

Session 3

Third Sunday in Advent

Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24;
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Focus

Theme: God Has Won

Law/Gospel Focus

Sin has brought desolation to our land, our bodies, and our lives. God has come to our rescue. He sent Jesus to forgive our sin and give us the promise of a new life in heaven.

Objectives

By the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word we will

1. understand that with the coming of Christ God ushered us into a new age, a last age where we wait patiently until He will come again to take us to heaven;
2. affirm steadfastness as a necessary part of Christian life in these latter days;
3. find comfort in knowing that God through faith strengthened by the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace makes His people strong to face any crisis or challenge and so enables them to be joyful always; pray continually; and give thanks in all circumstances.

Opening Worship

Sing or speak together the following stanzas from "Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel" (LW 31).

Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here

Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, O Rod of Jesse's stem,
From ev'ry foe deliver them
That trust Your mighty pow'r to save;
Bring them in vict'ry through the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, our Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel!

Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Oh, bid our sad divisions cease,
And be Yourself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, O Israel!

Then pray together,
Father in heaven, You sent Your Son, Jesus, to be our Savior
born humbly in Bethlehem. You will send Him again at the time
You have appointed to come to take us all home to heaven. Until
that time, strengthen us so that with strong arms and voices we
can proclaim Your saving name to all the world. Amen.

Introduction

In the Winter Olympics of 1980 The United States had a phenomenal hockey team. They accomplished what many thought was impossible—they won the gold medal. In order to win the gold medal they had to defeat some powerful teams from Czechoslovakia, Canada, and the Soviet Union. Their game against the Soviet Union was

televised across the country. People crowded around television sets everywhere to see if the United States could perform a miracle. It was a very close game, with the lead changing hands several times. Because of the difficulties involved in televising such a wonderful event, the picture was broadcast to the United States on a 20-minute delay. That meant that if someone wanted to keep up with the game as it was actually taking place, he or she would have to listen to it on the radio.

Four friends gathered to watch the game on television. As the lead changed hands they got more and more emotional, sometimes ecstatic, sometimes frustrated. As the game was coming to an end, and still it could be won by either side, two of the men, exhausted from the emotion of it all, announced to their friends that they were going to listen to the game on the radio and find out who won. They just couldn't take it any more. The other two men told them not to tell them who won.

About 10 minutes later the two men who had consulted the radio came back into the room. The TV watchers immediately told them to keep their mouths closed. They didn't want to know who won until they saw it for themselves. The two who learned how the game had ended promised to sit silently.

Although they did sit silently, it didn't take long for them to let their friends know that the United States had in fact won. The way they reacted to the game gave away the secret.

It's the same thing for Christians. Ever since Jesus' death and resurrection we have known how all things will work out. God won; we win; we have nothing to fear. We may have trials and setbacks, but we have nothing to fear. That's the message these lessons bring to us.

1. How can people tell by your words and actions that you know God has won for us?

2. Share a time when you or someone you know acted as if God had not won.

3. Because we are in Christ we cannot lose. Satan and the world wants us to question and doubt that statement. Share some Bible passages that remind us that the victory is ours.

Inform

Here are summaries of the lessons appointed for the Third Sunday of Advent.

Isaiah 61:1-3, 10-11—The prophet Isaiah speaks of the Messianic servant who will come to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for captives, and release for the prisoners from darkness. The Messiah will bring salvation to all people, breaking loose the bonds of sin and Satan. Righteousness and praise will spring up to all nations.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24—Paul informs the early church how they are to live as they await the return of the Lord. Patience coupled with steadfastness will allow the believers to show Jesus to the whole world. Because of what God has done for them in Christ Jesus, Paul urges the Thessalonians to "be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances."

John 1:6-8, 19-28—John the Baptist was sent by God into this world to testify to the Light of the world, Jesus Christ. When questioned by the Jews, John confessed who he is, who he is not, and who Jesus is. The day after John was questioned by the Jews, he saw Jesus coming toward him and proclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

1. According to Isaiah what will the Messiah provide to those broken by sin and the world?

2. What words of Isaiah indicate that the Messiah will come to save all people, including Gentiles?

Connect

3. How did Jesus fulfill the passages of Isaiah during His earthly ministry?
4. How did John's testimony set the stage for the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?
5. Humanly speaking, how might John's testimony been difficult to give?
6. The Thessalonians knew and affirmed that God had won the victory for them through Jesus. Although they had the victory, they still witnessed the effects of sin in the world and were tempted by Satan. In a sense they lived in a "now" and "not yet" state. What did they have "now"? "not yet"?
7. As people possessing saving faith in Jesus, Paul urges the Thessalonians to respond to this good news by demonstrating joy, giving thanks, and praying continually. How do these responses separate the Christian from the unbeliever? How might unbelievers respond to Paul's urging?

1. A Lutheran pastor who had suffered from polio when he was a child walked with a limp. He once was approached by a Pentecostal minister who wanted to "lay hands" on him so that he could be healed. For the Pentecostal minister being healed meant that the pastor wouldn't limp anymore. He approached the Lutheran pastor several times over a period of months. It got to the point that when the Lutheran minister saw the Pentecostal minister coming he would turn the other way. Finally the Lutheran minister said to the Pentecostal, "Friend, I appreciate your concern for my well-being, but I want you to know what I believe about healing. I believe that I am baptized; therefore, I am healed regardless of how I walk." Comment on the pastor's words in light of these lessons.

2. A Japanese Christian lost a teenage daughter in a horrible accident. Her family and church were devastated by this tragedy. After her funeral service, which took place by the side of her grave, her father bent over and picked up three clods of dirt from the pile of dirt next to the grave. He then threw the clods of dirt one at a time onto his daughter's coffin and each time shouted the word, "Banzai! Banzai! Banzai!" This word means victory! Comment on this word in light of 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24.

3. An elder of a Lutheran church approached his pastor with a concern. He wondered why the new members of their congregation almost never attended voters' meetings. He assumed it was because they didn't care about the affairs of the congregation. After a few uncomfortable moments, the pastor responded with these words, "They may not come because I don't encourage them to come. In fact, I sort of discourage them from coming." The shocked elder asked why? The pastor replied that young Christians get really confused when they watch other Christians

argue and grumble against each other. How important are the words of 1 Thessalonians for the health of Christian congregations?

4. A few years ago General Motors released a commercial for its Buick automobiles. The slogan said, "Buy a Buick and enjoy life. After all, life is to be enjoyed." What would Isaiah, Paul, and John the Baptist say to such a statement?

5. We, like the Thessalonians, live in the "now" and "not yet" era. How? We know what is ahead for us. How does focusing on Jesus' victory enable us to respond as Paul suggests in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18? How might this enable us to witness our faith to unbelievers?

Vision

During This Week

1. Pay attention to the number of times you sigh or complain this week. Carry a notepad with you and write down the reason for the sigh or complaint. Make that list your prayer list for a week. Conclude your prayer each night with the words of Romans 8:31-39.
2. Think about one circumstance in your life that causes you to lose patience. If you find yourself in that situation this week, remember that you are a child of God and an heir of heaven. Recall that you will spend eternity in perfect peace, and then ask yourself, "In light of this, what is my hurry?" And remember your patience glorifies God and serves as "proof" of His presence in your life.