

## Old Testament Reading:

### Zephaniah 3:14–20

- <sup>14</sup>Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
O daughter of Jerusalem!
- <sup>15</sup>The LORD has taken away the judgments  
against you;  
he has cleared away your enemies.  
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your  
midst;  
you shall never again fear evil.
- <sup>16</sup>On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
“Fear not, O Zion;  
let not your hands grow weak.
- <sup>17</sup>The LORD your God is in your midst,  
a mighty one who will save;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will quiet you by his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing.
- <sup>18</sup>I will gather those of you who mourn  
for the festival,  
so that you will no longer suffer  
reproach.
- <sup>19</sup>Behold, at that time I will deal  
with all your oppressors.  
And I will save the lame  
and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
and renown in all the earth.
- <sup>20</sup>At that time I will bring you in,  
at the time when I gather you together;  
for I will make you renowned and  
praised  
among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
before your eyes,” says the LORD.

### Epistle: Philippians 4:4–7

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will  
say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your reasonableness be  
known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;  
<sup>6</sup>do not be anxious about anything, but  
in everything by prayer and supplication  
with thanksgiving let your requests be  
made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of

God, which surpasses all understanding,  
will guard your hearts and your minds in  
Christ Jesus.

### Holy Gospel: Luke 7:18–28

<sup>18</sup>The disciples of John reported all these  
things to him. And John, <sup>19</sup>calling two of  
his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord,  
saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or  
shall we look for another?” <sup>20</sup>And when the  
men had come to him, they said, “John the  
Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you  
the one who is to come, or shall we look for  
another?’” <sup>21</sup>In that hour he healed many  
people of diseases and plagues and evil  
spirits, and on many who were blind he  
bestowed sight. <sup>22</sup>And he answered them,  
“Go and tell John what you have seen and  
heard: the blind receive their sight, the  
lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the  
deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor  
have good news preached to them. <sup>23</sup>And  
blessed is the one who is not offended by  
me.”

<sup>24</sup>When John’s messengers had gone,  
Jesus began to speak to the crowds con-  
cerning John: “What did you go out into  
the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the  
wind? <sup>25</sup>What then did you go out to see? A  
man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those  
who are dressed in splendid clothing and  
live in luxury are in kings’ courts. <sup>26</sup>What  
then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes,  
I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>27</sup>This  
is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send my messenger before  
your face,  
who will prepare your way before you.’”

<sup>28</sup>I tell you, among those born of women  
none is greater than John. Yet the one who  
is least in the kingdom of God is greater  
than he.”

# Rejoice . . .

## The Lord is at hand

PHILIPPIANS 4:4–5



**About the Cover:** One day, like the bright morning light that breaks through the darkness of night, the Lord’s second coming will bring rejoicing. While we do not know the day, the Lord is at hand today. God’s Word shines brightly, dispelling the darkness of anxiety and fear and replacing it with rejoicing in what He has accomplished for us in the forgiveness of our sins. The Lord is at hand. Let us rejoice today!



**St. John's Lutheran Church (LCMS)**

**8948 N 1900 Ave Geneseo, IL 61254**

**309-949-2516**

**December 15, 2024**

**Third Sunday in Advent**

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*Divine Service Three (Lutheran Service Book, p. 184)*

**Hymn of Invocation 331 The Advent of Our King**

**Invocation and Versicles (p. 184)**

**Introit**

*Psalm 146:5-8; antiphon: Philippians 4:4*

Rejoice in the Lord always;  
again I will say, Rejoice.

**Blessèd is he whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD his God,**

who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,  
who keeps faith forever;

**who executes justice for the oppressed,  
who gives food to the hungry.**

The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the  
blind.

**The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves  
the righteous.**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

Rejoice in the Lord always;  
again I will say, Rejoice.

**Gloria Patri and Kyrie (p. 186)**

*The Gloria in Excelsis is omitted during Advent*

**Collect of the Day**

P 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.** *(sung)*

**Readings (on back of bulletin)**

**Gradual**

*Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26, alt.*

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion.

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.

**Behold, your king is coming to you;  
righteous and having salvation.**

**Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**From the house of the Lord we bless you.**

**The Nicene Creed (p. 191)**

**Hymn of the Day 345 Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding**

**Sermon**

**Offertory (p. 192)**

**Presentation of the Offering**

**Prayer of the Church**

*After each petition:*

P Lord, in Your mercy,

C **hear our prayer.**

*The prayer concludes:*

P ...one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

**Service of the Sacrament (p. 194)**

*(Please see the Communion statement in the pew pads for receiving the  
Sacrament at St. John's.)*

**Distribution Hymns:**

**333 Once He Came in Blessing**

**343 Prepare the Royal Highway**

**347 Comfort, Comfort Ye My People**

**Nunc Dimittis (p. 199)**

**Hymn to Depart 348**

**The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns**

*Silent Prayer*

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**ST. JOHN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH-LCMS**

churchoffice@stjohnsgeneseo.org  
Website: www.stjohnsgeneseo.org  
https://www.facebook.com/St.Johns.Geneseo

**HEARING ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE  
HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE**

**Rev. Timothy Nerud** Pastor  
815-989-2025 (Office) 612-940-8138 (Cell)

Elder: Mike Dahl

Greeter: Janet Bertso

Videographers: Joel Werling, Nicole Nerud, or Heidi Nerud

**WE PRAY:** Almighty God, who holds the destiny of every person and the ultimate resolution of all created things in Your hand, restrain us from hypocrisy, maintain us in integrity, and keep us in our joy that Christ has come will come again; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who with You and the Holy Spirit are one God with dominion over us forever. Amen

**WELCOME TO ALL!**

We are anxious to share with you the Christ-centered ministry at St. John's. Our Liturgy follows closely the pattern of Word and Lord's Supper handed down from the ancient Church. It is our hope that you will make the Church's life of prayer your own. If you have difficulty following our order of service, please ask someone sitting near you for assistance. We pray that you will receive rich spiritual blessings from your presence here. May the peace and power of our risen Christ be yours always.

**OFFICE HOURS**

Terri's hours (Monday—Friday, please call ahead) 8 am—12 pm  
Pastor's hours (Monday, Pastor's day off)  
(Tuesday— Friday) please call ahead

**STREAM SERVICES** <https://www.facebook.com/St.Johns.Geneseo/> and on the website: [www.stjohnsgeneseo.org](http://www.stjohnsgeneseo.org).

**DAILY DEVOTIONS FROM LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES** - use this website ([www.lhm.org](http://www.lhm.org)) to receive daily devotions sent to your email or phone. You never have to be without God's word.

*All bulletin announcements need to be in the Office by Wednesday mornings.*

**ATTENDANCE LAST SUNDAY**

Sunday school—5/1 Adult Bible Class—11 Worship—51

**OFFERING**

Offering last Sunday \$4,105.00  
Weekly giving needed per 2024 Budget \$4,481.54

**WEEKLY ACTIVITIES AT ST JOHN'S**

Today	8:30 am	Christmas Practice for children
	8:45 am	SS, Adult/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship/Holy Communion
	11:30 am	Youth meeting
Tuesday	1:00 pm	LWML meeting
Next Sunday	8:30 am	Christmas Practice for children
	8:45 am	SS, Adult/Youth Bible Study
	10:00 am	Divine Worship

*I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."  
Psalms 122:1*

**PHILIPPIANS 4:5-6** – "The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Wouldn't you like to be free from worry and anxiety? Isn't it worry and anxiety that often keep us from living the generous life God has called us to? St. Paul contrasts anxiety with prayer, supplication and thanksgiving in making our requests known to God. In other words, when you are tempted to anxiety and worry, pray to the Lord with a thankful heart and pour out your supplications before Him

**ATTENDANCE BOOK**—We ask everyone attending this morning to sign the red attendance book found at the end of each pew, then pass it back.

**THANK YOU**—"I sincerely thank you for all the cards, prayers and well wishes. They are truly appreciated". These are the feelings of Shirley Nerud which she wanted everyone at St. John's to hear.

These last several months were difficult for her and her family. Your love and support have been such a comfort. Though her battle is over, we look forward to the joyous reunion with Mom and all our brothers and sisters in the true faith. This has been promised by Christ our Risen Savior. Thank You!

Pastor, Heidi, Sarah, Nicole, Katrina

**THE GIVING TREE**—You are invited to participate in this mission project. See the insert for directions. Bless others with your gifts of love this season.

**COLLECTING CALENDARS**—We will collect 2025 calendars Dec. 15—29. Place them in the basket found on the table next to the coat room. Thank You!

**THANK YOU** to all who have given so generously to the various mission projects during the past few weeks and this entire year. Your love for Christ shines brightly as you care for your fellow man.

## SPECIAL WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES DURING THIS SEASON!

- Midweek Advent service, Wednesday Dec. 18 @ 7 pm
- Christmas Eve Service, Dec. 24 @ 6:30 pm
- Christmas Day Service, Dec. 25 @ 10:00 am
- New Year's Eve Service, Dec. 31 @ Concordia Geneseo @ 6 pm

**LIFE THOUGHTS**—"Speak tenderly" in Isaiah 40:1-2 is literally "speak to the heart." More than nice-sounding words, all of the Good News encapsulated in the first and second coming of Jesus speaks powerfully to those with struggling and burdened hearts. The life issues give us opportunity to speak this Good News to matters of the heart, especially those considered "controversial" and "divisive." *Prayer: Thank You for touching our hearts with the Good News! Help us share it with all who deal with matters of the heart. Amen.*

**WITNESS & OUTREACH**—Luke 7:18-28 (29-35): Sometimes, when we look at the humble way in which Jesus entered our world, we are filled with doubts. We ask along with John's messengers, "Are You the One to come or shall we look for another?" Jesus' answer to John's messengers serves as a mission statement for our outreach: "Go and tell what you have seen and heard." May we boldly share what we have seen and heard about our coming Savior, Jesus Christ.

**MESSAGE FROM LCRL**—Ben Franklin once observed, "It is in the region of ignorance that tyranny begins." The Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty provides devotions, podcasts, op-ed pieces, and more in an effort to inform. You are invited to join the LCRL mailing list – see [www.LCRLFreedom.org](http://www.LCRLFreedom.org) to subscribe.

**DOLLAR FOR MISSIONS**—Water heater for Cristo Rey Lutheran Church, East Moline. Dollar for Missions (DFM) contributions in late 2024 will help to pay for a new water heater at Cristo Rey Lutheran Church, East Moline. The church's previous water heater is almost 20 years old.

"This is another 'non-glamor' item," said CID Mission Executive Ken Schurb. "Yet to proclaim the Gospel in Spanish at Cristo Rey, especially in winter time, a reliable hot water heater is a helpful piece of equipment to have." Plumbing as well as painting and many other such things have their place in a mission.

Cristo Rey is CID's only congregation in which the ministry is conducted almost entirely in Spanish. It serves, particularly, Spanish-speaking people in the Quad Cities.

Pastor Pablo Dominguez has served in East Moline for over 20 years. First he was a CID missionary-at-large, then subsequently pastor of Cristo Rey. The congregation formally joined the Synod in 2018. **Amount to be funded: \$1,000 Project:** Replace water heater at Cristo Rey Lutheran Church, East Moline.

**ALTAR FLOWERS**—The 2024 Flower Chart is now on the bulletin board next to the restrooms. Cost for weekly flowers are \$30 for two arrangements. We greatly appreciate those who help with providing flowers for Sunday wor-

ship services. Please sign up for a Sunday.

## PRAYER MINISTRY

*The Church waits for the Second Coming in repentance, hope and faith. For the following, we pray "Lord, have mercy."*

**MISSION**—*Pray for the coming of Christ, Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*

**ST JOHN'S**—**Mr. Conner Helke**—We offer before You our common request for the well-being of Your church throughout the world that it may be so guided and governed by Your good Spirit that all who profess themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit in the bond of peace, and the righteousness of life. Specifically, we pray for Conner asking Your blessings him.

**ST. JOHN'S FAMILY**—O Lord, You are the great Physician of soul and body. We pray that You would show mercy to Your servants:

<b>Elizabeth Bjork</b>	<b>Paula Chapa</b>	<b>Joyce DeFauw</b>
<b>Betty Firch</b>	<b>Arlyn Helke</b>	<b>Jessica Johnson</b>
<b>Lynne Johnson</b>	<b>Linda Lundquist</b>	<b>Aaron Raschke</b>
<b>Drew Schillinger</b>	<b>Carolyn Wildermuth</b>	<b>Marilyn Woods</b>
<b>Dawn Daebellienn</b>	<b>Lisa Peterson</b>	

**Brandon & Shaeli Streeks & family** (Adopted Seminarian)

**Jon/Anita Clausing** (missionaries in Kenya)

**Don Eggers** (son of friend of Marilyn Woods)

**Jodi Martins** (daughter of Gary & Darla Johns)

**Shandel Loenser**

**Paul Werner** (brother of Dan Werner)

**Justin Rittenhouse** (grandson of John/Nancy Wickwire)

**Marty Cavato** (cousin of Mary Jo Gehn)

**Ellen Bauer** (grandmother of Joel Werling)

**Don Lutz** (husband of an LWML friend of Liz Neumann)

**Gary Kilstom** (friend of Brad Gehn)

**MILITARY**—We pray for those serving in our military and their families:

**Mandy Davila** (daughter of Linda Aper)

**Luke/Nicole Thompson** (son/daughter-in-law of John/Kindra Thompson)

**Karl Flynn** (son of Mr/Mrs Paul Flynn)

**Casey Powers Jr.** (step son of Lisa Powers)

**Brittany Loenser** (daughter of Gabe Loenser)

**Rylie Hallendorff** (grand-daughter of Carolyn & Dan Werner)

## LUTHERANS FOR LIFE

"Who is going to be king? Christ or Herod? Christ or I? Every day we make dozens of decisions which either acknowledge Christ's lordship or which assert our own. The star of the Magi reminds the Christian that he has a gracious King to whom he can, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, submit his will and live. By His word Christ desires to reign in our hearts through faith!" *Rev. Darren Green, St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church, Redwood Falls, Minnesota – A Life Quote from Lutherans For Life • [lutheransforlife.org](http://lutheransforlife.org)*

**Third Sunday in Advent  
15 December 2024**

**Collect of the Day**

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.

**Presentation of the Offering**

Our humble offerings we now bring To You, dear Jesus, Savior-King./ Accept them, small as they may be; And by Your Spirit help us see/ Whatever work needs yet be done So other may learn that heaven is won,/ Is work which each of us must do, And, what's done for others, is done for You. Amen.

**Prayer of the Church—Responsive Form**

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

Almighty God, as You once sent messengers before the face of Jesus to prepare His way, so strengthen and encourage pastors and church workers as they make known His saving name. Open the ears of all who hear to rejoice, repent and firmly believe in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You rescue the daughter of Zion from her enemies and take away the judgments against her. Look with compassion upon Your people wherever they suffer for the name of Jesus. Give them wisdom when they are pressured to compromise, provide for them when they suffer loss, give courage when they are afraid, and strengthen them in the midst of persecution until You deliver them. Preserve us in the joyful hope that You will restore all that is lost with what cannot be taken away. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, Giver of all good gifts, look upon the households of Your people. Provide companionship for those who are alone. Strengthen the bonds of marriage. Equip parents to raise their children in love and faith. Grant that our homes may be places of joy, reasonableness, peace and prayer. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, You command us not to be anxious, but in everything by prayer and thanksgiving to make our requests known to You. Give wisdom, health and success to the authorities who govern us and those newly elected. Give earthly peace in our time, even as Your Gospel gives eternally the peace that passes all understanding. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Kindhearted Lord, look with kindness on all people, especially those who are lonely, ill, hurting, or in any need, specifically those who have asked for our prayers including, Ellen, Elizabeth, Marty, Paula, Dawn, Joyce, Don, Betty, Arlyn, Jessica, Lynne, Gary,

Shandel, Linda, Don, Jodi, Lisa, Aaron, Justin, Drew, Paul, Carolyn, and Marilyn. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, be with all those who mourn the death of loved ones, especially the family and friends of Shirley Nerud. Give to them the peace that surpasses all understanding and the certain hope of the grand reunion in glory with all who believe in Jesus. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, remember Conner Helke. Bless him in body and soul with all things needful for this life and eternity. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, the Son of Man came eating and drinking with sinners, that He might proclaim the kingdom and welcome them in by the forgiveness of sins. As He hosts His Supper this day for His repentant people, grant those who partake of His body and blood to be worthy and well-prepared, firmly believing the words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us, heavenly Father, for the sake of Christ Jesus, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Third Sunday in Advent

December 15, 2024

Text: Luke 7:18-28 (Gospel)

Other Texts: Zephaniah 3:14-20 (Old Testament Reading); Philippians 4:4-7 (Epistle)

### **“Blessed Is the One Who Is Not Offended by Me”**

Grace, mercy and peace be yours from God our Father through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who has come, continues to come in His Word and Sacraments, and will come one last time in glory.

It has been about 33 years since aged priest Zechariah was offering the sacrifice of incense and received a message from the angel Gabriel that his barren wife Elizabeth would have a son whom they would name John. It has been about 2 years since John the Baptist began his God-given ministry, coming in the spirit and power of Elijah to go before the Lord and to prepare His way by calling the people to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.

For about a year John continued his prophetic ministry, faithfully proclaiming the greater One who had come, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” And his mission seemed successful as the crowds came out to him, many repenting and being baptized, their repentance and faith proven by their desire to live in a way pleasing to God. Yet despite his powerful ministry and notwithstanding that he was the last and greatest of the prophets other than the Messiah Himself, still John in true humility of spirit stated in no uncertain terms that he was not the Christ, saying of Jesus that “He must increase, but I must decrease,” even proclaiming himself unworthy to untie the straps of his Lord’s sandals. Is it any wonder that Jesus said of John, “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John”?

Yes, some rather amazing events in the life of John the Baptist for sure. Yet, the last year was quite different. Boldly condemning the sins of the high and mighty had led to serious consequences. Reproving Herod Antipas for his sinful marriage to his brother Philip’s ex-wife Herodias, herself wrongly divorced from Philip in her climb to power, was right and true, but also rather unwanted by the rulers. So John had been imprisoned in the cells of Macherus, a palace and fortified city on the Dead Sea. And this brings forth some questions from John as his faith is under heavy attack by the forces of darkness even as he is in a dark prison.

For it is one thing in genuine humility to acknowledge one’s lack of worth in comparison to the Messiah, God in the flesh, to say that He must increase and I must decrease, but was he thinking *imprisonment* when he said that? Sure he was called to live an austere life, no alcohol, a diet of locusts and honey, wearing rough clothes, living in the wilderness away from family and the many joys of this life, but incarceration in a dungeon is still beyond that. Especially imprisonment *for faithfully carrying out his calling!* So yes, he starts to have some questions.

John remembers proclaiming, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Yet, the faithful servant, yes, the prophesied forerunner of the Lord, is languishing in prison while the incestuous, adulterous aristocracy who imprisoned him remains in power, along with all the other wicked, high and low, who continue in their evil, continuing to get away with it.

“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Was Jesus truly the Messiah? Why is everything so wrong? Yes, John and his disciples are struggling, but a struggling faith is still faith, and the comforting truth is that even when faith in Christ is but a smoldering wick, the Lord will not snuff it out. John does exactly what all believers are to do when they have questions and doubts; he brings them to Jesus. And he gets his answers.

Jesus points John to His many miracles of healing and the good news being proclaimed to the poor, all fulfilling what the prophets foretold of the Christ as written in Holy Scripture. So He concludes His message to John saying, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Certainly words of challenge, words that call for faith when all seems to be wrong, faithfulness even unto a martyr’s death if necessary. But even more certainly words of promise, of hope, of blessing, already in this world with enduring faith, godliness, and divine wisdom, and eternal life in the heavenly world to come. And with his faith in Jesus confirmed, John is able to endure imprisonment and beheading, and so enters the glory of the Lord whose way he prepared.

Friends in Christ, as we consider St. John the Baptist and all that he endured as a faithful believer, I would like to utilize our Lord’s questions to the crowds and direct them to us. Speaking of John, Jesus asked them, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts.”

So what did we expect to see in the Christian life? Do we expect it to be like a reed shaken in the wind, that is, being permitted to go with the flow, whatever the world is telling us at the time, in order to avoid arguments, difficulties at the moment, and troubles down the road? Or do we realize that we are called to stand firm for Christ, to live a life in word and deed that honors Him and His Word, and suffer if necessary? Do we recognize that Christians die to live, that is die to themselves, their sinful desires certainly, but also by putting the Lord first and others above ourselves, for that is life in Christ and His Spirit, life that will continue forever?

Do we expect the Christian life to be one of soft clothing, luxury, and self-aggrandizement? Did Jesus come so that we would have our best life now, that we would be happy, healthy, and wealthy here on earth? That our life would not have troubles and,



if it does, sending a quick “knee-mail” to God would see it fixed fast and made even better than before?

To be blunt, “Is being a Christian living up to what you expected?” You hear Jesus died on the cross for you and your sins are forgiven, yet the feeling of guilt doesn’t miraculously go away, especially since consequences of your sins still remain, as does the harm they have caused others. You hear of Jesus healing all sorts of diseases, even raising the dead, yet you remain ill, your loved one still died, despite all the prayers. You hear that Jesus gives you the peace that surpasses all understanding, yet the world remains in chaos, your life remains difficult, even unpleasant, your mind and soul sometimes feeling overwhelmed with turmoil and sorrow.

You hear that Jesus is risen and ascended, ruling all, yet you see the unbeliever and the openly wicked succeeding and even persecuting the righteous. You hear that the devil is defeated, yet his temptations to sin, as well as his accusations against you through your conscience when you give in and sin, seem as powerful as ever. You want an intense experience with Christ, yet what you get is to hear a fellow sinner speak, water poured on you in the past, and some bread and wine to eat and drink. Did you think it would be different, that it would be better, as a Christian? Like John in prison, do you wonder, “Is there actually somebody else?”

I suspect all of us have had our “John in prison” moments and, to our shame, too often for less serious circumstances than his. Yet, our dear Lord says to us the same as to John, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Word that for us too are both challenge and promise.

They challenge us to rethink what we believe being a Christian should be, reminding us that Christ has been honest with us. For did He not actually say, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” And to prove His words, do we not have the examples of John the Baptist, the prophets and apostles, and faithful Christians throughout the world and centuries? Does not the holy apostle remind us that we walk by faith, *not by sight*? Of course, we do receive many blessings under God’s gracious care, but never was it said that following Him is an easy life here until we enter the big party in the sky!

It is true that things often don’t seem right. That’s because they’re not! This world remains under God’s curse upon sin; the devil, though beaten, remains active; and the wicked are not immediately destroyed because God is giving them time to repent. And that is good, because all of us have needed that time of grace to hear and respond in faith to John’s call to repent and bear the fruits of repentance as well. A call that we keep needing to heed that our faith remain strong.

But Jesus *is* the Messiah. He preached good news to the poor, that is, the poor in spirit, those who know their soul’s poverty due to sin and their need for the riches of

forgiveness He won on the cross. And His mighty miracles, restoring sight, healing the sick, raising the dead, these point forward to when faith will finally be fulfilled in sight, when He remakes all things right once again. When the bodies of believers are raised in glory to never be sick again, hurt again, hunger again, nor die again, even as our souls will be free from all struggle, sorrow, anxiety, and anguish. John is an example of one who lived the theology of the cross, suffering in this life for Jesus' sake, and glory in the next because Jesus saves us by His own suffering and death that we can share in His glory.

So dear Christians, keep up the faith. Yes, you will struggle; you will have doubts. But then do what John did, take them to Jesus. Bring your sorrows, fears, and doubts to your Lord and Savior in prayer. And then hear Him speak His assurance to you through His Word and Sacraments. Hear and have your faith restored and strengthened, made able to endure all suffering and evil to the end, and so receive the blessing of all who are not offended by Him: the crown of everlasting life and glory in the new heavens and earth.

God keep us from being offended by Jesus and so receive His blessing now and forever. Amen!