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# A Christmas Workbook

## I. Introduction

Unlike the Advent season which is thematically-based and spread over 4 Sundays, the season of Christmas is squarely planted in the celebration of a singular event—the Nativity of our Lord and Savior. Nevertheless, do not be fooled into thinking that the Christmas season is one monotonous repetitious refrain without much depth. Just as a single bomb shatters debris in every direction, the Nativity of Our Lord scatters a plethora of themes reaching out in every direction. The twelve-day Christmas season, which may include two Sundays, but often does not, is simply not long enough to address each of the diverse doctrines and topics. Some of those topics include: the incarnation, the conception, the birth, the rebirth of holy baptism, the only begotten Son, the heirs and sons of God, the humiliation, His glory, grace and truth, light and darkness, the Name, Immanuel, peace and joy, the image, the mass, the Bread, the Virgin, the Father's Love, and the Second Coming.

In a similar vein, some pastors have noted the seemingly unbalanced number of Christmas hymns, when you consider the shortness of the Christmas season. One of the solutions to reconcile this disparity may not be a reduction in hymns, but an increase in divine services and prayer offices offered throughout the twelve days. I hope that this Christmas workbook will inspire each pastor to seek to offer as full a Christmas schedule of services as he and his congregation can handle. Realizing the limitations which are placed on faithful pastors, this workbook can provide insight into the structural basis for

the historic ordering of the appointed propers. Once we know the relative importance of the constituent parts, the pastor will make better decisions concerning the meals which he prepares to feed his congregation (Luke 12:42, John 21:15,17).

Sometimes an oversimplification is helpful. The season of Christmas starts with a great bang on December 25 and then slowly peters out as we pick up the pieces over the following twelve days. The Christmas season comes to an end not because of some internal logical reasoning, but because the Epiphany of our Lord starts on January 6.

The only security warning about the big event is a pre-Nativity vigil which tells of Joseph's decision concerning Mary's post-annunciation conception (Mt 1:18-25). By midnight that evening, the Big Bang has already gone off. The Nativity of Our Lord is jam-packed with three Divine Services including both the historical account of the Nativity from St. Luke, chapter 2 and the more important theological teaching on the historical Nativity from St. John, chapter 1. The lesser events following the Big Bang include the 8-day Jesus, the 40-day Jesus and the less than 2-year Jesus. When the thematic season of Epiphany begins, it reuses the facts of Matthew, chapter 2—which has already been used on The Holy Innocents and the Second Sunday after Christmas, if there is one. To reiterate, the twelve-day Christmas season expounds on the significance of the Nativity of Our Lord.

## **II. The Date of Christmas**

As the date of December 25 serves as the foundation for all of the twelve days of Christmas, I need to respond to the “history of religions” school (*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) which argues that Jesus was not born on December 25. They say that Christianity chose this arbitrary date, because of the winter solstice on December 21, in

order to replace the more primitive solstice worship by pagans with Christianity's own day-lengthening observance of the Light of the world. This 19<sup>th</sup> century idea became popular at about the same time as the Higher Critical Method was gaining a foot-hold within Christianity, and flows from the presupposition that all religion has its origin in man, whose thinking is evolving from primitive pagan polytheism to an ethical monotheism. Those who still maintain that there was a real Jesus, say that He was actually born in the Spring, since that is the time of year that shepherds "stay out in the field by night."

The truth is that December 25 is not some arbitrary date. The date of Christmas is determined by the date of the Annunciation on March 25, nine months earlier. It was Mary's memory that the Angel Gabriel came a few days after the Vernal (Spring) Equinox on March 21, which determined things. The lambs which were being watched by the shepherds in late Autumn/Winter because they were being kept for "pure" for Temple slaughter at the Passover. St. John Chrysostom explains that the records for Augustus' enrollment taken in Judea were in the public records in Rome. Furthermore, Zachariah the priest was taking his turn in Jerusalem(Luke 2:5-23) during the fast of the seventh month(*Tisri*- Leviticus 23:24) which corresponds to the end of September/beginning of October. Since Mary conceived in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, that puts the date of Christ's birth around the end of December/beginning of January.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Migne's *Patrologia Græca*, XLVIII, 752, XLIX, 351.

### III. The Limits of the Season

Most of the seasons of the church year are determined by a fixed number of Sundays (Advent four, Lent six, and Easter seven). Even though the Epiphany and the Trinity seasons have a variable number of Sundays, their seasons are, nevertheless, defined by their Sunday observances. The season of Christmas behaves more like the minor festivals do, which are tied to a particular calendar day. No need to determine the latest equinox or count a certain number of days from another liturgical observance. Even the secular world can easily compute the date of (and days leading up to) Christmas! The season of Christmas begins on December 25 and ends on January 5.

On the church's three high festival days(Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost), there is an appointed vigil on the evening preceding it. The usual custom is to begin the new season with first Vespers in the afternoon before the feast day, which is then followed by a vigil with Mass, that evening. The Nativity of our Lord seems to break the rule, with an observance in the morning on December 24, separate from the Christmas Eve(ning) Divine Service<sup>2</sup>. On the one hand, the paraments remain purple for the Vigil Service, and thus it would be difficult to convince the people that the season of Christmas begins on December 24. On the other hand, if you were color blind, practically everything you hear with your ears during the Vigil of the Nativity proclaims, "Christmas is here!" The antiphon for the Introit says, "This day(*Hodie*) you shall know that the Lord will come, and in the morning you shall see His glory."

Sundays don't get any respect when it comes to the season of Christmas. The two possible Sunday observances in Christmas seem to be an afterthought, in which 50% of

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<sup>2</sup> This late night service is actually called Christ's Mass at Midnight.

them are often excluded from a particular year's celebration. Over the next 15 years, the second Sunday of Christmas is omitted 40% of the time. Christmas can even overrule another season's Sundays. Should the fourth Sunday in Advent happen to fall on December 24th, contrary to the usual liturgical preference for Sundays, the Vigil of Christmas overrules it and Advent is to have only 3 Sundays that year<sup>3</sup>.

I would like to think that there is a theological significance to this liturgical Christmas anomaly. The celebration of the birth of the Savior on December 25 rotates through the days of the week. Jesus is born as the world's Savior("peace on earth") and the celebration of his birth is determined according to the world's calendar numbering. However, our Savior's birth culminates in a new birth for Christians through our baptism into His death and resurrection. The particular calendar day of Christmas reaches its fulfillment in the Sunday-only observance of Easter. From the Resurrection onward, the church of Christ determines everything from Sunday to Sunday. Each first day of the week is a little Easter celebration or we can say that each eighth day is the completion of Christ's resurrection or the new creation. It would seem that the resolution of the Easter Date controversy from a fixed Nissan 14 observance(*Quartodeciman*) to a regular Sunday observance, further illustrates the progression of Jesus' coming into the world to take on the world's sin, so that we might come out of the world and live in a resurrected life according to the Lord's day—Sunday.

Whether there is any hidden theological meaning behind the well-know hymn "The Twelve days of Christmas" or not, it has popularized the length of the Christmas season as lasting twelve days(*Dodecameron*). I do need to mention that there is a

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<sup>3</sup> See the chart in the appendix. The next time that Christmas replaces Advent Four is 2017 and 2023.

minority opinion, seeking to set the length of the Christmas season to forty days, concluding the Christmas season on the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (The Presentation of Our Lord) on February 2.<sup>4</sup> There is indeed a strong connection between the actual birth and the Old Testament Law which concluded the duties of a birth-mother<sup>5</sup>, but to declare the Epiphany of Our Lord(January 6) and the Sundays following it up to February 2 as belonging to the Christmas season is well beyond the evidence found in the Propers which significantly change with the beginning of Epiphany. There is an even stronger connection between the incarnation, as celebrated in the Annunciation of Our Lord on March 25 and the birth of Jesus, but I doubt we would want to declare that the Christmas season lasts 9 months and 12 twelve days.<sup>6</sup>

#### **IV. The Observance of a Holy Day, a High Holy Day, and a Season**

Those who have been to a protestant service, often say, “It just didn’t seem like church, but more of a Bible study.” Exactly! A group of people gathered together to study the Bible, is a Bible study. A group of people gathered together to eat donuts is a social group. The church is those who are gathered for the Divine Service(Word and Sacrament). “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). It’s not that a congregation of people

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<sup>4</sup> “Christmastide runs from 1<sup>st</sup> Vespers of Christmas to January 13 inclusive. Within this time are included: a) the time season of Christmas, which runs from 1<sup>st</sup> Vespers of Christmas to None of January 5 inclusive; b) the season of Epiphany, which runs from 1<sup>st</sup> Vespers of the Epiphany of our Lord to January 13 inclusive” (Divine Office, General Rubrics p.28) But “We apply the name of Christmas to the forty days which begin with the Nativity of our Lord, December 25, and end with the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, February 2.” Discussion of the 40 days as being divided into 20 and 20 are found on p. 13 TLY Vol. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Lev 12:2-8; Lev 5:11; Ex 13:12-13; Num 3:11-13; Num 8:17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Despite the conclusion of 12 days from the Proper’s evidence, I find the more compelling argument to be that the Christmas season needs to have forty days. Lent is forty days. Easter to Pentecost is forty days. When you add the final Sundays of the church year to the four Sundays of Advent, it could be said to have forty days.

might not out of Christian love do other things together, however those things do not define their existence. For Lutherans the “when” of the celebration of the Mass, which in itself is *adiaphora*, has already been decided, “For among us masses are performed every Lord’s Day and on the other festivals, in which the sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved. And the usual public ceremonies are observed, the series of lessons, of prayers, vestments and other like things” (Ap XXIV, 1). Similarly the church building is not primarily a “fellowship” hall with a kitchen, or classrooms for Sunday school craft assembly, but it is an altar and a pulpit with a roof over it!

The celebration of an ordinary Sunday and Holy Day is centered in the celebration of the **Divine Service**, which includes the service of the Word with preaching

<i>Eve Day</i>	<b>Ordinary Sunday and Holy Days</b>
	Matins
	<b>Mass</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Vespers	2 <sup>nd</sup> Vespers

and the service of Lord’s Supper. For those congregations which are able to provide it, there are the accompanying prayer services which begin and end the day: **Matins and Vespers**. Due to the anticipation of the day, and most likely an acknowledgement of our Jewish roots in which the day begins at sundown (consisting of evening and morning, rather than morning and evening), there is also a vespers on the evening before the day—called **first vespers**. Thus, the name of the vespers which concludes the actual day is called **second vespers**.

Each week begins on Sunday and lasts until the next Sunday. The idea of an eighth day observance is already found in the Old Testament

<b>Octave</b> = 8 day celebration (i.e. Sunday to Sunday)							
Holy Day	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
Thus the Sunday altar color remains on the altar for 7 days, because the next Sunday takes precedent.							

regulations in which Israel's festivals would begin with a ceremony on the first and eighth day of a festival. Although all Sundays and Holy Days are considered to have an **octave**, in practice, those octave days are seldom observed with much more than the repetition of that day's collect from eight days ago.

Dec 24	Dec 25	Dec 26	Dec 27	Dec 28	Dec 29	Dec 30	Dec 31	Jan 1	Jan 2	Jan 3	Jan 4	Jan 5
Vigil of the Nativity	The Nativity of Our Lord							Octave of Nativity				
		St. Stephen							Octave of Stephen			
			St. John							Octave of John		
				The Holy Innocents							Octave of Holy Innocents	
							Eve of the Name	Circumcision of Our Lord				Vigil of the Epiphany
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12

When there is the celebration of a **High Holy Day**, the church provides Propers for the celebration of three masses spread out over the night and day. As mentioned earlier, Christmas is unusual in that it provides for a special Vigil on December 24 in the morning. The usual order is a vigil-Mass following first vespers, a second mass at Daybreak, and a third mass at mid-morning.

<i>Eve Day</i>	<b>High Holy Day</b>
	Matins
	<b>1. Midnight Mass</b>
	Lauds
	<b>2. Dawn Mass</b>
Vigil (mid-morning)	<b>3. Day Mass (mid-morning)</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Vespers	2 <sup>nd</sup> Vespers (in the evening)



## V. The Nativity of Lord Service Themes

### A. Vigil of the Nativity: the yearly expectation

(Isaiah 7:10-14, 1 John 4:7-16, Matthew 1:18-25)

The Church's great holy days are usually anticipated by celebrating their eve day. The "adorable birthday"<sup>7</sup> of Christ is no exception, having its own beautiful vigil on December 24. Although the Vigil of the Nativity technically belongs to the season of Advent, it is included here because it forms a modulation into the season of Christmas.

The antiphon for the vigil's introit<sup>8</sup> is taken from Moses' proclamation to the Israelites(Ex. 16:6-7), when they grumbled against Moses and Aaron only a month after the Red Sea crossing. The Lord promises to rain down bread from heaven(Ex 16:4-7). In the Lord's Supper, we receive our heavenly Manna, and the glory of the Lord is revealed to us. This Bread is none other than Jesus, born in the House of Bread (Bethlehem) and who will save his people from their sins.

The collect mentions "joy" twice. The collect's address describes God as the One, "who makest us to rejoice" (*laetificas*) and the petition describes us as "we who joyfully receive" (*laeti suscipimus*). The Holy Gospel from Matthew 1:18-25 presents a troubled Joseph, who after finding out that his engaged wife Mary is pregnant, makes initial plans to divorce her. The Lord makest Joseph to rejoice by the announcement of a Son who is from the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the promise given to Isaiah (7:10-14).

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<sup>7</sup> Secret, "as we anticipate the adorable birthday of Thy Son."

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 16:6-7 is also found in the Gradual for the Vigil. Not understanding that repetition serves a didactic purpose and underscores an important theme, many modern revisions of the propers change it to Psalm 98:2-4.

Joseph is told to name this Immanuel<sup>9</sup>, “JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.”

The Roman missal prescribes St. Paul’s address to the Romans(1:1-6) as the Epistle. This reading speaks of the Gospel as that “which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh....” The modern Epistle alternative is 1 John 4:7-16, a treatise which begins with God’s love in sending “His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him.” The second part is a sermon on the term “Immanuel,” which declares that those who know and believe God’s Love (in the sending of Jesus), abide in Him and He in us.

The Old Testament reading is the famous Isaiah 7:10-14 reading, which the angel of the Lord quoted in the vigil’s Holy Gospel. We often forget that wicked Ahaz feigns piety, all the while He is rejecting Isaiah’s offer of a Gospel sign. Isaiah proclaims the good news of the “Virgin’s Son, Immanuel,” but then later in verse 17 we find out that destruction will come to Judah by way of Assyria. Similarly the vigil’s collect speaks of Jesus’ coming “as a Redeemer” and “as our judge.”

The repentant (Josephs) are lifted up, but the proud (Ahazs) are made low, when “the glory(Antiphon) of the LORD shall be revealed” (Isaiah 40:4-5). This service urges us to “joyfully receive” Jesus and “His eternal gifts” (Secret). “Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in” (Offertory from Psalm 24:7). Justified believers respond by confessing sin and receiving Jesus’ salvation. As the elements are prepared, the church is invited to “lift up (your hearts)

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 1:23, “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us.’”

...that the King of glory shall come in.” “Abiding in Him”(Epistle) who “is our food and drink,” He “may give us fresh life.” In the alleluia we address the Shepherd of Israel directly and say, “stir up thy strength, and come, and save us” (Ps. 80:1-2).

The theme of glory is not prominent in the vigil readings, but it is introduced. You will find it in the collect’s Antiphon and the Invitatory for Matins(Ex 16:6-7), “...and in the morning you shall see His glory;” the Offertory(Ps 24:7-10), speaks of “the King of glory;” and the Communion(Is 40:4-5) says, “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.” The glory of the Lord will become a strong current throughout the Christmas season.

**B. Christ’s Mass at Midnight: This most holy night**  
(Isaiah 9:2-7, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-14)

The first official service of Christmas Day is the celebration of Christ’s Mass at Midnight. There is no more waiting or talk about tomorrow, the day of the fleshly birth of the Son of God is today! The Old Testament reading says, “The people... have seen a great light.” The Epistle says, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men....” The angels announce to the shepherds a completed event, “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord....Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

The Christmas’ announcement of Christ’s birth on a particular day in the past, which we were urged to joyfully receive in the present (at yesterday’s vigil), has the purpose of giving us the future hope—that we “come to the fullness of its joys in heaven” (Collect). It is this heavenly purpose which animates the theme of the Christ’s Mass at Midnight Divine Service. We are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing

of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Epistle). "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end..." (Old Testament).

In accordance with St. Luke's reading of the birth of God's only begotten Son, this Child is not just born, but is born to us. He is given as a gift of the Father "to us" and brings salvation to all men. The shepherds are told, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior." And this good news of great joy "will be to all people." Isaiah 9:2-7, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given" (*Puer natus est nobis et Filius datus est nobis*). The "good news of great joy" was not only for the shepherds, but for the heavens and the earth. "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad... for he cometh" (Offertory - Psalm 96:11-13)

The image of light and darkness is found in all the Christmas services, but is especially prominent in the midnight Mass. The midnight service collect declares that God "made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light," and that "we have known on earth the wonders of that Light." Isaiah (9:2-7) tells us that we "walked in darkness" of sin, but through the birth of Jesus, we "have seen a great light." Even while it is still dark outside, Jesus is declared to be the Light of the world. Thus "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Having seen a great Light (Ep and Lk 2:9), the shepherds with "great joy" worship the Christ.

Having come to a scientific understanding of biological life, we must set aside our technical knowledge of the linear distinction between conception and birth.<sup>10</sup> Yes, it is true that Jesus first took on flesh at his conception. However, the church's celebration

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<sup>10</sup> Similarly in the Scriptures the "day" is often a reference to the suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, and not simply one particular event or 24 hour period.

seems to move from speaking about the conception to the birth without any transition. If that weren't difficult enough for a Western mind (especially a Western male mind), the Christmas readings frequently throw in the mysterious reference to another birth, called the **eternal generation of the Son**. The Antiphon for the Introit from Psalm 2:7 says, "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee(*Ego hodie genui te*)" (Ps 2:7). The "today" here mentioned is the day of eternity in which the Father begot the Son(Word). As the Nicene Creed says, Jesus "begotten of his Father before all worlds." Furthermore the communion psalm from 110:3 speaks of the saints as "thy people... in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning." The dawn is the womb which gives birth to the day. Jesus' eternal generation is a cause which gives re-birth to God's people in the dawn of this age.

With repeated emphasis the propers direct our attention to the enfleshed Messiah saying, "Thou art my Son" (Alleluia, Antiphon, Ps 2:7). The *Gloria in Excelsis* returns! Isaiah speaks of the fleshly birth of Jesus Christ, who united his Divinity with human flesh, and from now on is the Word Incarnate(God and Man). The shepherds worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. The infant is God in Man made manifest. According to the Introit(Psalm 2) the nations will fight against the Son, but it will all be in vain. The believers embrace and kiss the Son. Rejoicing (with the shepherds) at the mystery of the Word Incarnate, we are received into fellowship with Him (Post-Communion).

The propers preserve for us the distinction of salvation by faith alone and yet faith is never alone. The one who is justified by Christ, shows it forth in the sanctified life. The seated-at-the-right-hand Lord has raised up our humanity and made us a willing people. (Gradual- Psalm 110:3,1). With the Epistle from Titus 2:11-15. Jesus is "the

grace of God that bringeth salvation.” He has redeemed us from iniquity(justification) and is purifying(sanctification) us to be a people “zealous of good works.” The secret tells us that having united Himself with our substance(flesh), through the Holy intercourse of the Divine Service and the Communion, we are conformed to “the love of those things{heavenly desires} which are not seen” (Preface for Christmas).

The antiphon from the Introit from the pre-Vatican Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity of our Lord, has been moved to the antiphon for the Introit for Christ’s Mass at Midnight. Wisdom 18:14-15a (the Apocrypha) states, “For while all things were in quiet silence, and that night was in the midst of her swift course, Thine Almighty word leaped down from heaven out of thy royal throne....” Translating “in the midst” with the words “midnight,” you can understand the translation and its placement in this service. The English propers read, “When all was still and it was midnight, Your almighty Word descended from the royal throne” (Wisdom 18:14-15). Could it be that the birth occurred in the middle of the night, perhaps at midnight(Mt 25:6)?

### **C. Christ’s Mass at the Aurora** (Micah 5:2-5a, Titus 3:4-7, Luke 2:15-20)

Christ’s Mass at Dawn emphasizes the new birth of Holy Baptism. The Introit says, “The Lord reigns, He is clothed with majesty; The Lord is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength.” The Son of God, having clothed Himself with our flesh, now renews the baptized with His strength as we are clothed with Jesus (Psalm 93:1-5). The Epistle (Titus 3:4-7) is the sermon to explain the theme of this service. When Christ appeared in the flesh, God “saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the

Holy Ghost{=Holy Baptism}; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

This baptismal emphasis is not so much on the justification aspect of holy Baptism (that comes later in the 3rd service), but the sanctification aspect. The collect declares that Jesus, “the new light of Thy Word made flesh” brings forth action from our new minds (Rom 8:5). We have been changed and given new thoughts and minds.

This baptismal emphasis does not exclude, but pushes us forward to receive the sacrament of Our Lord’s Body and Blood. Jesus “wonderful birth has overcome the old man,” so that we may be revived by “the new life” of forgiveness received in “His Sacrament” (Post-Communion). In the Secret, we receive peace knowing that “as He who was born Man shone forth also as God, so may this earthly substance {=bread and wine} bestow upon us that which is divine {=power and nature} (2 Peter 1:3-4). Keeping it all in the right focus, we are to see that even our sanctification is the Lord’s will and work. “This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Gradual - Psalm 118:23-29).

The announcement of Christ’s birth brings us face to face with the God-Man. With haste the shepherds go to Bethlehem to see and worship the revelation of God. In Luke 2:15-20, the shepherds proclaim the saying: Jesus is the “Savior, Christ the Lord” (v.11). The doctrine that the second Person of the Trinity is both true God and true Man is clear. Though the Man Jesus comes out of little Bethlehem Ephrathah, He is the divine, “Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2-5a). The Man Jesus is God “Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting” (Offertory, Introit - Psalm 93:1b-2). Though our King is robed in majesty

(Ps 93:1), we dare not forget that he humbled Himself (“lowly, and riding upon an ass”) and the Father exalted Him for His obedient suffering and death. Rejoice greatly, Jesus is “just, and having salvation” (Communion).

#### **D. Christ’s Mass Day**

(Exodus 40:17-21, 34-38, Hebrews 1:1-12, John 1:1-18)

At the Christmas Eve Vigil, we heard St. Matthew’s account of the angelic vision to St. Joseph in a dream and the command to give this child the name, “Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (1:21). At the midnight service, we heard St. Luke’s account of the birth of Christ and the angelic announcement to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.” At the aurora service, the shepherds go to see “the Babe lying in a manger.” The ending of the Dawn service tells us the result of that visit, and foretells the theme of the main and final service on the Nativity of our Lord.

The Shepherds glorified and praised God for all the things which they had heard and seen. Mary, who is a type of the Church, “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” The Holy Gospel from St. John 1:1-18 is the theological pondering over the historical facts of Luke 2:1-20. This child born of the blessed Virgin Mary is none other than the Son of God, the new Light, the Word became flesh (*Et Verbum est Caro*). Jesus is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His (the Father’s) nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). The union of God and Man in one person Jesus Christ is clearly taught, “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.”



The theme of this service is summarized in the collect. The new fleshly birth of the only-begotten Son is without the yoke of original sin. Jesus sets us free from our old bondage. If you are looking for a justification theme, this Christ's Mass Day service has it! We are those who are described as "in the old bondage under the yoke of sin," are set free! Through the reception of the new birth of Thine only-begotten Son, our Lord sanctifies and cleanses us from the stains of sins (Secret). Remembering His mercy and His faithfulness to the house of Israel, our "Lord has made known His Salvation...His righteousness" (Introit - Psalm 98:1-4). In Jesus, we sing and rejoice in the salvation He brings us. Though the world and the Jews did not receive Him, those who received/believed Jesus were "born of God" through holy baptism.

The Holy Gospel (v.14) draws on the Old Testament reading(Exodus 40:17-21, 34-38). Jesus tabernacled among His people by hiding His Divine Nature under the covering of our human nature. Just as "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle," so all the fullness Godhead lives in the flesh of Jesus(Col 2:9). Blessed is Jesus, who was authorized to come in the Father's Name. "This was the LORD's doing" to send before our eyes, Jesus Christ, our Light (Gradual Psalm 118:26-27, 23). Jesus' fleshly generation in the Virgin Mary is the beginning of our new birth in Holy Baptism and our "divine generation." Through Jesus, we receive the gift of "immortality" (Post-Communion).

It is in this service that the theme of the **glory of the Lord** reaches its fullness. This glory is not a fireworks-like display of power (that will be later in the Second Coming of Christ), but the glory of God at Christmas is the revelation of the Gospel in

Jesus Christ. “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” (John 1:14).

“The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.” The wonderful thing about the revelation of God’s glory is its openness. No more hidden Jesus in the enigmas of the Old Testament. No more hidden Jesus in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. “All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Introit-Ps 98:3-4, 2). The Church openly declares in the Alleluia, “A holy day has dawned upon us. Come, all you nations, and worship the Lord.” We live in “these last days,” in which God does not wish to speak to us apart from the revelation of His reigning Son, who “had by Himself purged our sins” (Hebrews 1:1-12).

Finally, rejoicing and joyful praising is a fruit of our pondering with Mary on the Nativity of our Lord Christ’s birth. The communion psalm tell us that the fulfillment of God’s promises of Old in the birth of Jesus Christ leads us to “Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.” The sequence hymn is “Let All Together Praise Our God.”

## **VI. The Sunday Service Themes**

### **A. (First) Sunday after Christmas**

(Isaiah 11:1-5, Galatians 4:1-7, Luke 2:22-40)

As we continue to ponder with Mary the singular event of Christ’s nativity, the theme presented on the first Sunday in the Christmas season is freedom from the Law. Having fell into sin, we were under the Law. The Epistle teaches us about our sorry condition, “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world” (v.3). This Sunday serves as a correction to those who would be set free from

the law only to fall in anti-nomianism. As slaves, we were set free. That freedom didn't result in no association or no connection, so that we become a kind of theological gypsy without home, living the life of a free-spirit, and following the whims of our sinful desires and passions. We were set free from bondage as slaves and became children of God. This was not about freedom as in revolution from authority, but freedom from slavery through the adoption as sons. "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

The collect fully understands this as freedom not from the law, but freedom in Christ so that we desire to keep the law. "Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Your good pleasure, that in the name of Your beloved Son, we may be made to abound in good works" (Collect). The result of the birth of Christ is not embracing of sin, but no longer being forced by the Law. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father'" (v.6). We freely petition God to "Purge away our vices and our just desires fulfill," in the Post-Communion prayer.

One of the ways in which we live apart from the law, is to praise the One who set us free. Trusting in the grace of the Father's tender devotion, we receive the reward of Christ's righteousness (secret prayer). Our Savior does not judge us according to our own righteousness under the Law. "With (His) righteousness, shall he (the rod of Jesse's stem) judge the poor" (Isaiah 11:1). "The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, *wherewith* he hath girded himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved" (Alleluia, Introit - Psalm 93:1). We rejoice that our

Lord is “fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever” (Gradual -Psalm 45:1-2).

The Holy Gospel(St. Luke 2:22-32, 33-40)<sup>11</sup> for this day gives a historical account, which illustrates the life of the New Testament church. Jesus is brought to the temple in fulfillment of the Law of the Lord. Though we usually speak of the passive obedience of the Christ (Jesus died for our sins), this text gives the opportunity to emphasize Christ’s active obedience(Jesus lived for me) in keeping the Law perfectly. Simeon in the pastoral office, which in preaching and teaching, takes Jesus up in his arms and draws our attention to the Savior. Anna is the church who hears the preaching from the pastoral office and responds with hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

The pastor would be remiss in not further drawing our attention to the *Nunc Dimittis*. In the Divine Service and in the Holy Communion, we, too, have received Jesus and are prepared to depart this world in peace.

## **B. Second Sunday after Christmas**

(Gen 46:1-7, 1 Peter 4:12-19, Matthew 2:13-23)

If you ask two liturgists their opinion on the readings and themes for the Second Sunday after Christmas, you will get three, or maybe four responses. For a Sunday which is included only 60% of the time, there has been a lot of ink spilled. On this second Sunday, the pre-Vatican II Roman church celebrates the Name of Jesus(Act 4:8-12, Luke 2:21). The Book of Common Prayer anticipates the Epiphany(Is 61:1-3, Mt 2:19-23). The Service Book repeats Christmas Day (Titus 3:4-7, John 1:14-18). Lutheran Worship-

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<sup>11</sup> On February 2, the church celebrates the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple and emphasizes Luke 2:22-32. On the Sunday after Christmas, the church emphasizes Luke 2:33-40. For more background about the presentation of a male child, see Exodus 13:11-16. For more background about the Purification of Mary, forty days after she gave birth see Leviticus 12:1-8.

one year recommended the Twelve-year old Jesus (1 John 5:11-13, Luke 2:39-52), which got slighted because the Baptism of Our Lord replaced the Epiphany One readings. The Lutheran Hymnal and LSB One Year use the Flight into Egypt (1 Peter 4:12-19, Mt 2:13-19). In addition to that, there are those “Americans,” who simply chuck a liturgical connection and wish to celebrate a secular “Sunday after the (civil) New Year.”<sup>12</sup>

Although I am not opposed to a didactic repeating of important texts and themes, the particular selection for the Second Sunday after Christmas should include a consideration of the readings for the minor festivals in close proximity. Those who celebrate Epiphany on January 6, the holy Innocents(Matthew 2:13-18) on December 28, the Twelve-year old Jesus(Luke 2:41-51) on Epiphany One will at least want to consider a different reading or at least a different theme based on the same readings.

Once you have determined which readings to use, the selection of a collect of the day, opens up the divisions all over again. The traditional collect uses Jesus’ trip as a type of our life. We “poor sinners who are strangers and sojourners in this perilous world” ask the Lord that we “may finally come to our true home and fatherland, to live in joy and glory.” Luther evidently thought he could do better and proposed a rather short prayer, “Grant, dear Lord God, that we may become and remain partakers of the new birth in the flesh of Your dear Son and be delivered from our old sinful birth.” Luther’s suggestion makes no mention of the flight to Egypt(Mt 2:13-23), but uses birth imagery to draw a connection between “our old sinful birth” and being made partakers of Jesus’ new birth. His collect sounds like a shortening or a repetition of the Christmas Day collect. Dr. Norman Nagel, a professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, tried his

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<sup>12</sup> See The Lutheran Hymnal, p.58.

hand at this Sunday's collect as well. He kept the flight into Egypt theme, but keyed in on the contrast between "places along the way" as sinful diversions keeping us from "our abiding home with Jesus{you}."

This paper is not the place to untangle the lectionary or collect selection. Without any justification of the choice, I will use Gen 46:1-7, 1 Peter 4:12-19, Matthew 2:13-23 and the traditional collect. This choice allows the discussion of the killing of the male children for The Holy Innocents and the Flight into Egypt for this Sunday. It is the Epistle reading which truly explains the theme for this Sunday. 1 Peter 4:12-13, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." When the season of Christmas allows for two Sundays it appropriate to speak about not only the sufferings of the Christ child, but also the suffering of those who are baptized into Christ. We do partake of Christ's sufferings! When Psalm 8:2 (Antiphon for Introit) says, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger," the children's voices are not the supposedly "innocent" voices of Sunday School children. They are a reference to the death of circumcised Jewish infants. We need to learn that "to give thanks unto thy holy name, *and* to triumph in thy praise," (Gradual *Psalm 106:47; Isaiah 63:16*) does not happen only when the Lord rescues us from suffering. God's name is hallowed by our suffering for the name of Christ. We rejoice in the sufferings of Christ in Him and in us.

## **VII. Minor Festivals**

### **A. St. Stephen**(2 Chronicles 24:17-22, Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60, Matthew 23:34-39)

St. Matthew 23:34-39 is a summary of Jesus' directions to the laymen(v.1-7), His exhortation to His apostles in the pastoral office(v.8-13) and his seven-fold condemnation of the hirelings—the teachers of the law and the Pharisees(v.14-33). In the verse directly preceding this text(23:33b) Jesus asks, “Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?” The answer is self-evident. They can't.

Despite the lack of repentance from many, the Lord will continue to send out wise men, like Stephen(Epistle – Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60). These unrepentant will shed his righteous blood. Similarly, we need to understand that this is the position into which we have been placed. We don't pray for release from this suffering. The only way that this suffering may be avoided is through friendship with the world. That we can't have. Instead, we pray for “grace that in our sufferings” we may be faithful as was St. Stephen and “pray for those who do us wrong.”

### **B. St. John, Apostle** (Hosea 14:1-9, 1 John 1:1-10, John 21:19b-24)

Although the historical reason for the date of the minor festivals is the heavenly birthdate of the saint (the day they departed this world), the after-the-fact placement can provide additional lessons. St. Stephen is appointed to die, that's what happens to true prophets. In John 21, after Peter is told that he is going to die a martyr's death, he asks Jesus, “What about John?” Although suffering and death are the expectation of all disciples, the Lord is in charge of His flock. We are not to be concerned with the Lord's

dealings with others, our concern is the lot and vocation which we have been given. St. John the Apostle is the only Apostle not martyred for his witness to the faith.

### **C. The Holy Innocents (Jeremiah 31:15-17, Rev. 14:1-5, Matthew 2:13-18)**

The standard explanation for the ordering of the minor festivals following Christmas is thus: “St. Stephen was a martyr in will and deed. St. John was a martyr in will, but not in deed. The Holy Innocents were martyrs in deed, but not in will.” The golden-mouthed, St. John Chrysostom, was preaching on the Holy Innocents in 386-388 AD. As he was dealing with the injustice that was done to these infants, he gives this interesting saying, “That although there be many that injure, yet there is not so much as one that is injured.”<sup>13</sup> Chrysostom goes on to explain, “I mean, that what we may suffer unjustly from any one, it tells either to the doing away of our sins, God so putting that wrong to our account; or unto the recompense of rewards.” Chrysostom teaches us that although there may be those who harm us, God will use it to makes us better Christians while we are here or reward us in the life to come, and thus we are never truly injured.

### **D. Eve of the Name and Circumcision of Jesus**

The pre-Vatican II missal celebrates the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus (Acts 4:8-12, Luke 2:21) on a Sunday<sup>14</sup>, while January 1 is the Circumcision of the Our Lord (Titus 2:11-15, same as Midnight Mass; Luke 2:21) and the Octave of the Nativity. The Lutheran Hymnal combines the two into “The Circumcision and the Name of Jesus” (New Year’s Day), while Lutheran Worship and the Lutheran Service Book breaks them apart

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<sup>13</sup> Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol 10, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> “...the Sunday occurring between January 1 and 6, otherwise on January 2”.



into The Eve of the Name of Jesus(Isaiah 51:1-6, Acts 4:8-12 or Romans 8:31-39, Matthew 1:18-21) on December 31 and the Circumcision of Jesus(Genesis 17:1-4, Galatians 3:23-29, Luke 2:21) on January 1.

According to Luke 2:21 both the naming and the circumcision happened on the same day, “And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called **JESUS**, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.” The collect for the Name of Jesus describes believers as those “who worship His name of earth,” asking that we may “behold Him in heaven.” It is the collect for the Circumcision which carries the heavy theological weight. I am amazed that Colossians 2:11-12 is not included as a reading. Colossians 2:11-12, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup>buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

## **Appendix: The Second Sunday after Christ's Mass**

### **Readings:**

<b>Roman Missal</b>	<b>Service Book</b>	<b>Book of Common Prayer</b>	<b>The Lutheran Hymnal</b>	<b>LW, One year</b>	<b>LSB, One Year</b>	<b>My Proposal</b>
Name of Jesus	Repeats Christmas Day	Anticipates Epiphany				
	<b>1 Sam 2:1-10</b> Hannah's Prayer			1 Sam 2:1-10	Genesis 46:1-7 Jacob to Egypt	<b>Isaiah 61:1-3</b>
Acts 4:8-12	<b>Titus 3:4-7</b> 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mass at Dawn <sup>15</sup>	Isaiah 61:1-3	<b>1 Peter 4:12-19</b> Suffering with Jesus	1 John 5:11-13 Believe in name of Son of God	1 Peter 4:12-19	<b>Hebrews 1:1-12</b> The Son <sup>16</sup>
Luke 2:21 Used on 12/31 <sup>17</sup>	<b>John 1:14-18</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> Mass Day <sup>18</sup>	Matt. 2:19-23 Flight to Egypt <sup>19</sup>	Matthew 2:13-23	Luke 2:39-52 - Twelve year-old Jesus <sup>20</sup>	Matthew 2:13-23	<b>Matthew 2:13-23</b>

### **Collects:**

<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Luther</b>	<b>Nagel</b>
O Lord God, heavenly Father, who allowed Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, to become a stranger and sojourner in Egypt for our sake and led Him safely home to His fatherland, mercifully grant that we poor sinners who are strangers and sojourners in this perilous world, may finally come to our true home and fatherland, to live in joy and glory;	Grant, dear Lord God, that we may become and remain partakers of the new birth in the flesh of Your dear Son and be delivered from our old sinful birth;	Lord God, heavenly Father, who from the safety of exile in Egypt called Your Son and brought Him to a home for a while in Nazareth, mercifully keep us from losing our final home by clinging to places along the way, and so bring us to our abiding home with You, Your Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

<sup>15</sup> Also appointed in Roman Missal for Dec. 30 if a Saturday or Monday.

<sup>16</sup> Luther has a sermon on Hebrews 1:1-12 on Third Christmas Day (Complete sermons of Luther, vol 3.2).

<sup>17</sup> Eve of the Name and Circumcision of Jesus – Luke 2:21

<sup>18</sup> Christmas Day, 3<sup>rd</sup> Mass - John 1:1-18

<sup>19</sup> The Holy Innocents - Matthew 2:13-18

<sup>20</sup> Historic 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Epiphany – Luke 2:39-52

The newly published Volume 58 of Luther's Works, "Sermons V," includes a section of Luther's "Christmastide Sermons" which were preached December 25, 26, and 28, 1544.

The introductory preface includes the following words, "On the afternoon of Christmas Day and the following days in 1544, Luther took the Wittenberg pulpit for what would be his last Christmas sermons, preaching on texts and themes of the incarnation that had been of such importance to his faith and piety throughout the years. According to the traditional lectionary, Titus 2:11-14 and Luke 2:1-14 had been the readings for Mass on Christmas Eve, Titus 3:4-6 and Luke 2:15-20 for the early Mass on Christmas Day, and Heb. 1:1-12 and John 1:1-14 for the Christmas Day high Mass. But in the course of the 1540s, the Wittenberg church rearranged the Christmas readings in order to facilitate their exposition for the congregation over the course of Christmastide: Matt. 1:18-25 became the Christmas Eve Gospel, whereas the former readings for Christmas Eve became the readings for Christmas Day. The old Christmas Day readings were assigned to December 26 and 27, the festival days of St. Stephen and St. John the Evangelist respectively. (See WA DB 7:531, 533, 536-37.) Luther's 1544 Christmastide preaching loosely reflects this new schedule."

The chart below is based on these words.

	Christmas Eve	Early Mass on Christmas Day	Christmas Day High Mass	Dec 26	Dec 27
Traditional	Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14	Titus 3:4-6 Luke 2:15-20	Heb 1:1-12 John 1:1-14		
New Schedule (1540s)	Matthew 1:18-25	Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14		Titus 3:4-6 Luke 2:15-20	Heb 1:1-12 John 1:1-14

Dec 24	Dec 25	Dec 26	Dec 27	Dec 28	Dec 29	Dec 30	Dec 31	Jan 1	Jan 2	Jan 3	Jan 4	Jan 5
Sun Vigil of Nativit y (Not Advent 4)	Mon 2017 2023	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Mon	Tue 2012 2018	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Tue	Wed 2013 2019 2024	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sun after Christ mas (Not vigil of Epipha ny)
Wed	Thu 2014 2025	Fri	Sat	Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sun after Christ mas	Mon
Thu	Fri 2015 2020 2026	Sat	Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue
Fri	Sat 2021	Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	2 <sup>nd</sup> Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue	Wed
Sat	Sun 2016 2022 Christ mas Day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun after Christ mas	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12

<b>Christmas</b>		
<b>Dec 24 Vigil of the Nativity</b>	Isaiah 7:10-14 1 John 4:7-16 Matthew 1:18-25	O God, who makest us rejoice in the yearly expectation of the feast of our redemption: grant that we who joyfully receive the only begotten Son as a Redeemer, may behold, without fear, the same Lord Jesus Christ coming as our judge; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. <b>AMEN</b>
<b>1. Dec 24/25 Christ's Mass at Midnight</b>	Isaiah 9:2-7 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14	O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light, grant, we implore You, that as we have known on earth the wonders of that Light, we may also come to the fullness of its joys in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. <b>AMEN</b>
<b>2. Dec 25 (Dawn) Christ's Mass at the Aurora</b>	Micah 5:2-5a Titus 3:4-7 Luke 2:15-20	Grant, we implore You, almighty God, that we, upon whom is poured the new light of Thy Word made flesh, may show forth in our actions that which by faith shineth in our minds; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. <b>AMEN</b>
<b>3. Dec 25 Christ's Mass Day</b>	Ex. 40:17-21, 34-38 Hebrews 1:1-12 John 1:1-18	Grant, we beseech thee, O Almighty God, that we who groan under the old captivity of sin, may be freed there from by the new birth of thine Only-Begotten Son; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. <b>AMEN</b>
<b>Dec 26 St. Stephen, The First Martyr</b>	2 Chronicles 24:17-22; Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60; Matthew 23:34-39	
<b>Dec 27 St. John, Apostle and Evangelist</b>	Hosea 14:1-9; 1 John 1:1-10; John 21:19b-24	
<b>Dec 28 The Holy Innocents, Martyrs</b>	Jeremiah 31:15-17; Revelation 14:1-5; Matthew 2:13-18	
<b>First Sunday after Christmas</b>	Isaiah 11:1-5 Galatians 4:1-7 Luke 2:22-40	Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Your good pleasure, that in the name of Your beloved Son, we may be made to abound in good works; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. <b>AMEN</b> (The correct collect for this day)  OR Almighty eternal God, we heartily implore You, grant that we may know and praise Your dear Son as did Simeon, who took Him up in his arms and faithfully knew and confessed Him; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Luther)
<b>Dec 31 Eve of the Name of Jesus</b>	Isaiah 51:1-6 Acts 4:8-12 or Romans 8:31-39 Matthew 1:18-21	O Lord God, heavenly Father, who sent Your only-begotten Son to be our Savior and so gave Him the name of Jesus, mercifully grant that we who worship His name on earth may joyfully behold Him in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
<b>Jan 1 The Circumcision of Our Lord</b>	Genesis 17:1-4 Galatians 3:23-29 Luke 2:21	O Lord God, who for our sakes made Your blessed Son, our Savior, subject to the Law and caused Him to endure the circumcision of the flesh, grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit, that our hearts may be pure from all sinful desires and lusts; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
<b>Second Sunday after Christmas</b>	Gen 46:1-7 1 Peter 4:12-19 Matthew 2:13-23	O Lord God, heavenly Father, who allowed Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, to become a stranger and sojourner in Egypt for our sake and led Him safely home to His fatherland, mercifully grant that we poor sinners who are strangers and sojourners in this perilous world, may finally come to our true home and fatherland, to live in joy and glory; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. [OR] Lord God, heavenly Father, who from the safety of exile in Egypt called Your Son and brought Him to a home for a while in Nazareth, mercifully keep us from losing our final home by clinging to places along the way, and so bring us to our abiding home with You, Your Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. [Nagel] [OR] Grant, dear Lord God, that we may become and remain partakers of the new birth in the flesh of Your dear Son and be delivered from our old sinful birth; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (Luther)