

Confession and Absolution

563 Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness

- 1 Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.
- 2 Bold shall I stand in that great day,
Cleansed and redeemed, no debt to pay;
Fully absolved through these I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.
- 3 Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which at the mercy seat of God
Pleads for the captives' liberty,
Was also shed in love for me.
- 4 Lord, I believe, were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.
- 5 When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,
This then shall be my only plea:
Jesus hath lived and died for me.
- 6 Jesus, be endless praise to Thee,
Whose boundless mercy hath for me,
For me, and all Thy hands have made,
An everlasting ransom paid.

Text: Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, 1700–60; tr. John B. Wesley, 1703–91, alt.
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Stand

The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

Invocation

- P** In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C Amen.

Exhortation

LSB 184

- P** Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.
- P** Our help is in the name of the Lord,
C **who made heaven and earth.**
- P** I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,
C **and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.**

Kneel/Stand

Silence for reflection on God's Word and for self-examination.

Confession of Sins

LSB 184

- P** O almighty God, merciful Father,
C **I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.**

Absolution

LSB 185

- P** Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- C** Amen.

*Stand***Service of the Word****Introit***Psalm 85:8–9, 12–13; antiphon: v. 7*

- P** Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.
- C** Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.
- P** Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.
- C** Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.
- P** Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.

Gloria Patri

LSB 186

- C** Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Kyrie

LSB 186

- C** Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.

Salutation and Collect of the Day

- P** The Lord be with you.
- C** And with thy spirit.
- P** Let us pray.
Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
- C** Amen.

*Sit***Old Testament Reading***Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11*

¹The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
³to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,

the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.
⁴They shall build up the ancient ruins;
 they shall raise up the former devastations;
 they shall repair the ruined cities,
 the devastations of many generations. . . .

⁸For I the LORD love justice;
 I hate robbery and wrong;
 I will faithfully give them their recompense,
 and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

⁹Their offspring shall be known among the nations,
 and their descendants in the midst of the peoples;
 all who see them shall acknowledge them,
 that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed.

¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
 my soul shall exult in my God,
 for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
 he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
 as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
 and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
 and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,
 so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise
 to sprout up before all the nations.

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Epistle

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil.

²³Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

Stand

Alleluia

LSB 190

C Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Holy Gospel

John 1:6–8, 19–28

P The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the first chapter.

C Glory be to Thee, O Lord.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. . . .

¹⁹This is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²²So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

²⁴(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C Praise be to Thee, O Christ.

Apostles' Creed

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy Christian Church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life † everlasting. Amen.

Sit

345 Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding

1 Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding!

“Christ is near,” we hear it say.

“Cast away the works of darkness,

All you children of the day!”

2 Startled at the solemn warning,

Let the earthbound soul arise;

Christ, its sun, all sloth dispelling,

Shines upon the morning skies.

3 See, the Lamb, so long expected,

Comes with pardon down from heav’n.

Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,

One and all, to be forgiv’n;

4 So, when next He comes in glory

And the world is wrapped in fear,

He will shield us with His mercy

And with words of love draw near.

△ 5 Honor, glory, might, dominion

To the Father and the Son

With the ever-living Spirit

While eternal ages run!

Text: Latin, c. 5th–10th cent.; tr. Edward Caswall, 1814–78, alt.

Text: Public domain

Sermon

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today, we celebrate Gaudete Sunday, the Sunday of Joy. We take a brief break during the somber, penitential season of Advent to focus on joy. We've been focused on the last things, eschatology in fancy theological terms. And while there are elements of joy underlying Jesus's second coming, there is also fear and dread.

As Lutherans, we are a pretty sober bunch. We begin each Divine Service by confessing how sinful, how evil we are. Without the Holy Spirit, we are so evil that we can't seek God. In fact, our sinful nature repulses God. It is only in God's grace and mercy that the Holy Spirit calls us to faith and leads us to be Baptized and become children of God.

Many equate happiness and joy. The song, "If you're happy and you know it" often contains "if you are happy and you know it then your face will surely show it". But look around. How many happy people do you see this morning? The hustle and bustle of Christmas doesn't help either. Despite what we hear in Christmas songs, Christmas can be and is a difficult time for many people. Seasonal Affective Disorder causes many to be depressed or at least depressive during these shortest days of the year. Family gatherings often resurface unresolved conflicts. Tensions can erupt. With additional demands on our time, we often feel rushed and irritable, making things even worse. Some have lost loved ones during the past year, bringing grief into an already complicated, emotional situation. And for those in distress already, be it Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), or depression, or some other mental health issue, or unresolved issues between family members, alcohol and stress can bring things to a boiling point.

In 1963, Andy Williams released "It's the most wonderful time of the year". The first two verses are:

1. "It's the most wonderful time of the year
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you be of good cheer
It's the most wonderful time of the year
2. It's the hap-happiest season of all
With those holiday greetings and gay happy meetings
When friends come to call
It's the hap-happiest season of all

For many, Christmas isn't the hap-happiest season of all. And being told to be of good cheer is the last thing you want to hear when you're depressed, anxious, or stressed.

Paul isn't telling us to be happy or be of good cheer. Paul is telling us to have joy. What is the difference?

First, God promises us joy. God does not promise happiness. The word happy appears 8 times in the Bible, all in the Old Testament. Four of the eight are about Solomon. The word happiness only twice, both in the Old Testament. Forms of the word joy occurs 203 times, 141 times in the Old Testament and 62 in the New Testament.

Second, joy is a gift of God. After listing the works of the flesh, Paul writes in Galatians 5:22-23 "²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." After Jesus describes Himself as the true vine, and calls the disciples to be fruitful and abide in His love, John (15:11) writes "¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Third, joy is internal and happiness external. Happiness is a reaction to events around us. Happiness cannot exist in the presence of its opposite. One cannot be happy and sad at the same time. However, one can be joyful and sad at the same time. Joy transcends the moment and the world around us. Joy transcends the events that are happening around us. Paul writes to the Colossians (1:11-12) "¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks^[d] to the Father, who has qualified you^[e] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." God promises us joy for all eternity. In the parable of the talents, remember the reward of the servants who doubled the master's investment? (Matthew 25:21 & 23) "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little;

I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” As we await Jesus’s coming again in glory, we know the kingdom of God is at hand. We have joy both now and for all eternity.

Fourth, joy enables us to be God’s children who face difficulty. Based on the joy in our hearts, we face trials and tribulations knowing that we are God’s own dear children, and He is with us to the end of the age. God is in control. We cling to God’s promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation. James (1:2-4) challenges us “²Count it all joy, my brothers,^[b] when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Happiness retreats quickly in the face of trials and tribulations.

Finally, joy leads to peace and contentment. Isaiah writes (55:12) “For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Sadly, our sins rob us of our joy. We too often turn from God, pursuing fleeting happiness. We make ourselves or created things into gods to which we turn for all good things and in times of need. We seek happiness at the expense of others. We love ourselves more than others and God. We covet things that God has not given us, possessions, relationships, skills, or talents. We seek our own good over the good of others. We fail to respect and treasure God’s Word and our relationship with Him. We fail to respect those in authority over us. God sent Jesus to be our Savior, to pay the full atonement price for our sins and the sins of all. God from all eternity, born of Mary. The perfect sacrificed for the imperfect. The joyful for the joyless. Hebrews 12:2 “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the **joy** that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

God is faithful when we are faithless. God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Psalm 86:15). The Holy Spirit leads us to acknowledge our sins, repent of our sins, confess our sins, and receive God’s forgiveness. John writes in 1 John 1:8-10 “⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

God’s will for us is to have joy and with joy and peace here on earth as we await the ultimate joy of living in God’s Kingdom for all eternity.

While happiness may elude us in this valley of the shadow of death, we are God’s joyful people. God’s gift of joy gives us strength to face the trials and tribulations until we are united with Him for all eternity in the new heavens and new earth. Amen.

The peace of God will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

Votum

P The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

C Amen.

Stand

Offertory

LSB 192

C Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free spirit. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, You sent John the Baptist to proclaim the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Grant that we who prepare to celebrate the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ may die to sin and rise to new life, that we may treasure up and ponder in our hearts the Christ announced by Your forerunner. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You sent John to proclaim the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Richly and daily forgive our sins and the sins of all believers. Bless Matthew, our Synod president; President Scharr, our district president; Pastor Prumm, our circuit visitor; and all pastors in Christ. Gather and preserve Your Holy Christian Church by Your voice, and send us faithful preachers who will not deny but confess Your truth. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, be the source of strength and comfort in every home. Bless the children of our families, that every darkness would be lightened by Your Son's gracious visitation. Preserve them from dangers to body and soul, guide them by Your Word in wise paths, and keep them firm in the faith until life's end. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Righteous Lord, You rule over all things in heaven and on earth. Until that day when Your Son comes in glory to usher in His kingdom, give wisdom and insight to all leaders, that we may live peaceable lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creator of all, many in our midst have been afflicted with pain, sickness, trials and difficulties. Be merciful to those who are close to us, [*especially* _____,] that they may be granted health or strength to endure their afflictions. Help us all to see that when Christ returns in glory, our bodies will be incorruptible and immortal when He makes all things new. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Your Church eagerly awaits the return of her Bridegroom. Grant that we would not grow weary. Strengthen us through Your Word and Sacraments, that we would ever hold fast Your promise of salvation won for us by Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, heavenly Father, we gratefully remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Rejoicing in His victorious resurrection from the dead, we draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands for us as our own High Priest. Gather us together from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

LSB 196

- P** Our Father who art in heaven,
 hallowed be Thy name,
 Thy kingdom come,
 Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
 give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.

C For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Stand

Post-Communion Collect

- A** Let us pray.
 We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Salutation

LSB 201

- P** The Lord be with you.
C And with thy spirit.

Benedicamus*LSB 202*

- A** Bless we the Lord.
C Thanks be to God.

Benediction*LSB 202*

- P** The Lord bless you and keep you.
 The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.
 The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and ✠ give you peace.

C Amen, amen, amen.

387 Joy to the World

- 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
 Let earth receive her King;
 Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room
 And heav'n and nature sing,
 And heav'n and nature sing,
 And heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.
- 2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
 Let men their songs employ,
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
 Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat the sounding joy,
 Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
- 3 No more let sins and sorrows grow
 Nor thorns infest the ground;
 He comes to make His blessings flow
 Far as the curse is found,
 Far as the curse is found,
 Far as, far as the curse is found.
- 4 He rules the world with truth and grace
 And makes the nations prove
 The glories of His righteousness
 And wonders of His love,
 And wonders of His love,
 And wonders, wonders of His love.

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