

# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH (AELC)

BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOURS LOWOOD, ST JOHNS AUBIGNY,  
ST PAULS GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY

21 December 2025

The Fourth 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 24 (in front of LSB hymnbook) for the Introit.**

## • THE LIGHTING OF THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE

- **R:** The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a Son,
- **C:** and she will call His name 'Immanuel' which means, 'God is with us.'
- **ALL:** Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have sent Your Son Jesus to be with us and to save us. Teach us to live as Your people, and to serve you joyfully. Amen.

**Hymns (LSB):** 338 357 814 (610 628) 361

**Introit:** Psalm 24:1-10, 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:** 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

### **The First Reading: Isaiah 7:10–14**

<sup>10</sup>Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, <sup>11</sup>“Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” <sup>12</sup>But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” <sup>13</sup>And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? <sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. <sup>15</sup>He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. <sup>16</sup>For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. <sup>17</sup>The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria.”

### **The Second Reading: Romans 1:1–7**

<sup>1</sup>Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup>concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup>and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup>including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, <sup>7</sup>To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Gospel Reading from Matthew 1:18–25**

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

<sup>23</sup>“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel!”

(which means, God with us). <sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup>but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

## **MATTHEW'S CHRISTMAS STORY BEGINS WITH UNBELIEF BUT ENDS IN FAITH**

**Sermon for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent, 2025**

**Matthew 1:18-25**

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 1:18-25:

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Last Sunday's Gospel<sup>1</sup> had to do with John the Baptist's impending execution, which caused him to doubt whether Jesus was really the Messiah about whom he himself had preached. Instead of being released from prison, John is asked to compare the things Jesus has been doing with what Isaiah said about the Messiah: the blind see, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.

Today's Gospel takes us a little closer to Christmas, but, like John, Joseph is unbelieving. It wasn't that Joseph didn't believe Isaiah's prophecy about the virgin bearing a child; he just didn't think it was happening to Mary, and really, no man in Joseph's position would have reacted any differently.

Christmas is a Mary-Jesus thing, not a Joseph-Jesus thing. Our carols are more about Mary and Jesus. Few speak of Joseph. Joseph's role is *secondary*, somewhere back among the figures of angels, the shepherds, and the Wise Men. Writing through the evangelist Matthew, the Holy Spirit puts Joseph in the centre of the stage. For Matthew, Christmas begins with Joseph's dilemma about what to do with a wife whom he thinks is carrying another man's child.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:2-15

Culture shapes what we consider right and wrong. Joseph's situation of what to do with a woman to whom he was legally but still not physically joined is not a significant problem today, since many couples live together without being married, and they even have children. The scenario of a man marrying a woman who is carrying another man's child is not uncommon. But the world Joseph lived in was much different. Israelite men were *obliged* to have a son to secure the inheritance God had given the sons of Israel. Since Joseph was David's descendant, he knew he could be the line of descent of the Messiah. Someone else's child would not do. One way to discredit a person is to remind others that he is illegitimate. Jesus had to face this accusation. From the very beginning, the enemies of the Church have attempted to discredit Christianity by claiming that *Jesus may have been illegitimate*. If this were really true, then Jesus would not be the Son of God, and the Christian religion would be a fraud.

Through repetition, what the Creed says about Jesus being "*conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary*" may have become so ordinary that we are unaware of the tension this caused between Mary and Joseph. If Mary had been unfaithful, Joseph would lose a wife, and Mary would lose not only a husband but also support for her Child and herself. John the Baptist began to doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, but for Joseph, there were no doubts. He rejected Mary's claim that she had conceived by the Holy Spirit. Things like this do not happen—and that's right, things like this simply don't happen—or don't happen simply—but it happened once, and *God became a human being just like us*.

Joseph believed Mary's word that she was pregnant, but not that she was pregnant with the Immanuel Child, the One promised by the prophet Isaiah. Legal separation and divorce are bitter experiences, but in Joseph's mind, there was only one solution to his problem.

Old Testament law required divorce in cases of adultery and also allowed it without cause. Joseph chose the latter option. He would not tell anyone what he thought Mary had done. **“Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.”**

Joseph chose the kinder path. It's one thing to be morally right, and another, and harder, thing to forgive. Indignation at others' violations comes more easily to us than overlooking their faults. Joseph did not want to make a bad situation worse for her. Matthew introduces Joseph as not believing the word of salvation that Mary preached to him about her Child being the Son of God, but, on the other hand, Joseph is what every Christian should be in *not exposing the sins of*

*others*. In his explanation of the commandment against bearing false witness, Luther says that not only should we avoid lying, but we should also put the best construction on even the bad things others do. In broadcasting the misdeeds of others, we bring condemnation upon ourselves.

Now Joseph had to get down to the brass tacks of how he was going to prevent Mary's pregnancy from coming to light in a village of less than a hundred people. Today, a woman can travel out of town to give birth. Not so in the ancient world. Women rarely, if ever, travelled alone. Sooner rather than later, her predicament would become fodder for wagging tongues. This is probably the reality with which Joseph struggled as he lay in bed one night.

It is rare for anyone who goes to sleep at night to never be disrupted by the troubles of the day. We sleep, but we really don't. Our minds are fully engaged in anxious dreams. When we awake, sometimes it's as if we'd never slept at all. Caught in a sleepless sleep, **“an angel of the Lord appeared to (Joseph) in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”**

The Child Mary is carrying is not an ordinary child *but the God who redeems His people*. The God who had come in dreams to Abraham, Jacob, and the Old Testament Joseph, the one whom His brothers hated, was now coming to another Joseph in a dream. Mary's husband would not be the biological father of the Messiah, but he would be His *legal father*. Joseph would pass his claim as the Son of David to Jesus. **“When Joseph woke from sleep”**—and probably much to Mary's surprise, **“he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him,”** taking Mary into his home as his wife. Everything is done so that they can get together within the nine-month limit.

If, in our Christmas celebrations, Joseph is the minor figure, in the Christmas story, the first Christians heard he had the *major part*. That dream telling him to take Mary as his wife was not his last one. He received another dream to flee from the wrath of Herod to Egypt to save the Child's life. He received still another dream, some years later, instructing him to return from Egypt to their home in Galilee. Then there is still another dream on the way back to Galilee, that they should avoid Judea, where the treacherous son of the murderous Herod reigned. *Matthew's Christmas story begins with Joseph's refusal to believe his wife's report that she is carrying a Child conceived by the Holy Spirit, but ends with Joseph as the hero of faith and the guardian of the Child born to be the Saviour of the world.*

We can define life in several ways. One definition we can all resonate with is that life *is a series of dilemmas*. When we get through one dilemma, we face another. That also describes the Old Testament. God's people get out of one dilemma, and in a short time, they're in another. When God resolved Joseph's dilemma about what to do with an unfaithful wife, He resolved the predicament of all humankind. Mary's Child would save God's people from their sin by releasing them from death and Satan's power. All this Mary's Child could do because Jesus, "*God saves us*," was also the Immanuel Child spoken of in Isaiah 7:14. That name means "*God is with us*." God could save us because He became one with us. He became flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone.

For all legal purposes throughout His life, Jesus was known as Joseph's son, and from Joseph, Jesus learned the trade of a carpenter. Yet after Matthew's Christmas narrative, Joseph plays no part in the Gospel. If there was any doubt about Jesus being the Son of David by blood and not just in law, Luke tells us that Mary was a descendant of David. So Jesus is David's Son by law through Joseph and by blood through Mary. On Palm Sunday, this all comes to a pinnacle when the crowds greet Jesus with "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" (Matt. 21:9).

Joseph's legacy would not only be preserved in the life of Jesus but also in the lives of his own sons. James, the eldest brother of Jesus, became the bishop of Jerusalem and the author of a New Testament book. Jude, another son of Joseph, also wrote a book of the Bible. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, who was related to whom by blood, lost its importance. Jesus said that His brothers, sisters, and mothers were those who did the will of His Father in believing that He was the Christ (Matt. 12:50). Together, Christ's brothers and sisters constitute the household of God.

The important point of Matthew's Christmas story is that God came to us as Mary's Child. But if we are looking for a secondary point, it might be Joseph's willingness not to make a public example of her. Joseph's forgiveness is raised to an even higher plane in Jesus, who forgives all of us so that as His Church we can become His Bride without spot or blemish. Like the Old Testament Joseph, Jesus forgives all His brothers with whom He has become one by His incarnation of the Virgin Mary. Matthew's Christmas story begins with unbelief but ends with faith, and maybe that's the way every Christmas should be. Amen.

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

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

O God, You have kept Your Word and given us Your Son by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. Guide us so we can rejoice in the Word made flesh and in the redemption He has achieved through His holy life, life-giving death, and resurrection. Bless all pastors, that they may faithfully preach and teach this Gospel. Open the hearts of young men to listen and respond to Your call to the ministry. Bless all church workers in their various roles, that they may serve us well in Your name.

Holy Lord, You promised the virgin-born Son to reluctant King Ahaz, and in the fullness of time, the Word became flesh. Open our hearts and strengthen our faith joyfully to receive Your Son in the signs where He is present: not in signs of our own choosing, but in the Holy Word and Sacraments.

Heavenly Father, You raised up Joseph, a man honourable and just, to be the guardian and earthly father to Your Son. Give all earthly fathers wisdom, patience, pride in their duty, and, above all, faith and loyalty to Your Word, so that, understanding Your true Guardianship, they may lead their households with godly forbearance.

Almighty God, You will not endure the tiresome flattery and unbelief of kings and rulers forever. Have mercy on us, Lord, and spare our nation. Clear away all empty displays of piety and renew genuine faith in the Virgin's Son, so that His coming at the last may not be a sign against us.

You are the giver of every good gift, O Lord, and You care for us in all our needs of body, mind, and spirit. Give healing to the sick, relief to the suffering, peace to the dying, and comfort to those who mourn. According to Your gracious will, sustain them all by Your grace, and give them patience and courage as they await the unfolding of Your healing grace.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is the Dayspring from on high and the splendour of light everlasting. By His coming in the flesh and through His blessed Word, enlighten our hearts with the Gospel, and illuminate the hearts of those sitting in the darkness of unbelief with the light of saving faith. Also, enlighten those dwelling in the shadow of death with the sure hope of the resurrection through Him. Grant that, as we recall His advent in the flesh with thanksgiving, we may always confess Him and stay watchful for His coming in glory at the Last Day; 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 Goodness and Mercy of God**

Psalm 136:1 reads, “*Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.*”

The psalmist urges us to thank God for His goodness, which means His kindness and friendliness. God is inherently and wholeheartedly good. He is good and friendly with joy and delight. He takes pleasure in doing good. He is not embittered by ingratitude. He is good to the unthankful and evil. He is good to everyone; His tender mercies extend over all His works. Therefore, He provides food for all living creatures. He supplies for the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the animals in the fields and forests, and everything that moves and crawls, no matter where. All have their tables set with whatever they need to survive. “*The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season*” (Psalm 145:15), and that includes humanity as well.

God provides for mankind, for the entire human family. He allows His sunshine to shine on both the good and the evil and sends rain upon the fields of the just and the unjust. He generously and daily provides us with all we need to support our bodies and life. We may not always realise it, but we are truly living from God’s hand; where would we be, or what would we have, or how could we survive, if God took away from us just for one day the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and the sea, along with everything in them—the fish, the beasts, the fowl, the corn, the wheat, and the very air we breathe? All these things necessary for our life and sustenance, God made and provided long before we were born, even before any people existed on earth. And God continues to provide. In His goodness, He gives us everything we need. “*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.*”

“*For*” the psalmist continues, “*His steadfast love endures forever.*”

God shows His love through His mercy and compassion. His sympathy and pity for the downtrodden, the unfortunate, and the suffering — especially for sinful and fallen man — are clear. Like the Good Samaritan who had compassion on the man fallen among thieves and went to him, pouring oil and wine on his wounds and taking him to an inn to care for him, so the Lord has compassion on us. As Jesus felt compassion for the multitude when they were with Him in the wilderness for three days and refused to send them away hungry — so God cares for all people. However, nowhere in Holy Scripture is God’s mercy depicted more clearly than in the story of the Prodigal Son. When he had squandered his father’s inheritance on reckless living and found himself in need,

he returned to his father’s house as a penitent, and was welcomed and embraced with joy — illustrating how God feels towards us. His heart reaches out to us, longing for our return, always ready and eager to forgive sinners. Therefore, He sent Jesus, His only eternal Son, to redeem mankind from the miserable state of sin and eternal damnation into which they had fallen.

To that end, God also sends out His Word and Spirit throughout all ages to call men to repentance and faith in His mercy. “*God desires all men to be saved*” and “*He is not willing that any should perish*” because His mercy moves Him to compassion and to action.

God is merciful even as He is almighty. There is no limit to His power, and there is no end to His mercy. No one can measure the extent of God’s mercy; it is all-encompassing; it reaches out to and embraces all people; it “*endures forever*”; it never wears out and it never grows old. God’s mercy is not a fleeting sensation or feeling of pity like human sympathy; it is a quality in God as natural and eternal as God Himself. God can no more cease to be merciful than He can cease to be God; as sure as God is God, so sure God is merciful and always will be. He is the same merciful God day in and day out, year in and year out, from eternity to eternity.

His mercy is new every morning, and His compassion fails not. As often as we need mercy and seek it, we shall find it, whether we come in the morning, at noon, or midnight, in youth or old age, for the first time or the thousandth, He remains a compassionate and merciful God. God’s mercy is His everlasting glory, which He revealed to Moses when He proclaimed: “*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*” (Ex. 34:6-7).

*Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever.”*

#### WEEKLY READINGS

<b><i>Sunday, December 21</i></b>	Isaiah 3-4 Mark 1	<i>Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation (2017) pp. 23-24, Holy Baptism</i>
<b><i>Monday, December 22</i></b>	Isaiah 5-6 Mark 2	
<b><i>Tuesday, December 23</i></b>	Isaiah 7-8 Mark3	
<b><i>Wednesday, December 24</i></b>	Isaiah 9-10	
<b><i>Thursday, December 25</i></b>	Isaiah 11-13 Mark 4	
<b><i>Friday, December 26</i></b>	Isaiah 14-16	
<b><i>Saturday, December 27</i></b>	Isaiah 17-19 Mark 5	

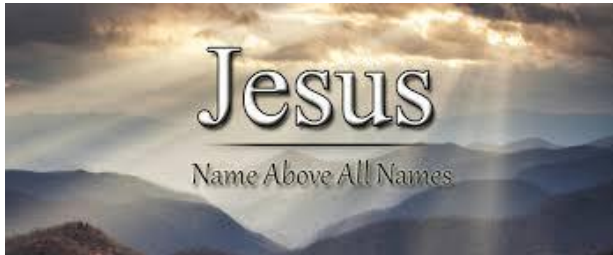
## Children's Address:

Before their baby is born, parents think very carefully about a name. They want to choose the perfect name for their new son or daughter. They might name the child after one of the grandparents or an aunt or uncle. Sometimes friends and family suggest names for the child. The parents may even use a book or a list of names that provides their meanings.

In Bible times, parents chose a name for a baby just as carefully as people do today. They might select a family name or a name that reflects their hopes for the child's future, perhaps a name meaning “strong” or “helpful.”

When Jesus, our Saviour, was born, Mary and Joseph didn't have to decide on a name or use a baby name book. God sent angels to Mary and Joseph to tell them what to name the baby born in Bethlehem. It would be the perfect name for the Saviour! It was the name God chose for His Son. God sent the angel Gabriel to tell Mary to name her baby Jesus. Then God sent another angel to Joseph, also instructing him to call Mary's Son Jesus. That angel even explained the reason for the name, saying, “*You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins*” (Matt. 1:21).

That special name is perfect for the Saviour because the name “Jesus” means “God saves.” It's a good name for God's Son because He came to earth to save



us from our sins. The Bible says that the name of Jesus is “*the name that is above every name*” (Phil. 2:9). That's because Jesus died on the cross and rose to life for us. We love Jesus' wonderful name.

God knows your names as well. When we are baptised, God makes us His children. He knows your name and has put His name on you: the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are people who love Jesus, and we are called “Christians,” a name that means followers of Jesus Christ. We can tell others about the wonderful name of Jesus, the Saviour who came to save them from their sins!

*Jesus, we love Your wonderful name, the name that means You saved us. Help us to tell others about Your name and how it means You love them! Amen.*

## SERVICE TIMES

<b>CHRISTMAS SERVICES</b>	<b>28 December 1 Christmas</b>	<b>NEW YEAR'S DAY 1 January 2026</b>
<u>CHRISTMAS EVE</u> 7.30pm GRN 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	8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am MARBURG LR	10.00am AUB HC

### **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 26 (Lutheran Hymnal) (365 375) 389

### **Sunday, 28 December**

READINGS: Isaiah 63:7-14; Galatians 4:4-7; Matthew 2:13-23

HYMNS: 360 374 725 (608 619) 383

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Tonight, 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.

Forward Announcement: Sunday, 4 January. AELC Service at Bethlehem Toowoomba, beginning at 10.00am. A Parish Executive meeting will be held after the service.

### **Verse of the Day**

Alleluia. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel. Alleluia.

Matthew 1:23a

## AELC Member Congregations Details

Contact: [ddaelc@gmail.com](mailto:ddaelc@gmail.com)

<b>Congregation</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Giving</b>
Bethlehem <b>Toowoomba</b>	41 Buckland Street, Harristown	BSB 638-070 Account 15877094
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

### 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. Furthermore, we 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 God's Word. 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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