

**Our Advent Prayer**  
**1 Thess. 3:9-13**

**Dec. 1, 2024 (Adv. 1-C)**

**St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom**

*How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.*

*Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (1 Thess. 3:9-13, NIV84)*

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Advent King, dear friends:

A mob formed. Riots spilled out in the city streets. No, I'm not talking about a 21<sup>st</sup> century American city, but a 1<sup>st</sup> century city in Macedonia, northern Greece: Thessalonica. The missionary team of Paul, Silas and Timothy had been preaching the gospel of Christ for three weeks, attracting large crowds. But the Jews grew jealous, and rounded up some wild characters to form a mob and instigate riots that got so boisterous that the missionaries' lives were in danger. The believers that night snuck Paul, Silas and Timothy out of the city, and eventually Paul ended up in Athens, southern Greece, finally safe from the persecution.

Paul kept on proclaiming the gospel, but his mind kept going back to the Thessalonian Christians. "I had been there less than 4 weeks! How are the Christians there going to hold on to the faith?" When Silas and Timothy caught up with Paul in Athens, they sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how things were going. You can imagine Paul pacing the room, praying as he waited for Timothy's return. What a relief when Timothy came back to report, "The Thessalonian Christians are standing firm in the Lord! Their faith and love are evident to all!" That good news caused Paul to burst forth with thanksgiving and prayer.

Today's text is Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the Thessalonians. Let's use that prayer as the basis for **Our Advent Prayer**, regarding Christ's first coming, his coming to us now, and his second coming on the Last Day.

After hearing of the Thessalonians' faith and love, Paul thanked God. "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?" Paul thanked God that the gospel message produced such a faith in them that was withstanding persecution. They believed that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah; Christ had indeed come. This brought joy to Paul, Silas and Timothy to see the gospel was doing its work.

**Our Advent Prayer** is also one of thanksgiving that Christ has come. For where would we be without Christ's coming? We would be robbed of any joy. We would be filled with guilty consciences over the sins we've committed, and feel hopeless about our future. For we know that our sins doom us to death and hell. But thank the Lord, Christ has come! As we heard in today's gospel reading, he is a King who came humbly, fulfilling the Scriptures, "Your king comes to you... lowly and riding on a donkey" (Zech 9:9), yet at the same time is "righteous and victorious." Christ in humility bore our sins and its punishment, yet victoriously crushed Satan's power and rose from the dead. How can we thank God enough for Christ who has come to save us!

As we this month get quite busy with our Christmas preparations—gifts to buy, cards to write, decorations to put up, etc.—let’s not be so busy that we forget what Christmas is all about. “A Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:11) That message never grows old. Every day, give thanks to God that Christ has come, sins are forgiven, heaven is ours!

We also give thanks for the Word of God, for baptism, and the work of the Holy Spirit that brought Christ to our hearts. That leads us to pray further. **Our Advent prayer** is for Christ to keep coming and supply what is lacking in our faith.

When the missionaries heard of the Thessalonians’ longing to see them again, that led them to pray night and day “most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.” They knew that Satan was still producing roadblocks, stirring up persecution that was preventing them from coming back. So they prayed, “Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.” They prayed this so that they could get more of the gospel, to build on what they had learned before.

Don’t we need to pray for that today! We’ve come to faith in Christ, but there is so much more for us to learn from the Bible. As we learn more, we’ll grow in the faith so we can stand firm during times of testing and persecution. We need Jesus to keep coming to us for that. Thankfully he does! He is present in his Word. He is present today in Holy Communion, for he tells us with the bread, “This is my body,” and in the cup of wine, “This is my blood.”

Are there any roadblocks preventing Christ from continuing to come into your hearts? Pray that God the Father and his Son clear the path and drive Satan out! Don’t let the cares and worries of this world drive you away from church; don’t let busy schedules prevent you from time with his Word. Let the Holy Spirit open your heart, let the gospel penetrate, and supply what is lacking in your faith, so that you may grow firmer in the faith of your Lord Jesus! Pray that this may be so!

Along with growing in faith comes growing in love. This is included in our Advent Prayer: “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.” Our faith is like a cup that holds water, and you want it not half-way full, but filled to brim, even overflowing. Christ’s love to us will lead us to have an increase of love toward the people in our lives. Pray that it may grow and overflow, that we can’t help but be loving, kind and forgiving, just as Christ has been toward us.

Then **Our Advent Prayer** looks to the future, when Christ will come again. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians: “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” On the Last Day, whenever that will be, Jesus will appear again “with all his holy ones,” saints and angels. By the grace of God, we will join the company of saints. It is our prayer that we will be found “blameless and holy” on that day. In this world we won’t be perfect—our sins still cling to us. But as our faith grows, our sanctified living grows with it. We won’t let our hearts be ruled by sin, but by Christ. When he comes, he’ll point to our lives of love as evidence of our faith in Christ, and that makes us blameless, no one can accuse us, not when we’re in Christ.

Let’s pray every day, not just in Advent, but every day of our lives, that we’ll be ready when Christ comes again. Jesus teaches us to pray that too: “Thy kingdom come.” Primarily that’s for Christ to come to more people through the spread of the Word, and for Christ to keep coming to our hearts, ruling us with his gospel. But pray also for his kingdom of glory to come. Since Christ has come and defeated Satan, and since he’s coming now with the gospel, we’ll be ready for him to come on the Last Day too and bring us to heaven! Amen.