, and put on the perfect robes of righteousness, the purity of our Lord. Let us weep with tears of joy, as we join our Bridegroom at His altar, and say: “My beloved is mine, and I am His. He feeds his flock among the lilies.” (Song. 2:16)

November 28: Healing of the Nobleman's Son

John 4:46–54

John 4:50 Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

Seventeen miles. That's how far away Cana is from Capernaum. Slightly less than a day's journey, but still long enough to make a round trip journey unlikely. A man hears that Jesus is back in Galilee after being in Judea, and he's off to find him. But who is this man going to find? A young rabbi whose sole miraculous work has been to make water into wine? The son of a carpenter? I don't think that this man knew exactly who Jesus was when he left Capernaum, but he knew that without aid his son was going to die. His son is on the point of death. When the life of your child is on the line, you've got to do something. Even if that something is untested or unknown.

Little does this man realize whom he is going to find in Cana! He is hoping for a miracle, that this young miracle worker would be willing to make the trip to Capernaum. But upon seeing Jesus, this father is rebuked for his unbelief, along with the crowd! This doesn't deter him though, and he asks again for his son. Jesus's response is so simple, “Go home, your son lives.” And he believed. He trusted Jesus's words to him that day. Returning home, his faith in Jesus's words is proven true.

So, do we have this same faith in Jesus's Words? We are constantly worried about our churches shrinking or dying, as if somehow the Church herself will die. Jesus said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church. Do you really believe that? Do you cling to that promise and live like you believe it? Or are you convinced that unless you think of the next big thing, the church is doomed? The church consists of believers gathered around the words and promises (sacraments) of Jesus. Believe in His promises, just as this man and his whole household believed. For Christ is risen and is coming again, Amen.

November 29: Cleansing of a Leper

Matthew 8:1–4; Mark 1:40–45; Luke 5:12–16

Mark 1:41–42 **Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched [the leper], and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed**

Leprosy is a horrible disease of the skin, the worst symptoms attacking your skin and your joints until your body literally falls apart. But that wasn't the worst of it: the accompanying isolation meant that no loved ones could care for you. To prevent the spread of the disease, you were removed from society, forced to live by yourself or in the company of other lepers. Should someone come near you unaware, you were to shout “unclean” lest that person come into contact with you unawares. On top of the physical and societal pain, you were even isolated spiritually from God and his commanded sacrifices.

In this reality dwells the leper that we meet in today's reading. For even though Jesus can heal the sick, command the elements, and even raise the dead, can he truly cleanse the unclean? Does he have that authority, and is he willing to use it? That is the question that is raised ever so politely by the leper: “If you will it?” Note Jesus's response to this. He doesn't call out the leper for his lack of faith, or as one who won't believe until he sees a sign. Mark clearly tells us that Jesus had compassion for this leper. In his compassion Jesus replies simply, then he reaches out his hand and TOUCHES the leper. Jesus willingly becomes ceremonially unclean to show his compassion to this leper. He does will for that leper to be clean, even though it means taking upon himself all the uncleanness—the leper's, yours, and the whole world's. The price for this would be his own death: not a long, painful death by leprosy, but an even harsher punishment under God's wrath. Jesus wanted this leper to be clean, He wants you to be clean, He wants me to be clean; all by his blood. So, let us cast our sins at Jesus's feet this Advent season, preparing for him to come again and make the whole world cleansed from sin. In Jesus's name, Amen.

November 30: Exorcism of the Demoniac in the Synagogue

Mark 1:21–28; Luke 4:31–37; Hosea 11:10–12

Mark 1:23–24 **Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!”**

Jesus begins his preaching ministry in Capernaum, and the crazies begin to come out of the woodwork. He preaches in a synagogue, and a man under the influence of a demon begins to yell out: “Let us alone!”

“Leave it be! Shut up! Stop!” When Jesus speaks, the man under the influence of demons speaks louder. Think about it. The demons don’t want Jesus to speak—because when he speaks, they lose their power. The demon screams out in rage as the Holy One of Israel walks into his synagogue. Jesus resists—and the demon flees.

When Jesus speaks, the demons lose their power. This demon knows his time is up, the man is freed from bondage on account of Christ’s Word. The Lord Jesus Christ steps onto the scene wielding the sword of the Spirit, and the rule of Satan over this world immediately begins to crumble.

You too wield this power. It’s on the tip of your lips whenever you speak Jesus’s words, out loud, to other people. Jesus gives us his word in order to equip you in this crazy, unclean, and demon-influenced world. He doesn’t leave you alone against the unclean spirits of this age. The Holy One of Israel fights through you, especially when you open your mouth and speak the words of Scripture. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

December 1: Healing of Peter's Mother-in-Law

Luke 4:38–41; Matthew 8:14–17; Mark 1:29–34

Mark 1:30–31 **But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told [Jesus] about her at once. So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them.**

Take a look at this miracle from the three different Gospel accounts, and you will notice something slightly different in every account, but nothing contradictory. Luke emphasizes Jesus's command over all creation by His simply speaking to the fever and it immediately obeys Jesus's command. Matthew emphasizes that Jesus touched the woman while she was sick. He wasn't concerned about contracting the fever himself; he wasn't worried about becoming unclean by touching someone who was sick. And at Jesus's cleansing touch, the fever left the body of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. But I like Mark's account the most of all. It includes the aforementioned details and more: Mark records that Jesus lifts her up. This should not be missed, for this same word is used when Jesus rises from the dead.

Why does Jesus do this miracle? For the loyalty of a disciple he only recently called to follow him? No. He does it out of love for this woman whom we only know as Simon Peter's mother-in-law. He has compassion for all who suffer, and he would not leave us in bondage. He will even suffer for us, taking our sickness, our sin, upon himself, so that we might be clean and raised from the dead.

Her response is beautiful. She doesn't take over and start bossing Simon Peter and the others around. She doesn't tell Jesus to get out so she can put on her robe and some better clothes. She gets up and begins to serve, because that's what you do when Jesus has raised you from the dead. Through your baptism, you have a new life in service to him. Thanks be to Jesus, Amen.

December 2: Healing of the Woman with the Flow of Blood

Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56

Luke 8:47–48 Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before [Jesus], she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. And He said to her, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”

What is remarkable about the woman who was healed from a discharge of blood is the humility by which she approaches Jesus. She does not suppose herself worthy to approach Him directly. She does not even seek to touch Jesus Himself. Rather, she seeks him in the crowd hoping only to touch his garments in the hope that she might receive mercy and healing.

This event is sandwiched into the story of a man seeking Jesus for the sake of his daughter who is dying. There is an interesting contrast between the two. The ruler of the synagogue, Jairus, was a man of high rank and sought Jesus face to face. The woman, labeled unclean because of her discharge of blood, did not regard herself as worthy of his time. Just a passing touch of his garment will do. No reason to disturb the master. Yet in the end she is called a daughter by Jesus.

In the end the faith of the woman made her well, both physically and spiritually. Jairus, on the other hand, was amazed by Jesus’s miracle, walking by sight rather than by faith. Jairus sought Jesus as an option. The woman sought Jesus as THE only option. Both sought Jesus, but the woman sought Jesus with a certainty and conviction that he was the way to life. Are we seeking Jesus as a way or the way? Is he just another option for helping us get through the day? Or is he THE source of our strength and salvation?

December 3: The Raising of Jairus's Daughter

Matthew 9:18–26; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56

Mark 5:35b–36 **“Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not be afraid; only believe.”**

Jairus's story is a difficult one. This man is the ruler of the synagogue, yet when he finds Jesus, he doesn't try to use his authority, rather he bows in respect to Jesus's authority. Jesus hears Jairus's plight, and then he follows him to his house where his daughter lies on the brink of death. But then Jesus is stopped in the middle of the street by the press of the crowd and a woman who seeks Jesus for her own healing. This delay doesn't seem long in the ears of the listener, but for Jairus this delay must have stretched on forever. But then Jesus was (finally) back on his way, and then the messengers from his house arrive. He's too late! They've spent too much time on everything else. His daughter is dead. He has failed as a father. Jesus has failed as a savior.

Into this anguish interrupts the voice of Jesus, “Do not be afraid; only believe.” And Jairus does. He follows Jesus and, despite all the evidence to the contrary, listens to the voice of his Savior. The house mocks Jesus when he declares the little girl to be sleeping, but Jarius ignores their mocking and believes. And then, Jesus wakes the little girl and gives her back to her father and mother healthy.

Do not be afraid; only believe. Jesus speaks these words to you today. You who are afraid of the increasing corruption of our culture, believe in Jesus. You who are afraid of the mockery of your neighbors for your faith, believe in Jesus. You who are afraid of dying more than anything, believe in Jesus. Call upon him in faith, and trust in His promise to you. Jesus has washed you in the waters of baptism and will bring you through this life into the life to come, where you will reign with him forever. Until that day, do not be afraid; only believe. In Jesus's name, Amen.

December 4–Advent II: Calming the Tempest

Matthew 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25; Psalm 77

Mark 4:41 **And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”**

Who can this be? The disciples ask a great question. The answer is clear to us, but it should also have been clear to the disciples. Mark includes this question for our benefit, not merely as a historical note. He includes it in order that we might answer the question ourselves, so that we might yell out the answer.

Who can this be? A prophet greater than Jonah, Elijah, and even Moses. He commands the whole of creation, for it is he who made it. On the third day of creation, he separated the ocean and the dry land (Gen 1:9–10). In the days of Noah, he destroyed the wicked and saved the righteous man Noah and his family by the great deluge (Gen 6–8). In the Exodus, he split the Red Sea so that the Israelites would be saved and the Egyptians drowned (Exod 14–15). In the days of Joshua, he split the Jordan River so that the whole of Israel could enter into the Promised Land (Josh 3–4). In the days of Jonah, he sent a storm to call his prophet back to preach the gospel to all nations (Jonah 1–2). No one else commands the wind and the sea!

Who can this be? He is the one who has not only historically saved people, but the One who even now is saving you, through water. He has marked you as his own. We need not be afraid: “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Ps 46:11). He who has saved his people of old continues to save his people even today. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

December 5: Healing of the blind & mute man of Decapolis

Mark 7:31–37

Mark 7:37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

The creation groans over its brokenness. The Father sends the Son to answer the grieving creation, and the Son bears our weak, frail flesh and restores it. Jesus departs to the Sea of Galilee. A deaf and mute man is brought to Jesus. Jesus restores him by placing His fingers into the ears and spitting onto and touching the man’s tongue (7:33). Looking up to heaven, Jesus says, “Ephphatha” (“Be opened.”) As he does this Jesus himself groaned (ἐστέναξεν).

Today, in terms of our sin, this miracle does not solve our sinful condition. Jesus doesn’t come to take away the physical affliction of our groaning, but to restore us before God despite our sin. Jesus heals this man to point us deeper than a simple recognition of his miraculous power. He guides us to know that he has been sent by the Father, who throughout history has opened ears and mouths (Exod. 4:10–11) to hear and proclaim his word of promise to his people.

Jesus comes and assures us that he has heard our groaning, and he takes the sin of the world onto himself, dying on the cross to declare to you that your sin is no more, and that you have been restored to life by the shedding of his blood. Even creation—including all those who are deaf and mute—will have its moment of restoration on the Last Day, freed from its groaning under bondage to corruption. He who has ears, let him hear. The word of God opens our ears, and we are to go out into the world as the people at the Sea of Galilee, saying, “He has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.” (7:37). Come Lord Jesus.

December 6: Healing/exorcism of the Canaanite's Daughter

Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30

Matthew 15:27 **And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”**

Jesus called the woman a dog. That is probably the most shocking element of this story for most people. After all, Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, so he loves everyone, right? Why would he call this woman a dog?

The reality is that, in one or another, we are all dogs. The woman may not have been a child of Abraham, one of the sons who were to be fed first, but who in truth has a right to call themselves son of the kingdom anyways? John the Baptizer said, “Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham” (Luke 3:8). We, who were born dead in sin, could all have been called dogs by Jesus. What makes us children of light is nothing intrinsic within ourselves.

What separates the dog from the children is not the number of legs or tails, but the Father’s discretion of who eats at table and who eats the scraps. This woman had the faith to recognize that, despite her unworthiness, she had no better option, indeed no other option at all, than to call upon this man Jesus. “For this statement” of great faith, the dog was elevated to the position of child and admitted to table to eat with the children. Conversely, it is upon the rejection of the cornerstone that those who are children of Abraham will eat the scraps.

Like the woman, we ought to come before the throne in humility, knowing that in our sin we deserve only scraps. Yet because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we approach the Lord’s table with faith as precious children of his heavenly kingdom, which has no end.

December 7: Two blind men and a mute demoniac healed

Matthew 9:27–38

Matthew 9:30 – 31 **And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, “See that no one knows it.” But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country.**

One curious command that Jesus sometimes gives after a miracle is to be silent about it, to not tell anyone. At the same time, the people often ignore Jesus every time that he says this. We see that these two blind men who followed Jesus believe in Him. After all, they cried out for Jesus as the Son of David to have mercy on them. And then, when they are in the same room with Jesus, he asks them if they believe that Jesus has the power and authority to do this for them. Their reply is quite revealing, “Yes Lord.” They confess that Jesus is the Son of David and their Lord, none less than the divine Messiah that they have been waiting for, and who they hope and believe in. Their eyes are then opened and they behold their savior, but are told not to tell anyone. But so great is their joy over Jesus’ compassion that they can’t help but tell everyone that they meet, and soon the news is spread throughout the country.

Yet they were told not to tell, to keep it secret. Why? Because Jesus hasn’t come to simply heal the sick, cast out demons, and give bread to people. He has come to die on the cross. That is where we see his compassion reach its ultimate form, where he lays down his life for us. After he rises then he tells his disciples and all who have seen him to go and share this gospel of Jesus’s death on the cross for the life of the world. But do we? Are we scared to even wear a crucifix? Are we frightened or ashamed of Jesus’s death? This Advent season, as we prepare for Jesus to come again, let us pray for a vocal faith such as these two blind men had. A faith that is unable to be silent about the compassion of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

December 8: Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43

Luke 18:38 **And he cried out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”**

A king is certainly a busy man, and one might not think as he travels from town to town that he cares much for the little worries of the common people. Yet Jesus our King stops and cares for the people who cry out for Him. Bartimaeus cries out and identifies Jesus as the Son of David and pleads for him to “have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:48; Luke 18:38). Jesus stops and calls the man to him and hears his plea for the King’s mercy. Blind Bartimaeus asks that he would simply “receive my sight” (Mark 10:51, Luke 18:40–41). This is not the typical request of an earthly king. This is the request of a divine King.

Bartimaeus sees Jesus not as an earthly descendent of David to rule and restore the kingdoms of Israel from the afflictions of Rome. No, this blind man saw what could only be seen by faith. Jesus had come to deliver not just God’s chosen people of Israel but that all people would be delivered by the Son of David from all afflictions of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus being the Son of David, and the Son of David’s God, hears Bartimaeus’s faithful confession and grants his plea. Jesus simply tells him to go and, by eyes of faith, Bartimaeus has received his sight. Jesus’s proclamation for Bartimaeus, is also for you and me as well. The King has come; he has given up his throne and crown for you. You are heirs by faith. May the Lord give us sight to see by his eternal word. Come Lord Jesus, Amen.

December 9: Healing the Paralytic lowered to Him from the roof

Matthew 9:1–8; Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26

Matthew 9:2 Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”

This miracle is one of those that has always stuck with me since I first heard it from my days in Sunday School. It has five great friends, four of which are willing to climb onto the roof of a house, haul up their friend in a bed to this roof, remove a section of this roof, and lower him down so that this man can see Jesus. I can hardly get a friend to agree to meet me for coffee some days! But even more amazing than the actions of this man’s friends is Jesus’s response. He looks upon this man and treats the most deadly disease that mankind has ever suffered, a disease with a 100% mortality rate: sin. This paralyzed man isn’t angry about it, neither are his friends. Instead, it’s the scribes and Pharisees that are standing outside who are offended: “This man is blaspheming” (Matt 9:3). So Jesus gives them a sign to show simultaneously his divinity and his mercy. He heals the man of his paralysis.

This is the God who came to us as a baby in his first Advent. This is the God who is coming back, whom we await. A God who has compassion on those who believe in him. A God who is not content to only say words, but whose words have the power to change the cosmos. He forgives your sins. He will raise your body in the resurrection, free from sin and corruption. He has the power to do it because he is risen, and he is coming again. Until that day, in Jesus’s name, Amen.

December 10: Raising the Widow's Son of Nain

Luke 7:11–17

Luke 7:16 Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us”; and, “God has visited His people.”

There are some places where conflict is expected. We attempt to control and regulate it by rules of behavior through the mediums of sports, martial arts, politics, and the economy. There are some places where conflict is not expected—and generally suppressed. Worship is one of these spheres; St. Paul exhorts men in particular: “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Tim 2:8).

Funerals likewise should have no conflict. There should be respect for the body of one who has died and for those who are mourning. It is appropriate to pull over as a funeral procession is driving from the church to the cemetery. Let nothing get in their way or stop them. Except...Jesus. Jesus got in the way of a funeral procession. He stopped it—the text makes sure you know this. Then by his compassion he raised the man and gave him to his mother.

The conflict between life and death is a bitter one. Death came into this world “through sin” (Rom 5:12). Even now sin and death reign over us. Christ brings life and forgiveness. There will be conflict. It is inevitable. Even a funeral procession that Jesus meets on his way is a small battle in this war. He won this battle, he has won the war by his cross and resurrection, and this victory will be finally seen on the last day. God has indeed visited his people in the person of Christ, and will visit us again. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

December 11: Feeding the 5,000

Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14

John 6:7 **Philip answered [Jesus], “Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little.”**

The Feeding of the 5000 has some prominence for the fact that it is the only miracle (other than the resurrection) mentioned in all four Gospels. One thing we should immediately note is that this is a miracle of *multiplication*. Jesus often corrects that which is evil in his miracles (healing, raising, exorcizing, calming, etc.) or converts something to another (water to wine), but this miracle is an exponential creation from nothing. Jesus takes five loaves of bread and two fish, given by a generous boy, and he distributes them to five thousand men, not counting women and children—with plenty left over!

People noticed. John records the result: “Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself” (6:15). If an army runs on its stomach, and Jesus could create bread out of nothing, there should be no surprise that the Jews acted as they did. Make Jesus our earthly king and general! Wouldn't we react the same? Instead of asking Jesus to multiply bread, why could he not multiply the money in my bank account? (Although, I'm pretty sure God knows how inflation would then result.)

The lesson for us in this miracle is that God uses physical blessings to point us to his spiritual blessings. What had Jesus been doing for the people all day? Preaching and healing the sick. He then spread a feast for them to enjoy. He does not multiply money for them to go out and buy their food. He multiplies something that is here for a time, consumed for energy, then spoils just as quickly. This food in the Bible points us to a more lasting food that enters us and gives us an eternal life and does not spoil. Christ does care for our body and gives us our daily bread, but even more importantly, he feeds us with his Word, his Body and his Blood, for our souls to feast upon.

December 12: Feeding the 4,000

Matthew 15:32–39; Mark 8:1–10

Matthew 15:37 **So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left.**

There are two meals that Christ gives. He gives us feasts where we can eat our fill, relax, and laugh with family members around a table. He also gives us manna when we are hungry and do not know where else to go. If the miracle of the Feeding of the 5000 is a feast, then the Feeding of the 4000 is bread of necessity. This happened in a very pagan area, “in the region of the Decapolis” (Mark 7:31). The countryside was as barren as the religious practices of the area. This was not the lush countryside of Judea, but a desolate place in every way. But people were hungry. They followed Jesus out there because he had words of life. They stayed so long that they even ran out of food.

Jesus saw this and said, “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away” (Mark 8:2–3).

Are you hungry? Do the religious stories and teachings of our media, film, and elites not satisfy you? Follow Jesus and his teaching, where you will be satisfied. Even if Jesus seems to be leading you away from “civilization” into a barren desert, follow him, until “the wilderness becomes a fruitful field” (Isa 32:15). There food for your souls is found. He will not neglect your physical needs, but he will give you the bread of necessity that keeps you living one day at a time. It is the daily bread that we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer. In the end, this “dry morsel with quiet” will be better than “a house full of feasting with strife” (Prov 17:1).

December 13: Healing of the Blind Bethsaida Man

Mark 8:22–26; Isaiah 35:1 – 10

Mark 8:25 Then [Jesus] put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly.

Raising someone from the dead? For a Hebrew, that wasn't all that special of a miracle—it had already happened! Now granted, it only happened a couple of times. Restoring sight to the blind, however, that had never happened. It truly was a sign of the Messiah, of the restoration of Israel promised by Isaiah.

In his ministry, Jesus heals two blind men (cf. John 9). In Mark, the healing isn't just a sign that Jesus was the Messiah, but something greater. This sign teaches about the nature of faith as sight. In Mark's Gospel, we see how the Jews reject Jesus while the Gentiles have faith in him. This is especially clear in Mark 6–8. This miracle is followed by Peter's confession (8:27–30).

Jesus heals the man in two stages. First, he sees partially, then fully. This isn't an accident—Jesus doesn't have accidents. Jesus is teaching. Peter will see only in part—Jesus is the Christ (Mark 8:29), but not the One who comes to suffer and die (Mark 8:32). Peter, like the blind man, sees partially, and only later sees fully.

So too, we see partially, then fully. Faith grows when it is watered and fed by the Word and Sacraments of Christ. We gradually come to a clearer vision of who Jesus is and what he has come to do as we gather together every Lord's Day. Until that Last Day, we know that we see dimly, yet we look forward to that day when Jesus will open our eyes fully. In his holy name, Amen.

December 14: Exorcism of the Gadarene Demoniacs

Matthew 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39

Mark 5:12–13a **So all the demons begged [Jesus], saying, “Send us to the swine, that we may enter them.” And at once Jesus gave them permission.**

Demons are real. Demons are present and active. This is an uncomfortable truth for most Western Christians. It assaults our modern mindset where truth is what we see under a microscope. It also causes discomfort to think that we are not in control of our destiny. Yet demons are quite real and always active, seeking to bring harm to the kingdom of God and bring ruin upon God’s chosen people.

This exorcism is one of the more dramatic exorcisms in scripture: a legion of demons ask to be sent into an entire herd of pigs. What a story! Looking beyond these theatrics, there is a subtle comfort in this story that we should not ignore. Jesus continues to care for the man by clothing and teaching him. He cares for the only soul that mattered in that body. The demons, rebels from the foundation of the earth, are powerless and helpless before their avenging Creator. Having been cast out, they could not even possess a herd of pigs without the consent of our Savior. They are helpless in all matters before the Son of God, and they know it. Even though they are a legion of many demons, there is no possibility of victory. A mere word of Jesus is sufficient to cast them out.

Accept the fact that demons are among us. Contemplate this truth. Then rest in the fact that no evil can approach our doorstep without God’s permission. Everything evil brought upon Job by Satan was possible only by God’s permissive word. So also does God restrain the arm of Satan and his minions against us. Although they rage against the church God is always in control. When they say to you, “Jesus we know, and Paul we recognize, but who are you?” say to them, “I am an adopted son of the kingdom, and you can do nothing against me.” Pray to the Lord at all times, for he is able to deliver from every evil.

December 15: Healing of the Man Born Blind

John 9:1–41

John 9:1–3 Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.”

This miracle is not so different from so many others, but it’s the context surrounding it that makes it such an interesting lesson. Unlike others, this man doesn’t call out to Jesus for aid; instead, he is brought to Jesus’s attention by a question from his disciples. What caused this man’s blindness, his own sin or that of his parents? Jesus turns that idea upside down and says, “Neither.”

We who read this centuries later can easily feel vastly superior to those “superstitious” disciples who thought that blindness was the result of a sin of either the parents or the child, while Jesus identifies it as a birth defect that he is able to correct. At the same time, when we encounter our own suffering, we usually ask a similar question; “God, what did I do to deserve this?!?” While sometimes the answer is easily seen as a consequence of our actions, other times there’s no easy answer for us to grasp, but our suffering is just the sinful world pressing down on us, forcing us to rely on God for our salvation.

We see that in our lesson today. The blind man trusts in Jesus’s words, and he is healed. He’s then ostracized from his community and family, yet Jesus is there. He doesn’t abandon this man. So he gets a new family, with God as his father, and he gets a new community where Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus has done the same for us, and there is coming a day when what we believe will be seen, when the blindness of sin will darken our eyes no more, and we will see Jesus face to face. Until that day, in Jesus’s name, Amen.

December 16: Healing of the Centurion's Servant

Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10

Matthew 8:8 **The centurion answered and said, “Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.**

Luke's account of this miracle helps fill in some important details about the centurion. He was a man acquainted with the promises of God and had helped build a synagogue. Maybe he just wanted to get along well with his neighbors, but I don't think that's all there was to it. Look at how this centurion treats the servant under him. He doesn't treat him as some sort of disposable cog in the machine, but he has compassion on this servant when he becomes ill. This centurion knows the Torah, even if he isn't circumcised or even ritually able to attend the synagogue that he built. So he hears of Jesus and asks Jesus for healing for his servant. He is a man of authority who recognizes that Jesus has authority greater than he does.

Yet how often do we go to God in a completely different way? How often do we bring a problem to him and tell him exactly how he should fix it? How often do we try to impose our own authority on Jesus Himself? How seldom do we recognize the authority of the God who made heaven and earth, and who came down to this earth to save us from our sins, but we say, “Oh, but if he just did this thing in my way, it would be so much better.” No, Jesus is the one with the authority. He is the one who speaks, and the creation obeys his voice. This Advent season, let us approach our Savior with the same humility and faith that this centurion displayed. Thy will be done. In Jesus name, Amen.

December 17: Raising of Lazarus

John 11:1–44

John 11:25a **Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.”**

If there's any miracle that comes close to rivaling Jesus's own resurrection, it is the resurrection of Lazarus. It might be conceivable to our minds that Jesus could raise those who had recently died, whether it has been a few hours (Jairus's daughter) or a day (widow's son at Nain). After all, we hear rumors of people declared dead, only to wake up some time later. Lazarus was different. He was dead as a doornail, and his body had even begun to decay. In the words of the King James Version: “He stinketh.” Not even Jesus's own body had laid in the tomb as long as Lazarus's did.

There is a deeper problem than just the decay. Jews of Jesus's day believed that the soul “hovered” over the body for three days, only departing to Sheol on the fourth. The Talmud says: “The whole strength of the mourning is not till the third day; for three days long the soul returns to the grave, thinking that it will return [into the body]; when however it sees that the color of its face has changed then it goes away and leaves it” (*Gen. Rab.* 100 [64a]). Not only did Lazarus's body stink, but his soul was gone until the resurrection of all the dead. Martha even confessed as such in her grief.

The resurrection of Lazarus is significant for both these reasons. Jesus does have power over the decaying body, shown by his many miracles of healing and resurrection. Even more, he has power over souls. He has authority even now over your soul and rules it graciously by his Word and Sacraments. In life and death, Christ your King reigns. On the last day, he will recreate your bodies though they be but dust and infuse your soul back into them. We will rise in a more glorious way than Lazarus to live before God in holiness and bliss. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.

December 18 – Advent IV: Walking on Water

Matthew 14:22–33; Mark 6:45–56; John 6:15–21

Matthew 14:30 **But when [Peter] saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!”**

When I was a new Christian, I used to think that Peter was Jesus’s worst choice for a disciple. He was constantly putting his foot in his mouth, getting things wrong about Jesus and his divinity, and who can forget denying Jesus right before the crucifixion? In this text we have Peter thinking that since Jesus can walk on the water, he can too. What an ignoramus. What a buffoon. Yet Peter does it; he walks on the water just as Jesus did, albeit briefly. When the reality starts to set in and things look dangerous and scary around him, he starts to waver and begins to sink. Jesus doesn’t let him sink, though, He responds to Peter’s cry and saves him from his own foolishness.

The more my Christianity matures, the more solid food of the Scriptures that I eat, the more I’m thankful that Jesus chose Peter. Peter says and does things that we sinful human believers say and do. And Jesus didn’t turn away from Peter, didn’t tell him to save himself, didn’t tell him to just swim for it. He reached out and grabs Peter. He did chastise Peter for his lack of faith, since Peter didn’t believe that Jesus would be able to keep him safe in the blowing of the wind and the crashing of the waves. But we aren’t any better. We wonder how Jesus could possibly keep us safe through the turbulence of our recent years, including personal insults, politics, and old-fashioned persecution. So, brothers and sisters, have faith in the God who can walk on the waves, who walks above all danger, to bring you through it. For he will either bring you through it or bring you to him. He won’t be long now, so keep awake. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

December 19: Healing of Malchus's Ear

Luke 22; John 18:1–11

Luke 22:51 But Jesus answered and said, "Permit even this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

We've heard a lot about Jesus having compassion on those who seek healing from Him over the last few weeks. We've read about the woman with the flow of blood stopped, we've heard about the Canaanite woman and her daughter, we've heard about the man lowered in through the roof. But these are all people who have heard about Jesus and then sought him out for his mighty works. Their faith in Jesus drove them to seek Jesus for healing.

But not so today. Today Malchus, the servant of the high priest, came with the mob to arrest Jesus. This mob did indeed come to find Jesus, but not to ask for his healing, not to hear his teaching, not to receive his blessing. Instead, they have come, under the cover of darkness, to seize Jesus in secret and to bring him to trial. When the mob encounters Jesus, Malchus is there in the front ready to arrest Jesus. Peter lashes out with his sword, and his untrained stroke cuts off the ear of Malchus. In response, Jesus doesn't say, "That's what you get for coming to arrest the Son of Man." Instead, he rebukes Peter and then undoes the hurt that Peter has inflicted. Jesus still has compassion on Malchus, a man who is coming to arrest him.

But what does this reveal to us of Jesus? How many of you have been hurt by someone who is a follower of Jesus? Peter was willing to lay down his life to fight for Jesus. Yet, in doing so, he hurt Malchus, and Jesus had compassion on both of them. So if you have been hurt, then Jesus is there to heal you. If you have hurt, then Jesus is there to forgive you. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't fight back against Satan and his minions. But Jesus is ready to bring healing to those people, and we pray that God bring their evil plans to ruin and bring them to repentance. In Jesus's name, Amen.

December 20: Cleansing of the Ten Lepers

Luke 17:11–19

Luke 17:19 **And [Jesus] said to [the Samaritan], “Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”**

When Jesus speaks, things happen. When God comes into contact with what is “unclean,” the only options are that they are made clean by God, or they perish. This text in general is interesting because Jesus is brought into contact with people who are unclean, and by coming into contact with them we see that Jesus himself is risking being socially seen as unclean. Throughout these miracles, Jesus does not separate Himself from the broken creation. Jesus works in it and speaks over it as one who has authority over it. So when these ten lepers approach Jesus, they acknowledge him as one who can make their uncleanness clean. “They lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (Luke 17:13)

Jesus as master of all creation in the heavens and the earth simply tells them to go and show themselves to the priests. As they all rush to show themselves, a Samaritan notices he is healed and returns and gives thanks (Luke 17:15–16). Jesus spoke, and what was unclean was made clean. So also with us, our sin hangs upon Jesus on the cross and is covered in his precious blood. When God sees us covered by the blood of his Son, he does not see an unclean sinner, but he sees his holy precious child standing before him. God delights in the sinner who repents and returns to him in thanks and praise for all he has done. Praise God! You have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, declared a child of God in the waters of your baptism, and stand in the presence of God receiving the Supper of his life and salvation until Christ comes again. Go and proclaim what God has done for you in his Son. You have been made clean. To God be the glory forever. Come Lord Jesus.

December 21: Exorcism of the seizing Demoniac

Matthew 17:14–21; Mark 9:14–29; Luke 9:37–42

Mark 9:24 **Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”**

The part we all really want to know is why the disciples were unable to cast this demon out. We definitely want to know if there is some demon out there that is stronger than any human exorcist! We’re worried that there is something that we have no defense against, that could overpower us and take our body away from us. And blue light from the screens hasn’t helped this, with all sorts of horror stories about demonic possessions. In these stories, the priests are powerless in the face of the horror of the demon. But the real reason is much simpler: it’s unbelief. Matthew 17:20, “[Jesus] said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief.’”

The truth is that there is no demonic spirit that is more powerful than the Holy Spirit who dwells in the temple of your flesh through your baptism. But that doesn’t make for good Hollywood movies. So we’re always caught in this state, just like the father of the demon-possessed boy was today. Caught between belief and unbelief, with both wrestling in our hearts and minds. And the more we feed that unbelief with worldly things and the less we feed our faith, it’s no wonder that so many fall away. So, what will it be? Will we spend time in prayer and feeding our faith, or will we just be too busy this Advent season? Will we cry to Jesus, “Lord I believe, help my unbelief.” Or will we instead convulse and shudder in our “holiday activities” that reject Jesus? Jesus has given you His Holy Spirit, a Spirit that can’t be overcome by any demon. Cling to it, and to His promises. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

December 22: Healing of the man with the withered hand

Matthew 12:9–14; Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11

Matthew 12:12 **Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**

Many evangelicals, like the Pharisees, see the third commandment as merely as a ban on labor. The third commandment is much more than that. It isn't merely a ban on labor, but a gift of rest and a promise of providence.

Setting aside one day a week to rest from our labors is costly, especially in a society that is agricultural. When God requires sacrifice from us it is not like the pagan gods who require sacrifice to fulfill their fancy or earn their favor. When the Lord demands sacrifice it is like a good father commanding a son to help with household chores or aid in the family business. Telling your son to set aside his hobbies in order to help repair the roof is not tyrannical but rather loving. It will result in a secure home for him and the rest of the family.

The sabbath rest is not about banning labor but rather seeking rest and healing from our labors as a gift from God. This gift points to the final Sabbath rest which we will enjoy the company of our Lord forever. We who are not bound by the law to observe the Sabbath rest now see it as an invitation to gather weekly to hear the proclamation of God's good intentions for us and received his gift of word and sacrament.

It was right to heal the man on the Sabbath, because the Sabbath is a day not only for physical healing, but also for spiritual healing and refreshment. It is a day for the gospel to be proclaimed in every congregation as we await the coming of our Lord.

December 23: Healing of the Bent Woman

Luke 13:10–17

Luke 13:13 And [Jesus] laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

You've heard it say that you can't judge a book by its cover, but boy wouldn't it be great if you could? I'm not talking about being able to read a book just by reading its cover, but wouldn't it be great if the way a person looked reflected who they were. If someone who was very stingy would have a very tight and pinched face. If someone who loved to laugh always had a great big smile on their face, and if someone was angry and loved to yell their face would always be that shade of red that you see when someone is about to blow their lid. Sadly, people aren't that easy for us to read. But they are that easy for our savior to read.

In our lesson for today, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue and there is a woman there who is bent. The weight of her responsibilities and her age have pulled her body in on itself to the point where she cannot straighten herself out. And Jesus sees her, and has compassion on her, and looses the chains of age on her body, and it is made straight again. But the leader of the synagogue will have none of that, he can't stand to see this woman made whole on the Sabbath. Sadly, this man is bound by Satan just as much as the woman was. The woman was bound in body, bent to where she could not look up. This man is bent in his soul, where he can only look inward on himself. He has placed himself in God's place, and is now lecturing God for not following his man made rules concerning the Sabbath.

Jesus has come to make the crooked straight, and He has done that by His death on the cross. Now there is a straight path between God and us. Now we can stand upright in the presence of God, not confident in our own works, but confident in the blood of Jesus Christ that covers us. May we continue to stand straight in Jesus Christ, the God who makes the crooked straight. In Jesus name, Amen.

December 24: The Resurrection

Matthew 28:1–8; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 24:1–12; John 20:1–10

John 20:9 For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

Jesus's resurrection is for you. It is entirely for your benefit, for your peace of mind that Jesus made known his resurrection from the dead. Yes, death could not hold Jesus—that was impossible. But salvation is already accomplished before Jesus enters the tomb. Jesus cries out in John 19:30, “He said, ‘It is finished!’ And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.” Jesus doesn't say that it is half finished, and I've just got to rise from the dead first. No, it is finished. God didn't take a break from creation before he had finished, and he doesn't take a break from salvation before it's finished either.

But we still have Jesus's resurrection. And it's completely for our faith. We have the eyewitness testimony of all those 500+ people who saw that Jesus had risen from the dead. we have Jesus's own promise, that he will not leave us nor forsake us, that where he has gone we will be, for He has gone to prepare a place for us. So, tonight, as you're holding your candle singing softly “Silent Night” to that little baby in a manger, remember that this same baby will die on the cross for your sins, and rise again. And because he has defeated death and the grave, you will too. Jesus's resurrection is the guarantee of your resurrection. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed, Alleluia! Amen.

December 25: The Incarnation

John 1:1–14; Luke 2:1–20

John 1:14 **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**

Proclaim the news, Christ is born in Bethlehem. God's Word has become incarnate, has taken on human flesh. I'm sure you've heard this plenty of times today, or will hear it if you haven't been to Christmas day service yet. But I want you to just stop a minute and think about that, really think about it. Not just the warm fuzzy feeling that you get in your heart when you hear Linus stand up in the "Charlie Brown Christmas Special" and recite from Luke 2. What does it mean that God has taken on human flesh? It means that our God, in the person of Jesus Christ, is different than any of these other false gods.

What does that mean? Consider that in all the other religions, man has to ascend to the gods. If the gods must condescend from Olympus for any reason, they don't act like you and me. They don't know what it's like to be human. Instead it's just an illusion where a god is playing at being mortal. Or it's a part of some cruel joke that the gods want to perpetuate on silly powerless humanity. Or it's a coming in vengeance/judgment. Jesus isn't just pretending to be human. He IS human, born of the virgin Mary. Jesus didn't come down to play some cruel joke. He came down to show His love for us, to die on the cross. Jesus didn't even come in vengeance or judgment, rather He came down to take our sins upon Himself, to suffer the judgment that was ours in our place.

So, proclaim the Savior's birth. Go, tell it on the mountains. Rejoice, rejoice this happy morn. For Christ is born, and through Him we are reconciled to God. What joy is now to the world, in Jesus's holy name, Amen.

The Sons of Solomon Discipline:

The Sons of Solomon is an ecumenical prayer habitus of catholic Christian men worldwide focused on the Psalms and Proverbs. We agree on what we all confess: The Three Ecumenical Creeds. We pray the prayers God gave us to pray, and seek together the wisdom that is from above.

How?

1. Carry a bible, prayer book, and crucifix with you.

What is a prayer book?

Anything that points you back to the scriptures in your daily life: a hymnal, catechism, theological book...Anything by which you find inspiration to open, read and ponder the scriptures

Is this required at all times?

We are not practitioners of Judaism.

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any."

Do not abandon prudence, practice wisdom and discipline.

Let the image of the perfect man be your spiritual focus.

2. Meditate on a Proverb every day.

How might one do that?

Translate the Proverb into your own words. Carry that thought with you on a piece of paper for a day. Pray that you might use the thought in a conversation. Leave the note alone for a week, then read it again and repeat the process. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the wisdom of the Holy Scriptures. Let the author teach you wisdom, that you may be thoroughly equipped.

3. Read the Psalms of the Diaspora each day:

Morning: Psalms 123, 125, 127

Mid-day: Psalms 124, 129

Vespers: Psalms 126, 128

Evening: Psalms 130, 131

Learn more about this discipline at <https://sonsofsolomon.net/>

The Daughters of Wisdom Discipline:
Mothers, Sisters, Daughters, pray for the Patriarchy. Pray for the blessings God has promised. Pray for God's will to be done.

Morning: Psalm 133, 1 Samuel 2: 1–10

Meditate on how joyous it is when brothers dwell together in unity!
For additional morning encouragement, add the Song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, as she gives thanks to God.

Midday: Proverbs 31

The Wisdom of the mother of King Lemuel. Meditate on the promises God gives to the wife that trust his words. Meditate on the blessings you are given. Consider the life presented therein, and rejoice in it.

Vespers: Psalm 135 (optional)

Remember the mighty works of the LORD Jesus, and remember the folly of those who trust in idols of silver and gold (and plastic).

Compline: Psalm 134, Magnificat

Bless the LORD Jesus at the end of the day, and add in the Song of Mary, the mother of our LORD, as she gives thanks to God.

Learn more about this discipline at <https://sonsofsolomon.net/dow>