

# Christmas Day 2011

## Jesus, Tender Shepherd, Hear Me: "Come Quickly"

Text: Revelation 22:12-20

**"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Romans 8:18**

Dear Fellow Sheep – you who today celebrate the birth of the Good Shepherd and long for his return:

Today the preparations for Christmas are at an end, for the day – the event itself – has arrived. The preparations for Jesus' Second Coming, however, continue. Yet just as our Savior-God once kept his promise to come to earth the first time to pay the sin-debt that he did not owe, so he will surely also keep his promise to return to gather the faithful to his side at the Resurrection. This morning then we celebrate the fulfillment of the first Promise and rejoice in the confident anticipation of the second. On this great day, then, this is our simple prayer, *"Thank you for your first visit. Please come again!"*

Our devotion this Christmas morning is based on the word of God recorded the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation, Chapter 22:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 22:12-20 "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." <sup>14</sup> ¶ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. <sup>15</sup> Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. <sup>16</sup> ¶ "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." <sup>17</sup> ¶ The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. <sup>18</sup> ¶ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. <sup>20</sup> ¶ He who testifies to**

***these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!***

These are the very words of God – words that God gave us to clarify our thoughts and to increase our understanding and appreciation for all that he has done for us in the past and will most certainly do for us in the future. That our God would so bless us on this special day, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

During our mid-week services this Advent season we have been focusing on Jesus as our Good Shepherd - our "Tender Shepherd" in the words of the popular bedtime prayer. Focusing first on the common tools of the shepherd's trade, we asked our Shepherd to come to us with his *rod* (because we need both protection and correction); we asked him to come with his *staff* (because we need both guidance and rescue); and we asked him to come as our Sacrifice (because we had nothing to offer to God as a payment for our sins.) This morning we ask of him one last thing: To come again, and *to come quickly*.

Only that doesn't seem to fit on such a day as this, does it? We usually want the good days to last – and Christmas is certainly a very good day. But that's also part of the problem. We tend to enjoy the special days like this one too much to wish that they would quickly end. It's the bad days - the hard days - that we want to end. It's usually only when we are suffering in some way (or maybe in many ways) that we long for our Savior's immediate return and an end to this life and start of the next.

But that's exactly why we are doing what we are doing today. That's why we ask our Savior to come quickly *even on Christmas Day* – because it gives us a better measure of our own misguided, fickle human hearts. The fact is *whenever* we find ourselves hoping that the Lord puts off his return, while not always sinful, it certainly ought to give us pause and cause us to honestly reevaluate. Usually it means, at best, that we have lost focus, and that we just don't get how spectacular our eternal existence in God's presence will one day be. At worst it gives indication that we have developed a divided heart. At worst it is an indication that we love this world in a way that is contrary to God's holy will for our lives.

Many of you have heard it before, but it probably bears repeating that nearly all sin can be boiled down or simplified to two basic conditions of the human heart: pride and greed. Theft, for example, is born of both. It

is sinful pride that causes us to believe that we deserve more than God has given us, and it is greed that leaves us with a near insatiable desire for more. Most often then when you and I find ourselves wishing that our Savior would put off his Second Coming, we can trace it back to simple greed, or pride, or both. In other words, you and I want heaven, but first we want to squeeze every last bit of pleasure or satisfaction that we can out of this present existence. Understand here that there are good and noble reasons for praying that the end might be postponed. Most of us have friends and loved ones who have not yet been brought to faith. Some want to bring children into this world and to teach them about their Savior so that they too can share heaven with the rest of the Christian Church. Others find it their greatest, purest joy to be able to carry out kingdom work in the service of their God, and are saddened in a way to think of that service as ending.

While motives such as these are not in themselves necessarily sinful, most often our reasons are much less noble and far more self-centered. *"I've worked hard at getting my degree and it would be sad if the end came before I got to march across the stage and get my diploma." "I am this close to getting that big promotion at work and it would be so sweet to be able to 'go out on top!'" "If Jesus could just wait until after our upcoming wedding... or vacation... or family reunion... or the Super Bowl..."*

These are the sorts of things that ought to concern us. These give testament to misguided thoughts and aspirations. They tell me with embarrassing clarity that there is definitely a problem that I need to address. They are evidence of greed, pride, and of a very *ungodly* love of this present world.

Need a more timely, pointed example? How many of you young ones (or not so young ones) wanted Jesus to return before you got a chance to open your presents?

Yet just here is where we rediscover a universal truth about life on this earth compared to the life that is to come: *This world always disappoints; the world to come never could, never will.* No matter what you were hoping to get and no matter what you *did* get for Christmas, the reality and the aftermath never seem to match the expectation and anticipation. Even when you get *exactly* what you wanted and pretty much *everything* that you wanted and more, sooner or later (usually sooner) it breaks, gets old, you lose it, or in some way it passes into irrelevance. That's even true with all those folks who evidently give each other a new Lexus or Mercedes for Christmas – which, according to the commercials, happens all the time. Even the six and seven figure gifts eventually lose their shine and appeal.

Compare that with the Second Coming of our Savior. Our big problem here is that we lack the experience and imagination to comprehend just how spectacular heaven will be. In fact we do ourselves a great disservice by trying to describe or define it in terms that we can even now grasp or understand. How can we today possibly imagine a joy that does not grow dull with time? Right now human beings are just wired by our Creator so that everything grows dull with use and the passing of time. How then can we envision anything different? How can we picture an existence in the very presence of God himself? How can we fathom living without anything negative, ever? How can we know what it will be like to never again know doubt, or sorrow, or dread, or impatience? How can we now know perfection of any kind – even of the human senses, like perfect sound, sight, smell, taste? How can we know what it will be like to exist without fear of any kind – fear of the phone call bearing bad news, fear of the bad report from the doctor, fear of loneliness, heartbreak, or loss? How can we have any concept here in time of what eternity will be like? How can we even picture true, permanent contentment?

And yet this is actually precisely why we celebrate Christmas, isn't it? While we cannot now imagine heaven with any degree of accuracy, we do recognize that Christmas was the start of the process, the work, that made it all possible.

In this regard, Christmas is a very strange celebration, isn't it? Most birthdays we celebrate as the beginning of life for a friend or loved one. Obviously not so with Jesus. Jesus, God's Son, was eternal. That means that he had existence long before he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin, Mary. So also we confess in the Creed that Jesus was and is: *"God of God, Light of Light, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father – by Whom all things were made."* So also we hear Jesus himself in the words of our text relate this same truth when he says, ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."***

We also routinely celebrate birthdays as the starting point for all the joys of life. Human beings that are never born, never get to enjoy life. Again, not so with Jesus. Jesus wasn't born for his own pleasure or enjoyment of life. In fact he had to leave the perfection of heaven when he took on our human nature. Nor did he come to enjoy himself. He came to serve, suffer, and die.

The fact is we celebrate Christmas not for Jesus' sake but for our own. Again, while we cannot fully comprehend what heaven will be like, we can and do acknowledge that we would never get to experience that sublime existence had Jesus not come to earth as he did. Without Jesus we would have been left out – part of the "out" crowd in our text: **"Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."** In most birthday celebrations the birthday boy or girl gets the presents. At the birth of Jesus Christ – and at every Christmas celebration after – you and I are the ones who get the gifts.

The truly amazing part of all this is that this is exactly the way Jesus wanted it. In his own words he came **"not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for the many."** Even his own birth wasn't about him; it was about you and me, since it was necessary if you and I were one day to experience the heaven described by the Apostle John in our text. Our sins had separated us from our God. Worse still, we had no ability to repay or make good the debt that we owed. Jesus came to pay that debt for us, which is why it is now and forever true that **"the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin."** So also our text describes this cleansing by blood with these words: **"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates."**

Let this then be the beating heart of our Christmas celebration: Our Savior has been born! Not only that, he has accomplished the work of our salvation. Let nothing on earth cloud this vision, this single-mindedness in us. When that is indeed the case, then we will always be eager for our Lord's return. Then too we add our own "Amen!" to the closing words of our text: **"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"** Come quickly! Amen.

# St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church

Mr. Michael McEnroe, President  
Rev. Michael Roehl, Pastor

Mrs. Eileen McEnroe, Organist  
Miss Suzannah Miller, Organist

## Christmas Day Service – December 25, 2011

### Pre-Service Christmas Music and Anthems

#### The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

##### Hymn by the Congregation - "Joy To the World!"

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King!  
Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing (repeat)

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)

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 (repeat)

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love (repeat)

**Pastor:** *In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Congregation:** (Spoken) **Amen**

#### Song of Invocation (Sung to the tune of "Oh Come All Ye Faithful")

The Lord God be with us, and with all His children  
Oh come let us lift our spirits unto the Lord  
With hearts rejoicing, thanks to Him we render  
With joy we come before Him, in gratefulness implore Him  
With thankful hearts adore Him, Christ the Lord!

**Pastor:** Beloved in the Lord, on this holy occasion let us first draw near  
and confess with true and open hearts our many sins, mindful that it  
was our transgression that made necessary our Lord's incarnation.

**All:** *O most merciful God, we confess to You all of our many sins. We  
have sinned against You in what we have thought, in what we have  
said, and in what we have done. Yet You have given Your only  
begotten Son to die for us.*

**Have mercy upon us we pray, and for His sake grant us  
forgiveness for all our sins. By the power of Your Holy Spirit,  
cause us to know your will truly, and to obey it willingly; so that  
by Your grace, through faith, we may finally come to everlasting  
life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

**Pastor:** Upon this your confession I, according to the command of our  
Lord Jesus Christ, and as His called servant, announce to you that  
Jesus Christ came to earth for this very purpose – to pay the full  
penalty for your sins. You are forgiven. As a result, your own  
personal name has been written in the Book of Life by the blood of  
the Lamb. Your guilt has been removed. Thanks be to God.

**All:** "Amen."

**The Collect by the Pastor:** Grant, Almighty God, that the birth of Your  
only-begotten Son in human flesh may gladden our hearts, who  
through sin were held in the bondage of darkness and despair.  
This we ask through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, Who lives  
and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and  
forever.

**All:** "Amen."

**Hymn by the Congregation** -#715- "Where Shepherds Lately Kneel"  
(Brown Hymnal Supplement)

**Pastor:** The Lord God be with you.

**All:** **And bless also you.**

**Pastor:** As the Lord Jesus once came in love and great poverty to be  
born in a manger in Bethlehem

**All:** **So now He comes to us in the richness of His Word.**

**Pastor:** As Jesus once came from heaven to earth to live with man in  
love

**All:** **So now He comes in the Word, to give light to the world.**

**Pastor:** As He came to heal, to forgive, and to save

**All:** **So now He comes to rescue, to comfort, to love.**

**Pastor:** Let us bless the great name of the Lord.

**All:** **Let us sing with our hearts the great songs of His Word.**

**Pastor:** Let us celebrate His birth.

**All:** **And tell of His coming to the ends of the earth.**

**Pastor:** As He came to save us sinners in the depths of our need,

**All:** **Help us also, O Lord, to give our life in love to You and to our  
neighbor.**

**Pastor:** Lord of heaven and earth, You have forgiven us all our sins. As we see also the great spiritual need of others, increase our faith, love, and courage that we might be bearers of the true peace, light, and comfort that You alone can provide.

**All: So let it be. Amen.**

**The Reading of the Christmas Story** (Luke 2:1-14)  
**With selected verses of "From Heaven Above"**

**All:** From heav'n above to earth I come  
To bear good news to ev'ry home;  
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,  
Whereof I now will say and sing:

**Pastor:** *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city.*

**All:** To you this night is born a child  
Of Mary, chosen virgin mild;  
This little child, of lowly birth,  
Shall be the joy of all the earth.

**Pastor:** *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.*

**All:** This is the Christ, our God and Lord,  
Who in all need shall aid afford;  
He will Himself your Savior be  
From all your sins to set you free.

**Pastor:** *And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

**All:** Give heed, my heart, lift up thine eyes!  
What is it in yon manger lies?  
Who is this child, so young and fair?  
The blessed Christ-child lieth there.

**Pastor:** *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.*

**All:** Welcome to earth, Thou noble Guest,  
Through whom the sinful world is blest  
Thou com'st to share my misery;  
What thanks shall I return to Thee?

**Pastor:** *And the angel said unto them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."*

**All:** Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,  
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,  
Within my heart, that it may be  
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

**Pastor:** *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."*

**All (Please Rise):** My heart for very joy doth leap,  
My lips no more can silence keep;  
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue  
That sweetest ancient cradle-song:

Glory to God in highest heaven,  
Who unto us His Son hath given!  
While angels sing with pious mirth  
A glad new year to all the earth.

## ***"Jesus, Tender Shepherd, Hear Me – Come Quickly"***

**Text: Revelation 22:12-20** "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." <sup>14</sup> ¶ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. <sup>15</sup> Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. <sup>16</sup> ¶ "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." <sup>17</sup> ¶ The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. <sup>18</sup> ¶ I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, <sup>19</sup> and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. <sup>20</sup> ¶ He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

### **The Offertory ("Create In Me")**

Create in me a clean heart Lord, and make my spirit right within  
Cast me not from Thy presence Lord; take not Thy Spirit nor Thy Word.

Restore to me the joy and peace of Thy salvation and Thy love  
Uphold me with Thy Spirit free; A clean heart, Lord, create in me.

### **The Offering** (The Offering Hymn Is Sung by a Part of the Church Choir)

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| 1) To Thee my heart I offer,<br>O Christ-child sweet and dear;<br>Upon Thy love relying,<br>Oh, be Thou ever near!<br>Take Thou my heart and give me Thine<br>And let it be forever mine,<br>O Jesus, holy, undefiled,<br>My Savior meek and mild. | 2) Let me be Thine forever,<br>O Christ-child sweet and dear;<br>Uphold me with Thy mercy<br>And be Thou ever near.<br>From Thee I gladly all receive,<br>And what is mine to Thee I give.<br>My heart, my soul, and all I own:<br>Let these be Thine alone. |
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### **The Christmas Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer**

### **The Preparation for Holy Communion** (The Christian Questions)

### **The Distribution** –Hymn 315- (Red Hymnal)

### **The Benediction**

### **The Closing Hymn** –Hymn 86 – (Verses 1, 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Christ the Lord to Us is Born"

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Welcome**—To our visitors this morning we offer a warm welcome, together with our thanks for allowing us to share the message and joy of the birth of the Savior with you. Please introduce yourself to the Pastor and join us again. You are welcome here.

**Flowers**—Please feel free to take your Christmas flowers home with you this morning, or consider sharing them with a shut-in.

**Confirmation and Bible Class**—Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be in Eau Claire this coming week, returning Friday. There are therefore no Confirmation or mid-week Bible Classes scheduled this week. Plans call for a return to our regular schedule on Sunday, January 1<sup>st</sup>, including our regular Wednesday schedule on January 4<sup>th</sup>.

**2012 Church Council**—As determined by last Sunday's Voters' meeting and the following Church Council organizational meeting, the 2012 Church Council will be: President—M. McEnroe, Vice President—K. Mantz, Secretary—L. Ollenburger, Treasurer—F. Adams, Financial Secretary—G. Miller, and Trustee Coordinator—J. Baumgarten. The new Council is scheduled to be installed next Sunday.

**Thank You**— *"A warm and heartfelt thank you once again, not only for the generous gifts that you have individually and collectively given to my family and me, but also for the privilege of serving you as your pastor for another year. It is my great joy and delight to bring the message of salvation to you each week, and to offer you the comfort of the gospel day by day. The Lord bless and keep each of you in the year to come."* - Pastor Roehl