



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

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Thanksgiving Day

Pastor Randy Ott

### **Thankful Throughout the Year**

A quote is attributed to the English author, Charles Dickens, which goes something along this line. I don't have it exactly, but he said, "We Americans have just got it all wrong when it comes to Thanksgiving." He said, "We should have 364 days for giving thanks and one day that we set aside to complain and whine about things." Sometimes it seems as though we do it the opposite way.

As we gather together on this Thanksgiving morning, we are going to take a look at the things that we can be thankful for throughout the year using the framework of the church year that we follow as we worship our God and see all the various things that we can be thankful for.

### **Be Thankful During Advent**

The first season of the church year is Advent. It usually begins the first Sunday in December or the last Sunday in November. It depends on where Christmas exactly falls. Think about the things you are thankful for during that time of the year. The word "advent" means "coming," so some of the things I suppose we are thankful for are the things that are going to be coming—all the things we circled in the toy catalogs that we got in the mail, right? We can't wait to rip those things open. We anticipate being thankful for that.

Maybe this time of the year we anticipate being thanked for the gifts that we give to someone else; maybe we are thankful that we might get some Christmas bonus from our employer or all the various Christmas parties that we will go to. We look forward to going to them and being thankful as we celebrate together.

There is certainly nothing wrong for being thankful for any of those things. However, if that is where it stops, it's kind of as though you were in a burning building and you were rescued by a fireman and the fireman said to you, "this way sir or madam" and brought you out and you thanked them for being so polite and calling you "sir" or "madam;" it kind of stops short of where you really need to be, right?

During Advent we focus not just on coming gifts that we are going to rip open, but we focus on God's coming. We prepare to celebrate his coming in time at Bethlehem. We celebrate the fact that he comes to us in the present through the Word and the Sacrament, and he shows us our sins and points us to the Savior. He shows us how he kept his promises in sending Christ. During Advent we look at a lot of those promises from the Old Testament.

Then we also focus on his second coming, and we find joy in knowing he will keep his promise and come and bring a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness for we who are believers.

If you think about those comings, you think about how they give us hope, not just “I hope the roads clear up” or “I hope that things go well,” but confidence. You and I have confidence because of Christ. That is what we can be thankful for during the time of Advent because God has given us hope. Our Spirit rejoices with Mary because God has sent a Savior for me, for you, and for Mary.

### **Luke 1:39-47**

#### **Mary Visits Elizabeth**

<sup>39</sup>At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, <sup>40</sup>where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup>In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! <sup>43</sup>But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup>As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup>Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

#### **Mary's Song**

<sup>46</sup>And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

### **Luke 1:54-55**

<sup>54</sup>He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful <sup>55</sup>to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

### ***Be Thankful During Christmas***

The next season of the church year, we look at what isn't really a season as much as it is the first major festival of the church year along with a Sunday or two after that festival. It's the festival of Christmas, where we celebrate Christ's birth.

During Christmas, sometimes we might shake our heads at the world around us. Recently I heard on the radio about a major lumber supply company that was apologizing because in their ad they had called it the “family” tree because they didn't want to use the word “Christmas” tree because they didn't want to upset people that weren't Christians. We hear that kind of stuff. We see it in stores—holiday, and Christmas not mentioned. We kind of shake our heads and say, “Boy, that's terrible! These people just don't get it.”

But then maybe we also ought to stop and ask ourselves, “What is it exactly we are thankful for during the season of Christmas?” Does sometimes our thanksgiving stop one exit short of where the Lord wants us to arrive?

What I mean is this—let’s picture it’s dark out and there are three times as many people in the church, so we are at the children’s Christmas program, right? Let’s say we go through the whole children’s Christmas program and we don’t sing *Silent Night*. Later that week, are you going to be one of those people that Dickens was talking about complaining and saying, “Boy it just doesn’t seem like Christmas if we don’t sing *Silent Night*”? Do we stop at the ritual of the celebration and forget what it is we are celebrating? If so, we are getting off an exit too soon, aren’t we? The ritual points us to Christ.

We are singing *Silent Night* this year, so don’t get worried, okay? But do you understand what I am saying? I know sometimes that’s what happens to me. I get so focused on some of the different things that we are doing that I forget why we are doing them, because there are lot of things that need to be done. But on that first Christmas Eve, they didn’t sing *Silent Night*, did they? They sang *Glory to God in the Highest*, and the people didn’t sing it, the angels did. They lived it, right? Because the shepherds that were there like any other night all of a sudden had angels talking to them, and their message focused on a simple word—Savior. “We bring you good news! A Savior is born to you!” A Savior that brings peace between God and man, because by nature, when we are born into this world, we are born at war, separated from God, because we are sinners and he is holy. But here comes a Savior. God becomes flesh. God leaves heaven to become flesh to be our Savior.

Wrap your head around that during the Christmas season—why God would love us that much that he becomes both God and man at the same time and leaves the glory of heaven. That is what we have to be thankful for during Christmas.

### **Luke 2:8-14**

#### **The Shepherds and the Angels**

<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

## Footnotes:

- a. [Luke 2:11](#) Or Messiah. "The Christ" (Greek) and "the Messiah" (Hebrew) both mean "the Anointed One"; also in verse 26.

### **Be Thankful During Epiphany**

As you look back over the past year, are there new friends that you have made that you treasure? Are there people that you've known that you have gotten to know better that has really been a joy and a blessing to you?

That is one of the great things that God gives us, right? Friends that we get to know and we develop this bond with that you know if something happens, they will be there to do whatever they can to help you. That is an incredible blessing that God gives to us as Christians. And getting to know them better and enjoy their company and know that they will be there for you and encourage you in Christ and that he'll do that for them, that's an incredible gift from God—getting to know others.

In the next season of the church year, that is really what we do with Jesus. The word "epiphany" means "to make known." During the season of Epiphany, God makes himself known to us. He reveals who he is, and then we stand back and we can marvel at the fact that the One that we ood and awed over that was wrapped in those strips of cloth in the manger is actually the One who created the plants that made those strips of cloth. We see that through his powerful teaching and through his miracles. He's not just a revolutionary. He's not just a great teacher. He is the God-man. He is the One that all the prophecies talked about. He reveals himself to be the only one that can take away our sins. We could never come to that conclusion on our own. He has to make it known to us.

During the season of Epiphany, week after week we get to know him better. There is no greater blessing than knowing your God better today than you did yesterday, better this year than you did last year. Because we still live in a sinful world, there are going to be things that challenge us and trouble us and worry us and present all kinds of problems. At those times, it's great to have other friends, but it's especially great to have God as the One that we know will walk side by side with us to face all of these things and to know that he does it in his love and in his power. That is what God makes known to us during Epiphany.

### **John 1:1-5**

#### **The Word Became Flesh**

- <sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning.

<sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood<sup>[a]</sup> it.

**Footnotes:**

- a. [John 1:5](#) Or darkness, and the darkness has not overcome

**John 1:10-17**

<sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— <sup>13</sup>children born not of natural descent,<sup>[a]</sup> nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,<sup>[b]</sup> who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup>John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" <sup>16</sup>From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. <sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

**Footnotes:**

- a. [John 1:13](#) Greek of bloods
- b. [John 1:14](#) Or the Only Begotten

**Be Thankful During Lent**

Who would you be willing to die for? Think of it this way—you are in a bank. You are there and you have your child next to you. A bank robber comes in and things go wrong. He points a gun at your child and is about to pull the trigger. Would you jump in front of your child to save your child's life?

Now let's say the police are there. A gunfight breaks out and the policeman is pointing his gun at the bank robber. Would you jump in front of him to save his life?

Of course not, he's getting what is coming to him, right? You might point him out and say, "Give him a couple more" for putting you through all that anxiety and that worry. He's getting what is coming to him.

During the season of Lent, we are reminded exactly who we are. We see the extent of God's love, his undeserved love, his grace. During Lent, we are reminded that we are the bank robber. We don't deserve God to take a bullet for us. Jesus takes the full cup of God's wrath over and against our sins and drinks it down to the last drop. He is the

One that hangs on the cross and cries out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” as he suffers the very agony of hell that you and I should have suffered. We don’t deserve it. He took it in our place.

During Lent, we see who he is willing to die for, and we see what his grace is, what true grace is. And then we are reminded that not only did he live in our place, he also drank that cup of God’s wrath in our place, and we now stand with access into his grace. We can approach God because of what Jesus has done for us. During Lent, we see just how thankful we can be as we are reminded of our sin, and we are reminded of the lengths that our Savior went to, to save us. It comes through the blood of Christ which took away our sins.

That is why during the season of Lent and throughout the rest of the year, we want to immerse ourselves in that grace. We want to do what the writer to the Hebrews talks about, not give up meeting together, but continually encourage ourselves and one another with that grace. And how thankful we can be that we have fellow Christians who will do that for us and who will point us to Christ as our Savior when we need that reminder.

### **Hebrews 10:19-25**

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup>by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

### **Be Thankful During Easter**

Did you ever pour yourself a nice big glass of milk or maybe a big bowl of cereal and sit down and take a big drink or get a big spoonful and then discover that the expiration date had passed awhile ago on that milk jug? It’s not the most pleasant experience in the world, now is it? It’s not something you would want to relive.

Things in this world, not just in our fridge, but things in the whole world perish, spoil and fade because we live in a world that is tainted by sin. That is true, but you might be thinking to yourself, “What in the dickens does that have to do with Easter?”

Think of what the empty tomb means for us. The fact that the One who hung on the cross, endured God’s wrath, the One who died and was buried did not remain dead, the fact that the grave could not hold him—in fact, this last week, both in our Tuesday afternoon Bible study and in my class with the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the school, we looked at Jesus’ descent into hell. One of the things that we saw is that he rose from

the dead. He descended into hell. He walked through hell and announced that he won the victory and Satan could not lay a finger on him. Can you imagine that? That's how complete his victory is. That is how completely he destroyed the devil's work. The fact the grave couldn't hold him assures us that that victory is there for us.

The Bible said he was put to death for our sins. He was raised to life for our justification. We can be certain we have been declared "not guilty" because Jesus rose from the dead. This is the central truth of the Christian life. This is why we don't worship on Saturday anymore. We are free. We don't have to worship on the Sabbath. And the early church and from then on has chosen as the main service of the week to be on Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day that he rose from the dead, the day that we remind ourselves the victory over sin, death and hell is ours because the grave couldn't hold Jesus.

Now, we know that even though we might perish, we might get sick and die, we might die suddenly, even though our loved ones in the Lord might perish, we know it's not eternal. Even though they die, yet shall they live, because Jesus said, "Because I live, you also will live." We know that one day our bodies will rise, our souls will go immediately to be with the Lord, but there will come a day when we too will rise from the grave. Easter assures us that we have new birth into a living hope and an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade.

### **1 Peter 1:3-9**

#### **Praise to God for a Living Hope**

<sup>3</sup>Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup>These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup>Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup>for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

#### **Be Thankful at Ascension**

As you look back over the past year, I'm sure there are a lot of things that have happened in your life or in the lives of your loved ones that has brought you sadness; things that maybe caused tears to flow; maybe that made the stomach acid a little overactive and it gave you an ulcer; things that made you worry and toss and turn.

That's always going to be the case in this world because we live in a world, as I said before, that still is ruined by sin. As sinners, we don't always have a perfect trust in

God. In fact, sometimes as we are going through some of these things, we might wonder where God is. “How come he allows this to happen or that to happen? This isn’t fair or that isn’t fair. God, don’t you love me? Where have you gone? Why aren’t you fixing things faster?”

At Ascension, we find an answer to those kinds of questions. At Ascension, we are reminded at this minor festival of how Jesus’ visible presence did leave, but that doesn’t mean he is gone. As we say in the Creed, he ascended into heaven, and now the ascended Lord sits at the right hand of God and rules everything for the benefit of the church. There are times in our lives when we need to remind ourselves of this. Ascension is important for us throughout the entire year, because the One who ascended into heaven is the One who now rules over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is all believers everywhere. He rules over all things for our good.

The problem is that you and I at times hear that phrase and we want to confuse our good with our earthly happiness. God has never promised to rule over all things for our earthly happiness. He has promised to rule over all things for our eternal good.

So when those things come that keep us up at night that cause the tears to flow over our cheeks, when we go to God and say, “God, I can’t get through this on my own. Help me! I need your strength because mine is not enough,” and we follow up that prayer with the answer God has told us; we immerse ourselves in his grace and his love and his Word and his Sacraments, God will make it work out for our eternal good. He will burn away and refine the impurities of our faith and lead us to focus more clearly and more directly on him.

As he rules over all things in our life that leads us to him, we can be thankful. We can be thankful to know that Christ has ascended and rules over all things for our benefit because we are his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. So throughout the whole year, we can be thankful that we know the meaning of “ascension.”

### **Ephesians 1:17-23**

<sup>17</sup>I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit<sup>[a]</sup> of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup>I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, <sup>20</sup>which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.



## Footnotes:

- a. [Ephesians 1:17](#) Or a spirit

### **Be Thankful During Pentecost**

Today across our land, many people will stop and be thankful for the fact that they are gainfully employed, they have a means of income, they have work that they can do to support themselves and their loved ones. That is certainly something we want to thank the Lord for.

But on this day, we can also stop and give thanks that the Lord has worked in us so that we can work, not just to make an income, but work for him. He gives us the gifts of the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit. During the third major festival of the church year, Pentecost, we focus on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and his work. And then throughout the rest of the Sundays after Pentecost, we focus on how the Spirit changes us so that we can live for God, so that we can serve God and serve one another.

The fruits of the Spirit, the things that God gives us that come with our faith, are a blessing to us because we can also, as we live in these fruits—love, joy, peace, patience and so forth—we are a blessing to one another as the Spirit works through us. We have Christian friends that point us to our God and encourage us when we are down and strengthen us when we are weak and reach out for us when we are straying. We can thank God that we have the Holy Spirit living in us with a living and active faith, but also thank God that he works through those who are around us—our fellow believers that we can be thankful for. Because the Spirit lives in all believers, and the Spirit blesses us directly through his work and indirectly through the work of our fellow believers that are around us.

### **Galatians 5:16-25**

#### **Life by the Spirit**

<sup>16</sup>So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

<sup>17</sup>For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

<sup>19</sup>The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup>idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

## **Be Thankful at Thanksgiving**

After the Sundays after Pentecost, we have one last season of the church year, the season we are in now, the season of End Time, where we thank the Lord for the gifts of the Reformation, for the promise of the Last Judgment, and as we did this last Sunday, thank him that we know that those who die in the Lord are Saints Triumphant. And this coming Sunday, we focus on how Christ is the King who rules, which brings us then again to Thanksgiving.

The Words of Psalm 148 urge every last thing that is in all creation—animate and inanimate objects—to praise the Lord. That truth reminds us that not only are we thankful one day a year as a Christian, but we live a life of “thanks-living” as we live to serve the God who has given us blessings that surround us each and every day of the year.

### **Psalm 148**

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD. [\[a\]](#)  
Praise the LORD from the heavens,  
praise him in the heights above.
- <sup>2</sup> Praise him, all his angels,  
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
- <sup>3</sup> Praise him, sun and moon,  
praise him, all you shining stars.
- <sup>4</sup> Praise him, you highest heavens  
and you waters above the skies.
- <sup>5</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded and they were created.
- <sup>6</sup> He set them in place for ever and ever;  
he gave a decree that will never pass away.
- <sup>7</sup> Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
- <sup>8</sup> lightning and hail, snow and clouds,  
stormy winds that do his bidding,
- <sup>9</sup> you mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars,

- <sup>10</sup> wild animals and all cattle,  
small creatures and flying birds,
- <sup>11</sup> kings of the earth and all nations,  
you princes and all rulers on earth,
- <sup>12</sup> young men and maidens,  
old men and children.
- <sup>13</sup> Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.
- <sup>14</sup> He has raised up for his people a horn, <sup>[b]</sup>  
the praise of all his saints,  
of Israel, the people close to his heart.  
Praise the LORD.

**Footnotes:**

- a. [Psalm 148:1](#) Hebrew *Hallelu Yah* ; also in verse 14
- b. [Psalm 148:14](#) *Horn* here symbolizes strong one, that is, king.