



Daily Prayer For Individuals and Families

Adopted from *The Lutheran Service Book* (p. 294)

December 24, 2023 A.D. Fourth Sunday in Advent

This brief service is intended as a simple form of daily prayer for individuals and families. When more than one person is present, the psalm and responses may be spoken responsively, with one person reading the words in regular type and the others responding with the words in bold type. The Creed and Prayers that are in bold type are to be said by all.

The sign of the cross ✠ may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

Invocation

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm

(Isaiah 45 & Psalm 19)

Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness;
let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit.
The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
In them he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

For those with access to the internet, you may now play today's worship video, located on Bethany's website (www.bethanycr.org) under the Sermons tab and then continue with the Apostles' Creed. Everyone else may continue the service as printed....

Scripture Lesson

(Luke 1:26-38)

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

Sermon – ✠ *Impossible?* ✠ *(A copy is included at the end of this service.)*

Apostles’ Creed

☐ I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life ✠ everlasting. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer



**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass
against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and
ever. Amen.**

Bethany’s Prayer List

Thanksgiving

- Jesus’ birth
- Kierra Penney - accepted the call to be Bethany’s DCE
- Bonnie Breiholz - recovered after surgery
- Jan (friend of Joni Schmith) - improved health
- Pat (mother of Karen Swanson) - recovered after falls

Entrusting into God’s Care

- Persecuted Christians and refugees
- Peace in Europe and throughout the world
- Project 24 students, Yvonne and Lorine

Healing

- Kathy (sister of Mark Holt) - health issues
- Kim Neuhaus - upcoming surgery on 12/27
- Ellie (4-yr-old relative of Madsens) - recovering after surgery
- Lora Raymon - recovering after surgery
- Carolyn Johnson - recovering after surgery
- Diane (relative of Brenda Heims) - health issues
- Rodney (relative of Betty Happel) - cancer
- Cindy Broadwater - recovering at Harmony after hospitalization
- Lee Heims - recovering after surgery
- Karl Hoech - recovering after surgery
- Kelly Johnson - healing
- Philip Hackbardt - recovering after surgery
- Ron Prescott - recovering after surgery
- Ethel Doehrmann - immunotherapy treatment
- Doug Knutson - immunotherapy treatment
- Deb Heitland - health issues
- Abi Clark - health issues

Homebound

- Candi Engel - Heritage Care Center

Mourning, friends and family of

- Del Block - died 12/21
- Lee Rathje - died 12/19
- Shirley Kellogg (mother of Lynn Kellogg) - died 12/17
- Loretta (relative of Barb Rocarek & Tyler Steggall) - died 12/4
- Denny (relative of Brenda Heims) - died 12/3

Serving Our Country

- Ben (son of Kroemers) - IA National Guard
- Devin (friend of Kroemers) - IA Army National Guard
- Mitchell & Benjamin (relatives of Schoens & Smiths) - US Navy
- Harrison (son of Siecks) - US Army, stationed in TX
- Jordan (grandson of Kim Neuhaus) - IA National Guard

Collect of the Day

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Concluding Prayers

Almighty God, grant us a steadfast faith in Jesus Christ, a cheerful hope in Your mercy, and a sincere love for You and one another; through Jesus Christ, our Lord...

Amen.

Together we pray... **I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that you would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.**

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.



✠ *Impossible?* ✠

Some critics of the Bible say that St. Luke, in our Scripture reading, was just trying to tell a fanciful story when he wrote of the angel Gabriel coming to Mary. They say that today, unlike the simple minded people of antiquity, we know that virgins don't have children. Well, I have to think that they knew this was the case back then as well. But what is interesting, is what those critics say of those who today believe in the Bible. They say in essence, that if you can believe that God became man, and that God would die for your forgiveness, than you can believe that a virgin gave birth. And at this point, I couldn't agree with them more. For today, we stand with the angel Gabriel and say, "*Nothing will be impossible with God.*"

In looking at our Scripture Lesson, what is often called the Annunciation, Martin Luther said that there were three great miracles taking place. The first we already hinted at and is what we call the incarnation – that the Divine became human. That the Almighty God who sits on His heavenly throne would take upon Himself our flesh to dwell among us in our sinful and at times miserable world. The second miracle that Luther notices is the fact that Mary will give birth in the unusual circumstance of her being a virgin. Now anyone of these two miracles would be something in and of themselves. But with the incarnation of God and the virgin birth both being brought in a message to Mary by an angel, perhaps the greatest miracle in our reading today, is the fact that Mary actually believed all of this! And for this reason, Mary has been held up by the church as an example of how we should live our lives as disciples of Christ.

Much has been written and said about the difficult circumstances that Mary would find herself in being unwed and pregnant in that particular time and place in history. Joseph, to whom she was pledged to marry, would want to call things off. She would be an outcast in society, and at a time when there were no government safety nets and very little charity, Mary have an exceedingly difficult time surviving with her child, let alone raising and nurturing Him. So more than just accepting that she was or would be pregnant, Mary is a role model in faith because she also accepted the incarnation. She believed the Word of God that came to her through Gabriel that said that her child will be called the Son of the Most High. That her child will sit on the throne of

David and reign forever. That her son, whom she is to name Jesus, will also be God's son. She believed the angel Gabriel's message that she would conceive, not after her wedding, but by the Holy Spirit before she was married to Joseph. After hearing all of this she says, "*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*"

These are the reasons that all Christians look up to Mary as an example of a faithful Christian. It wasn't because of what she had done in her life. In fact that Bible doesn't say all that much about Mary apart from the Christmas story. But despite the miraculous circumstances, she believed God's Word that all of these things were happening inside of her. And through her faith in God's Word the world has received the greatest gift of all time. For faithful Mary gave birth to Jesus, God's Son who takes away the sin of the world.

If we desire for Christ to dwell in our hearts today than we, like Mary, must become servants of God, hearing His Word and believing what it says is happening inside of us. As Mary did, we submit all of ourselves to the Word of the Lord. Of course, many today resist the idea of submitting to anything, even God. They fear that in doing so they will lose something in their lives, perhaps control or their identity. But in submitting our lives to the Word of God, we loose nothing except the sin and evil that dwells inside of us; and we have everything to gain, including the forgiveness of our sins and the life that God wants us to have.

For by believing and submitting our lives to the Word of God we cling to this assurance *that nothing is impossible with God*. We believe God's Word that not only says that Christ died for the sins of the world, but that He died for my sins. Not that He came so there would be a chance to be saved, we believe that we are saved because He came. It is not enough to believe that Christmas happened and is true, but as disciples of Christ we celebrate Christmas because what happened in that little town of Bethlehem happened for the whole world – including me and you. As the angels told the shepherds on Christmas Night, the Good News of our Savior's birth is for "all the people", including us today!

It's easy to imagine how Mary's life changed after our reading today. There was her pregnancy, the dealings with Joseph, then all of the challenges of raising a child, who also happened to be the Son of God. But when faced with all of the uncertainty and pressure of having this new baby in her life, she believed the angel's words that "*nothing is impossible with God*".

When Christ comes into our lives today we too might be overwhelmed with the changes that He brings. We may find it hard to believe that God would love us so much that Jesus would come to us in the way He did on Christmas. We may find it impossible to adhere to the better teachings that Jesus gave to us during His ministry, rather than the so called wisdom of this world. We may be overwhelmed to think that Jesus would give His life on the cross so that our sins against God and one another could be forgiven.

And in the midst of such difficulties and doubts in our lives we, like Mary, can do nothing other than trust in the Word of God. The Word that tells us that nothing - not God's love through Christ, not His free gift of forgiveness, not our ability to live joyfully as His children – is impossible with God. Amen.

