

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY

5 November All Saints' Day

HYMNS: 164 213 199 436

INTROIT: Psalm 149

Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise in the assembly of devout people!

Let Israel rejoice in its Maker! Let the children of Zion be joyful over their King!
Let them praise His name with dancing! Let them make music to Him with tambourine and lyre!

For the LORD takes pleasure in His people. He glorifies humble people with salvation.

Let devout people be jubilant in glory! Let them shout for joy on their beds!
Let the high praises of God be in their throats, and double-edged swords in their hands, to carry out vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, to tie up their kings with chains and their nobles' feet with iron shackles, to carry out the judgment that has been written against them! This is an honour that belongs to all His devout people.
Praise the LORD!

COLLECT: Almighty God, You have knit together Your chosen people in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Give us grace so that we may follow Your blessed holy people in all pure and godly living, and so that we may come to those unspeakable joys that You have prepared for those who sincerely love You, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

READINGS:

Revelation 7:9-17 Multitudes before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

1 John 3:1-3 The children of God.

Matthew 5:1-12 Rejoice, for you have a great reward in heaven.

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.

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Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

Revelation 7:2-17

² Then I saw another angel coming up from the east with the seal of the living God. He called out with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage the land and the sea, ³ saying: “Do not damage the land or the sea or the trees until we have **sealed** the servants of our God **on their foreheads!**”

⁴ Then I heard the number of those who had been sealed: “one hundred and forty-four thousand.” These were those who had been sealed were from every tribe of the people of Israel. ⁵ From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand had been sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, ⁶ from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, ⁷ from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, ⁸ from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand and from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand had been sealed. ⁹ After this, I looked and saw a large crowd that no one could count, from every **nation and all tribes, peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and carrying palm-branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They called out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our **God, who sits on the throne** and to the Lamb!”

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne, around the elders and around the four living creatures. They **fell** on their faces before the throne and **worshipped God**, ¹² saying: “Amen! Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and strength be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.”

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me: “Who are these people who have been clothed in the white robes and where have they come from?”

¹⁴ I replied to him, “My master, you know.”

He told me: “These are the people who have come out of the great tribulation. They have **washed their robes** and have made them white in **the blood of the Lamb**. ¹⁵ Therefore, they are before the throne of God and keep serving Him day and night in His Temple, and **He who is sitting on the throne** will shelter them with His tent. ¹⁶ **They will not be hungry any longer or thirsty any longer. The sun will certainly not beat on them or any scorching heat,** ¹⁷ because the Lamb, who is in the middle of the throne, **will be their Shepherd and lead them to springs of the water of life. God will wipe every tear from their eyes.**”

1 John 3:1-3

¹ See what great love the Father has given to us, that we are called “the children of God”! That is what we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it has not known Him. ² Dearly loved people, we are now the children of God, but it has not yet been shown what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.

³ Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Matthew 5:1-12

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountainside. When He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ² Then He began to speak and continued to teach them:

³ “Blessed are those who are **poor in spirit!** For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are **those who mourn!** For they will **be comforted.**

⁵ “Blessed are **those who are meek!** For they **will inherit the earth.**

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness! For they will be filled.

⁷ “Blessed are **those who are merciful!** For **they will be treated mercifully.**

⁸ “Blessed are **those who are pure in heart!** For they will see God.

⁹ “Blessed are those who make peace! For they will be called ‘the children of God.’

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who have been persecuted because of righteousness! For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, because of Me! ¹² Rejoice and be very glad! For your reward in heaven is great. For in this way people persecuted the prophets who were before you.

THE MILITANT AND TRIUMPHANT CHURCH

Sermon for All Saints' Day 2023

Revelation 7:2-17

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our First Reading from before,
Revelation 7:2-17:

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today is the Sunday we remember as All Saints' Day. This is a day for remembering our departed fellow Christians - those saints of old and those from our own past - who have fallen asleep in Jesus and now rest from their labours. Today, we thank God for keeping them in the faith and are encouraged by the example of their perseverance amid affliction as we rejoice and are filled with hope as we look forward to the glory that awaits us all.

The glory that awaits us. One of the readings assigned for this day, appropriately enough, gives us a glimpse of that glory. It's the reading from Revelation 7, a picture of the saints in glory: **“a large crowd that no one could count, from every nation and all tribes, peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and carrying palm-branches in their hands.”**

But notice, our reading today from Revelation 7 actually comes in *two parts*. The picture of the saints in glory, verses 9-17, is part two, if you will. The first part, verses 2-8, presents a different-looking picture. There we see the 144,000, arranged in twelve tribes of 12,000 each, and they are sealed with the seal of living God before great harm is unleashed on the earth. This is quite a different scene from the one that follows.

There's a reason for that. In verses 2-8, John is given a picture of the *church on earth*, as it is now, organised for battle and under the protection of God. This is what we call the church militant, the church still fighting the good fight of the faith. But then, in verses 9-17, John is given a picture of the *church in heaven*, as it will be, no longer fighting, no longer suffering, but at peace and at rest in the presence of the Lord. This is what we call the church triumphant. Today, both pictures give us great comfort and great hope for now and for what lies ahead.

Let's start with the **church militant**. That's what John sees in verses 2-8. Realise, in Revelation, John has just seen a series of great horrors and catastrophes that will characterise the age that we live in - conquest, war, famine, death, persecution, the martyrdom of Christians, earthquakes, natural disasters - the same kinds of things Jesus had warned about in His end-times discourse. These are things that could really discourage the church and us Christians.

Simply look at what is happening in the world in our day. We've seen all of these things take place. Man's penchant for war and violence has not abated. If anything, it seems to be getting worse. While it isn't happening here in our country, for now, Christians are still being put to death for their faith in other countries. But even in our own country, Christians and the values we wish to promote are mocked and quickly cast aside.

So, these evil things could demoralise us, even cause us to despair. Has God abandoned us? Perhaps, with David, we find ourselves crying out, "*How long, O Lord, how long?*" (Psalm 13). But here in Revelation 7, we are given courage and comfort - and even joy - in spite of all the adversities we shall face because before the end comes when it will look like all hell has broken loose, we are told what things look like from God's perspective: that God is watching out for us and that we have hope for our future. That's the message of this chapter.

So we see an angel arising, a messenger sent from God, sent out with the seal of the living God who calls out: "**Do not damage the land or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads!**" You see, God has placed His seal upon us. What does that mean? It means that God has put His claim and His name upon us. We belong to Him. He is not going to abandon us or forget us. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "*When you heard the message of the truth, the Good News that you have been saved and when you became believers, you were also sealed in Him by the Holy Spirit, whom God promised.* ¹⁴ *That Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance until God redeems us to be His very own, that His glory may be praised*" (1:13-14). We have been sealed with the seal of the living God in our baptism. We have been marked with the cross of Christ on our foreheads, and God has put His name on us, the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The fact that we have been sealed should give us great comfort and courage as we know that whatever may come, *no one can snatch us out of our Father's hand*. We have been sealed; we are protected.

Now, about these 144,000. Why that number? Because 144,000 is 12 times 12 times 1000. In other words, the full number of the church on earth, the people of God in the Old Testament, the twelve tribes of Israel, along with the people of God in the New Testament, the church founded on the twelve apostles. And here in Revelation, the church is described in terms of the twelve tribes. When Israel was on its way to the Promised Land, when they would camp out on their journey, the tribes were arranged in an orderly fashion, with the tabernacle of

God in their midst. Israel faced many battles on their way to the Promised Land, just as the church did on our journey. Of course, our battles are not fought with military arms; rather, they are spiritual battles that we face against the devil, the world, and our flesh. But in any case, God is in our midst and will guard and guide us on our way.

So that's what John sees in verses 2-8: the church militant, the church on earth as we journey through this world, sealed by God and under His protection.

Now, in verses 9-17, John is given a vision of the **church triumphant**, what is in store for all of us in the glory that awaits us, namely, **“a large crowd that no one could count, from every nation and all tribes, peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and carrying palm-branches in their hands.”** ¹⁰ They called out with a loud voice, saying, **“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!”**

Now we've gone from 144,000 to **“a large crowd that no one could count,”** and they come from every group of people you could imagine. This is the *church triumphant*. These are the saints at rest, meaning they have been delivered from the fight and are no longer struggling. They are at rest, but that does not mean they are bored or inactive. No, they are alive and energetic, joyful and praising God for the great victory He has won. The Lamb is there, and that of course is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain and who has risen from the dead and now lives and reigns to all eternity. The angels and all the company of heaven join in the praise: **“Amen! Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and strength be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.”**

A great multitude, clothed in white robes. So, who are these ones in the white robes? John is told who they are: **“These are the people who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** Friends, this is our hope and our comfort! The day is coming when we shall come out of the tribulation of this life and all the troubles we face. Whether that tribulation is great or small, it still weighs us down. Grief and loss, the loss of loved ones, sorrow and sickness, disease and debt and death - these are troubles we all face in one form or another. Separation and sadness, defeat and depression, broken homes, shattered dreams - so many things we sigh over, and we become sullen. And then, for many Christians in many lands, the tribulation takes the form of outright terror and persecution.

What do we make of all this? It would be pretty sad and pathetic if this were all there were.

But here in Revelation, we are given a glimpse of our future, and it is glorious! Think of your loved ones who have died in the Lord. They are safe and secure with the Lord, and we shall join them! Think of your own fleeting mortality. Death is not the end for you. Life eternal awaits! This is our hope! *The church militant, the church suffering, will become the church triumphant!* And Christ has led the way by way of His own resurrection.

Christ is the way! He is how we know we shall join that white-robed multitude. It's because of Jesus. How did those robes get so white? Because our robes have been washed white "**in the blood of the Lamb.**" "*Although your sins are like bright red cloth, they will become as white as snow. Although they are red like crimson, they will become like wool*" (Isaiah 1:18), and it's the blood of Jesus that does it. "*The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7).

How we need the blood of our Saviour! For our garments are soiled and stained with sin. Our sins convict us. Our conscience condemns us. We know we have sinned against God. But *the blood of Jesus cleanses us and removes every stain.* Believe this. It's true! Jesus Christ, God's own Son, has shed His blood on the cross for us! This is why we are called saints, holy ones, not because of any holiness of our own, but because of the holy blood of Jesus, washing us and cleansing us and making us worthy to stand in that white-robed multitude. Jesus is our entrance into heaven. He is our life, our eternal life and our great and only hope. *All saints owe their salvation to Him.*

Dear friends, here is what awaits us in the church triumphant: God will shelter us "**with His tent.**" ¹⁶ We shall **not be hungry any longer or thirsty any longer. The sun will certainly not beat on us or any scorching heat,** ¹⁷ **because the Lamb, who is in the middle of the throne, will be our Shepherd and lead us to springs of the water of life. God will wipe every tear from our eyes."**

For now, though, we are still in the church militant. Yes, the struggle continues. There are battles still to be fought. But the victory has already been won. Christ has won that victory for us. So take courage. We have been sealed with the seal of the living God. We have been baptised. God has placed His name upon us. He will see us through the battle and on into the Promised Land. That's the good news for this day. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ALL SAINTS' DAY

Almighty God and Father, in wisdom You have made the world and all things, seen and unseen. We praise You for the gift of life, for the wonderful creation of our bodies, for our moral and spiritual capacities, and for the marvellous gifts of intelligence and reason. But, above all else, we thank and praise You for the gift of faith, by which we know You and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. We praise and worship Him for showing us Your great love by dying the death that enables sinners to live for ever. We praise You for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who has brought us to faith in Jesus, and has changed our hearts from rebellion against You to love and praise for You.

Today we thank you for all the saints remembered and forgotten, for those dear souls who are now standing in Your presence. We thank You for calling them in this life to be Your children, and we thank You that we too, have been called by You to be saints.

Therefore, let us clearly recognise what it means to be called the children of God, and to remember that we are your saints not by our own inclination nor strength, but simply by Your gracious call and forgiveness that we have freely received through our Saviour, Christ Jesus.

In mercy, pour out Your Spirit on us anew each day, so that our love, knowledge, and spiritual power may keep on growing, and our lives may be filled with the truly good qualities that only Jesus Christ can produce. Lead us by Your Spirit to love one another with brotherly love, and to forgive one another as You have forgiven us for Christ's sake.

Keep Your church in the true fellowship of the Gospel, that it may stand firm in the faith. Protect it against all its enemies, that it may serve You freely. We ask you to continue to bless the ministry of the AELC and the ULMA, and to raise up men to be pastors to Your flock. Continue to guide and bless the students studying in both these churches so they can shine Your light into a darkened world.

We remember those of Your children who are being persecuted because of their faith. Uphold them by Your Spirit, and give them patient endurance, that they may witness to Your saving power. Move those who oppress them to turn to You. Free Your people from all falsehood and error and lead them along the road of truth and godliness.

Bring shame and discredit on those who continue to advocate abortion, homosexuality and single-sex marriage. Fill the leaders of the nations with Your light and dispel the darkness of sin and spiritual ignorance, giving wisdom and strength to all in authority in our country, that they may serve according to Your direction, and our people may live in unity and uprightness. Lead people everywhere to enjoy peace and happiness as they learn to love and follow You.

Move parents to sow Your Word in the hearts of their children, that the young may be raised in the ways of Christ and live lives that are a blessing to church, country, and mankind. Give parents the understanding and patience they need for their God-given responsibilities.

Watch over the sick, the sad, and the troubled. Stand by them in their various sufferings and help them in all their burdens. Protect all who are in any danger of body or soul and save them by Your wise love. Help us in all times of need to look to You for pardon, peace, and healing.

These, and all other things that we may need, give us for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Article: Commemorating the Saints

Satan's always working to confuse our theology. If he can't knock us off the horse on one side, he'll try to knock us off the other. He's done a really great job when it comes to commemorating the saints.

Sometimes I hear people say: "We're Lutherans! We don't commemorate saints! That's too catholic!"

But that would be to fall off the horse on the other side.

Now, of course we don't want to imitate the Roman error whereby we seek the so-called "merits of the saints." Christ is the world's Redeemer, the *only* Mediator between God and man. To look to anyone or anything but Christ alone for salvation is crass idolatry.

But that doesn't mean we forget about the saints entirely. After all, we believe "...in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints," don't we?

As Lutherans, in accord with the Church's faith in every generation, we believe, teach, and confess that the remembrance of the saints is to be commended in order that we may imitate their faith and good works according to their calling (*Augsburg Confession, 21*).

Remember, a saint isn't someone we go to in prayer so we can get a little extra favour in God's eyes or to get help in selling our house. A saint is one who has been made holy. This is what the Holy Spirit has done for you in Holy Baptism, where the flood of Christ's own blood has made you holy, right, and good before your heavenly Father.

We remember and thank God for the saints' lives on a Sunday in the Divine Service when we gather at the Lord's table with "angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven." Who is that company of heaven but the saints?

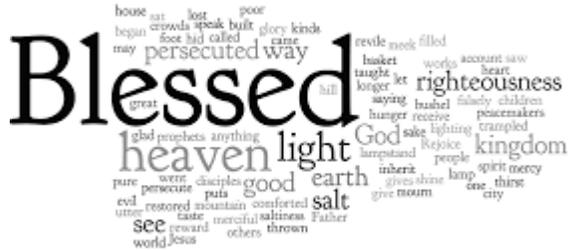
After we commune, we sing the hymn of Saint Simeon (the Nunc Dimittis, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace..."). Next, we pray that the love of Christ would not only fill our own cup but run over that we would live "in fervent love toward one another." This is a prayer that we would regard and treat one another as saints. As St. Paul says, "*So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*" (Ephesians 2:19).

To despise the commemoration of saints is to sever our communion in Christ, to forget how indispensable the other members of Christ's Body are. When we confess our faith in the communion of saints, we confess the vitality of our fellowship with one another, both with the saints who live here with Christ on earth and the saints who live with Him in heaven. Forgetting about the saints is just as bad as seeking their merits. Throwing the baby out with the bathwater is just as bad as drowning the baby in the bathtub.

Children's Message:

What are some things that make you happy? Maybe some things that make you happy are getting a new toy, eating a favourite food, or playing a video game. All these things may make us happy because they're things we want. There's nothing wrong with these things; God's goodness is so great that He gives us much more than we need, like all sorts of fun gifts like these.

In today's Gospel, we hear Jesus describe people who are blessed. What does it mean to be "blessed"? We may hear people say they are "blessed" when they win the lottery, become a movie star, or win a football game. So, does being blessed mean that we're happy? Or that we get all the things we want? What does Jesus say? Does He say that those who are blessed are happy?



Actually, He doesn't. Jesus calls those who are blessed "poor in spirit." To be poor in spirit means to be meek or humble, not proud. Those who are humble are small or little. They're low, not high; they're weak, not strong.

And that's who we are in God's kingdom. We are the weak, little, humble ones who are blessed by God. We don't have any good things to give to Jesus. We merely hold out our hands, willing to receive the good gifts God puts in them. We receive His gifts of love and mercy. We receive His gifts of our homes, food, clothing, and so many other things. We receive these gifts humbly and with thanksgiving.

Jesus was our model for being humble, lowly, and meek. Jesus was poor in spirit by allowing Himself to be made fun of and mocked even when He had done nothing wrong. Jesus was also meek. He did not speak up and defend Himself. Jesus was a peacemaker. He made us at peace with God through His death on the cross. Jesus was pure in heart in that He did nothing wrong, and had no sin. By Jesus' death on the cross, we're blessed with that goodness, grace, and salvation.

To be a Christian doesn't mean we'll always be happy. We won't get what we want. To be a Christian means that Jesus is the most important thing in our lives. We seek to be like Him, knowing that through His grace, we have all we need.

Dear Jesus, thank you for blessing us with your grace and love. Thank you for dying for us so that heaven and all your blessings are ours. Amen.

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

12 November 24 Pentecost	19 November 25 Pentecost	26 November Last Sunday of the Church Year
8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG LR	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD HC (Harvest)	8.30am OAK HC Harvest 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC Harvest 9.00am LOWOOD LR
Sunday, 12 November		
READINGS: Amos 5:18-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13		
HYMNS: 16 452 487 510		
Sunday, 19 November		
READINGS: Zephaniah 1:7-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30 HARVEST: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 12:13-21		
HYMNS: 463 485 372 339 LOWOOD: 562 (tune 282) 437 563 333 842 890		

18 November, 10.00am. CoC/Sem Committee meeting at Marburg. Could the Seminary Committee reps please meet for a quick meeting at 9.30am?

Wednesday, November 22, 10am. Women's Guild & Breakup at Lowood. Opening devotion: *Margaret*. Choose a Bible verse from Numbers Chapters 9-12. Item of Interest: *A pretty dress hanger*. Bring a Christmas gift to the value of \$10 to exchange. Afterwards our breakup lunch will be at the Club Hotel Lowood. All welcome.

November Bible Studies:

Greenwood – Thursday, 23 November, 7.30pm.

Oakey/Aubigny – Friday, 24 November, 7.30pm at Oakey.

Toowoomba, Lowood/Marburg – no Bible Study in November.

Pastor will be away in Victoria from 9-15 November. If there is an emergency during this time, please contact one of the elders.