

**THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH (AELC)**  
**BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOURS LOWOOD, ST JOHNS AUBIGNY,**  
**ST PAULS GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY**

**14 December 2025**  
**The Third Sunday of Advent**

**A warm welcome to all those who are worshipping with us today!**

*Behold, the Messiah comes to fulfil the Law and the Prophets, and it shall be proclaimed in all of Jerusalem, "This is the prophet Jesus!" From Mount Sinai to Calvary, the Lord reveals His edicts, His decrees, and that Jesus is the very fulfilment of them all. Christ is faithful in the midst of faithlessness, humble in the midst of arrogance. He alone is the rightful Prophet, Priest, and King. Hosanna in the highest!*

**In preparation of worship, please prepare by**

- **Praying one of the prayers found on page 308 in your LSB hymnbook**
- **Bookmarking Psalm 146 (in front of LSB hymnbook) for the Introit.**

**THE LIGHTING OF THE THIRD ADVENT CANDLE**

**R:** Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.

**C:** Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.'

**ALL:** Lord, hear our prayers, and graciously prepare us for Your coming.  
**For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

**Hymns (LSB):**

**Introit:** Psalm 146:1-10, found in the front of your LSB hymnbook.

**Gradual:** Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion,  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.  
Behold, your King is coming to you;  
Righteous and having salvation.  
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.  
From the house of the Lord we bless you.*

**Collect:** 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. Amen

### **The First Reading: Isaiah 35:1–10**

<sup>1</sup>The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus;  
<sup>2</sup>it shall blossom abundantly  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the Lord,  
the majesty of our God.  
<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
<sup>4</sup>Say to those who have an anxious heart,  
“Be strong; fear not!  
Behold, your God  
will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.  
He will come and save you.”  
<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
<sup>6</sup>then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.  
For waters break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;  
<sup>7</sup>the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.  
<sup>8</sup>And a highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;  
the unclean shall not pass over it.  
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;  
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.  
<sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.  
<sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the Lord shall return  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain gladness and joy,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

## **The Second Reading: James 5:7–11**

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup>You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup>Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. <sup>10</sup>As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup>Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

## **The Gospel Reading from Matthew 11:2–15**

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” <sup>4</sup>And Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

<sup>7</sup>As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</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>11</sup>Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup>From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. <sup>13</sup>For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, <sup>14</sup>and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup>He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

### **FAITH DRIVEN TO THE EDGE OF UNBELIEF**

#### **Sermon for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent, 2025 - Matthew 11:2-15**

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

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel reading read before, Matthew 11:2–15:

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

Dear friends in Christ,

The Third Sunday in Advent traditionally emphasises joy. Our First Reading today has the desert rejoicing “*with joy and singing*” as it blossoms like the crocus and the ransomed of the Lord returning to Zion with “*everlasting joy*” upon their heads (Is. 35:1-2, 10). The reason is the coming of the Messiah, whose age will bring sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, strength to the lame, and singing to the mute.

Yet, there appears to be little joy in the Gospel where we hear that John is in prison. This remains the traditional reading for today. Why is that? The answer, and the source of joy, lies in the assurance that the “**One who is to come**” has already arrived, so we need not search for another. As the sermon will emphasise, however, the blessings of Isaiah 35 that He brings should be seen as part of a greater blessing that we might overlook amid trouble.

If there were ever a man who could have had a clear sense of himself since childhood, it would be John the Baptist. When Zechariah learns from the angel that he and his wife will become parents, he falls into disbelief. As a sign to Zechariah, God takes away his ability to speak. He regains speech only when the child is born and his father names him John. John’s parents may not have been as old as the one-hundred-year-old Abraham and his ninety-year-old wife, Sarah, when Isaac was born, but even conception in their seventies was a miracle. The miracle of women giving birth long past the usual childbearing age was God’s way of showing that the child would be special.

When Zechariah regained the ability to speak, he sang, “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people*” (Luke 1:68). In this song, Zechariah spoke of how their child would prepare the way of God on earth. We do not know how long Elizabeth and Zechariah lived after John was born, but what they didn’t tell him of the strange circumstances surrounding his birth, *relatives and friends did*.

From his childhood, he knew that he would go before the face of the Lord to prepare His way. He would begin to lead the people out of darkness by bringing them to Christ. The stories of his birth shaped John’s life. He knew who he was and what he was going to do. John had a sense about himself. He was not simply

another child, but the one whom the prophet Isaiah called the voice crying in the wilderness. Valleys would be lifted up, and mountains lowered to prepare a level road for the promised Messiah. Jesus said that John was that Elijah whom Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet, foretold would come before the great and terrible Day of the Lord. John would stand on the edge of darkness, pointing the people to the dawn emitting from Christ, the Sun of Righteousness. God chose John as the watchman on Zion's walls to signal the coming of a new day.

John the Baptist's sense of himself as a child was confirmed by his success as a *preacher*. He was so eloquent that some thought he was the promised Messiah. After John died, his memory had such a hold on the people that they thought Jesus was John the Baptist come back from the dead.<sup>1</sup> Even though John made it clear that he was not Christ, he was the last prophet that God would send, the one who would identify Jesus as the Christ. In John's pointing to Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, God was using John to bring the old era to an end.

Those who grow up without life's ordinary disappointments often have a difficult time dealing with setbacks later in life. These setbacks can be devastating for those who have travelled a smooth road through life. This might have been true of John the Baptist, the child born to aged parents and predicted by prophecy, God's last prophet, the eloquent preacher with audiences so large that Matthew says that all Jerusalem and Judea went out to hear him. Now in his early thirties, his prominence and success have been exchanged for a prison, not because he did anything wrong, *but because he did everything right*. The man who preached that the Christ would release captives from prison could expect Jesus to spring him from prison. John, who pointed to Christ as the light of the world, could expect that the darkness of his prison could be exchanged for the brightness of day.

We know that life can become so miserable that, like Job, *we are forced to ask ourselves if God really cares for us*. Perhaps we go to the extreme and question whether God exists. John's question was a little different. He sent his disciples to ask whether Jesus was the Christ: **“Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?”** John, who had pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, toyed with the idea that he may have made a misidentification. If Jesus was not the Christ predicted by the prophets, then John's ministry was a total waste.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 14:2

Some scholars cannot accept that the great preacher did not believe his own sermons; they have hypothesized that John asked this question not for himself but for his disciples. John did not want his impending execution to cause those who'd heard him preach to lose faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Such an easy and attractive solution, putting the burden of unbelief on John's disciples and not on John himself, has no support from the Bible. This reading is about John's conflict with unbelief and how Jesus deals with it. John's doubts do not detract from his importance or his greatness. Jesus said to the crowds, **"Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist."**

Many who consider themselves Christian believe that believers will never lose their faith. They claim that those who lose their faith *never had faith*. The cliché is *"once saved, always saved."* Wrong! For us Christians, there is never a time when faith is very far from the edge of unbelief. Satan never leaves us alone, but each day he works harder to take us away from Christ. John was no exception. The sad reality is that preachers can lose the faith they preach to others. *Preacher and hearers are not immune to unbelief.*

A miracle is always a good solution for unbelief—or so we think. Nearly every pastor has heard the excuse that this or that person would believe if only Jesus did a miracle. But for those caught between faith and unbelief, there are no miracles. For John there are only the words of Jesus: **"The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."** Consider the sequence. Straightening out crooked bones, restoring hearing and sight, and curing leprosy are difficult, but raising the dead is impossible. ***More important than all these physical miracles is that the poor have the good news preached to them.***

No miracle will release John from imprisonment or save him from execution. He will have to be content that sins are forgiven in Christ—this is what it means that the poor have the Gospel preached to them. Faith feeds not on miracles but on the Gospel. Jesus' answer to John concludes with this cryptic message: **"Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me."** Only the one who takes Christ at His word, regardless of life's circumstances, will attain the blessedness God has promised in Christ. In God's plan of salvation, we, like John, have our purpose as Christians in bringing others to Christ, but, like him, the only promise we receive is that our sins are forgiven. God calls us to Himself, and we fulfil the purpose God gives.

The accounts of John are found in all four Gospels and the Book of Acts, but he is not a New Testament figure. As a prophet, he does not see Christ's fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies by His death and resurrection. John must get off the stage to make room for the New Testament, but this does not detract from Jesus' extraordinary claim that **“among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.”**

However, what Jesus gives with one hand, He seems to take away with the other, saying, **“The one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”** This could mean that even the most insignificant Christian knows things about Christ's death and resurrection that John did not. Or is Jesus Himself the least in the kingdom of heaven? He had no place to rest His head, even though birds had nests and foxes had holes. Jesus made no claims on God. In the sight of God and of us, He was the poorest of men.

Rather than picking one option over the other, perhaps we live with both. Those who hear and believe the good news about Jesus are the poor who, by faith, are joined to Him and His poverty and are saved. Amen.

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

### **Prayer for the Third Sunday in Advent**

Lord, You are the source of all joy. Even the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad at Your appearance. Sustain us in the time of waiting for Your will and purpose to unfold in these latter days. Give us patience under trials and hope that endures the changes and chances of this mortal life.

O God, You have sent messengers to prepare the way of Your Son's coming. Grant us ears to hear and hearts to believe the words delivered by pastors and all who bear Your Word.

Gracious Lord, You have instituted the home to be a refuge for husbands and wives and a place of growth and safety for children. Look with favour upon the homes of our land, and grant that the faith may be delivered from one generation to the next.

Almighty God, give guidance to those entrusted with positions of leadership in government. Protect service men and women who defend us against the enemies of our nation, and those who enact and enforce laws that protect us.

O Lord, our God, the prophet Isaiah looked for the day when blind eyes would see, deaf ears would hear, lame legs would leap and mute tongues would sing. Until the final day of restoration, draw near to all who have requested our prayers, and give them healing according to Your gracious will. Bind up those who grieve, that they may look for the resurrection of all flesh.

Merciful Lord, You give strength to those who are anxious. Give us hearts that trust in You at all times. Grant us courage to confront our doubts and fears with Your Word, and give us strength to fulfil our vocations of worship, witness, prayer and works of mercy.

O God, Your love invites us to rejoice in Your goodness. In every circumstance of life, teach us the joy that comes from knowing Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and eagerly expecting His gracious visitation; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**Article:                    The Dawning of the Christmas Holiday**

The New Testament never commands us to celebrate Christ’s birth, neither does it provide the precise date. And yet, from the earliest days of the Church, believers revered the miracle of the Incarnation.

They knew that the birth of Jesus was no ordinary moment in history—it was the hinge on which the entire redemptive story turns.

One sign of this is found in the Gospels themselves. Matthew and Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, open the story of Jesus with nativity narratives—angelic messengers splitting the night sky, shepherds startled on Judean hillsides, a virgin mother and a faithful carpenter, a child laid in a manger, and a multitude of the heavenly host praising God for the newborn King.

In the ancient world, biographers rarely lingered on a birth unless it signalled destiny. By highlighting Jesus’ nativity, the evangelists made a theological claim: the arrival of this Child was essential to His story.

He was the fulfilment of Israel’s long-awaited hope (Is. 7:14; Micah 5:2). The very inclusion of these narratives is itself evidence that the earliest Christians already viewed Christ’s birth as worthy of proclamation, meditation, and celebration.

As the church matured in the second to fourth centuries, leaders reflected more deeply on the meaning of the Nativity. Their aim wasn’t to mimic surrounding cultures but to confess, through worship and remembrance, that the living God Himself had stepped into creation.

The birth of Jesus was no peripheral curiosity—it was the gateway to the Gospel.

Writings from figures such as Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus of Rome show that early believers pondered the Incarnation with awe. They didn't treat it as quaint nostalgia but as cosmic Christology—the moment when the eternal “Second Adam” entered the fallen world to reverse the curse of the first Adam.

From such reflection grew the impulse to establish a feast in honour of the Incarnation, not because they were commanded to, but because they couldn't remain silent.

Whether marked on December 25, January 6, or another date, the purpose was always the same: to remember and rejoice—through Scripture, prayer, and song—that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The question of when to celebrate arose later; the question of whether to celebrate was already settled.

### *Why December 25?*

Some object to the celebration of Christmas on December 25, pointing out that we don't know the exact day Jesus was born. And that's true—we don't.

And since Scripture doesn't specify a date, there is, biblically speaking, no right or wrong day to mark the miracle of the Incarnation. In fact, the absence of a commanded date leaves room for intentional worship.

“One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord” Paul writes (Romans 14:5-6a).

For the early church, the question wasn't about imitating pagan customs—it was about proclaiming Christ to the world. The Light of the World had come, and they chose a day to say so.

By the early third century, Hippolytus of Rome (c. AD 200) suggested December 25 as the date of Jesus' birth. His reasoning was symbolic, rooted in what some early Christians called the “integral age” tradition: the belief that prophets lived in complete life cycles, dying on the same date as either their birth or conception.

Since the death of Jesus was believed to have occurred on March 25 Hippolytus concluded that this was also the date of His conception. Nine months later—December 25—He would have been born.

Clement of Alexandria, writing even earlier, mentioned Christians of his day attempting to calculate Jesus's birth based on similar ideas.

Though speculative, these reflections arose not from Roman mythology but from a desire to honour the Incarnation with theological coherence.

By the mid-fourth century, we find firm evidence of December 25 as a liturgical feast. A Roman document known as the *Chronograph of 354* records under that date: “Birth of Christ in Bethlehem of Judea.” Here we see the church formally commemorating Christ's nativity with worship, Scripture, and song.

Contrary to modern myths, this choice wasn't an effort to "Christianise" a pagan festival. The early church stood firmly against all forms of paganism. Their goal wasn't syncretism but distinction.

December 25 became their chosen day to proclaim that the true Light had entered the world, and that is what they celebrated.

### Children's Address:

When someone asks, "What's your name?" How do you respond? Of course, you can tell them who you are, but sometimes we have to prove it. How do we do that? Perhaps one way is to show your birth certificate with your name on it.



We've learned that God sent someone to help people get ready to welcome Jesus. Do you remember that man's name? Right. His name was John, and he came to prepare the way for Jesus. John told people to repent, to be sorry for their sins. John even told King Herod to repent, but Herod didn't like that at all. He wasn't sorry for his sins. In fact, he was so angry he put John in prison. And while John was in prison, he became sad or worried, so he sent two of his friends to ask Jesus a very important question: "*Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?*" (Matt. 11:3). Was Jesus the one? Was He really the promised Saviour? John wanted proof that Jesus was who He said He was.

Jesus didn't have a birth certificate! How would He prove He was the promised Saviour? John knew about the promises of God in the Old Testament. Prophets sent by God said that the promised Saviour would do miracles. The Saviour would heal blind people and make sick people well. And guess what! Jesus did those exact things that John's friends and everyone could see. He gave blind people sight. He made sick people well. People who couldn't walk were healed and got up and walked. Then Jesus told John's friends: "*Go and tell John what you hear and see*" (Matt. 11:4). They should tell John about the miracles they saw Jesus do. John would know that those miracles proved that Jesus was the promised Saviour.

Jesus doesn't need a birth certificate to prove who He is. He is the Son of God. He is the Saviour who died on the cross to take away our sins. And on the first Easter morning came the greatest miracle of all. Jesus rose from the dead! His resurrection proves that He is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. There's no doubt about it! *Jesus, Your miracles proved that You are the Son of God and our Saviour. We love You and we believe in You. Amen.*

## SERVICE TIMES

<b>3 MID-WEEK ADVENT</b>	<b>21 December 4 Advent</b>	<b>CHRISTMAS SERVICES</b>
Tuesday, 16 December, 7.00pm. LOWOOD.	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR	<u>CHRISTMAS EVE</u> 7.30pm GRN HC
Wednesday, 17 December, 7.30pm, OAKEY.	9.30am AUB LR 9.00am LOWOOD HC	<u>CHRISTMAS DAY</u> 8.00am LOWOOD HC 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR

### **Tuesday/Wednesday 3 Mid-Week Advent**

HYMNS: (LSB) 362 933 354 613

### **Sunday, 21 December**

READINGS: Isaiah 7:10-17; Romans 1:1-17; Matthew 1:18-25

HYMNS: 338 357 814 (610 628) 361

### **Wednesday, 24 December**

READINGS: Isaiah 7:10-14; 1 John 4:7-16; Matthew 1:18-25

HYMNS: 361 622 (Lutheran Hymnal) 364 370 375 363

### **Thursday, 25 December**

READINGS: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

HYMNS: 387 382 379 (365 375) 389

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Sunday, 21 December, 7.30pm. Carols Evening at Oakey. A cuppa will be held after the carols. Please bring something for a shared supper.

Tuesday, 23 December, 7.00pm. Carols Evening at Lowood. A cuppa will be held after the carols. Please bring something for a shared supper.

### **Verse of the Day**

Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight; all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia.

Luke 3:4b, 6

## WEEKLY READINGS

<b>Sunday, December 14</b>	Genesis 36-38, Romans 12	<i>Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (2017)</i> pp. 19-228, The Lord's Prayer
<b>Monday, December 15</b>	Genesis 39-40, Romans 13	
<b>Tuesday, December 16</b>	Genesis 41-42, Romans 14	
<b>Wednesday, December 17</b>	Genesis 43-45	
<b>Thursday, December 18</b>	Genesis 46-48, Romans 15	
<b>Friday, December 19</b>	Genesis 49-50, Romans 16	
<b>Saturday, December 20</b>	Isaiah 1-2	

### AELC Member Congregations Details

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Our Saviour <b>Lowood</b>	63 Prospect Street, Lowood	BSB 633-108 Account 159171487
St Johns <b>Aubigny</b>	2 Aubigny Crosshill Road, Aubigny	BSB 014-675 Account 388228975
St Pauls <b>Greenwood</b>	617 Acland-Silverleigh Road, Greenwood	BSB 638-070 Account 6918247
Trinity <b>Marburg</b>	19 Edmund Street, Marburg	BSB 633-000 Account 146106893
Trinity <b>Oakey</b>	125 Hamlyn Road, Oakey	BSB 638-070 Account 7405138

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### About the AELC

The Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) believes that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Word of God, and accordingly, believe that the Holy Scriptures are the sole source of what we believe, teach, and confess. We also subscribe to *The Lutheran Confessions of 1580*, *The Word Shall Stand* and *The AELC Statement of Faith* as correct expositions of Scripture, which address issues that have arisen throughout history by the Word of God. We teach nothing new and stand on Scripture alone as God's Word to us. We teach the message of Christ crucified for sinners. We teach that salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.



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