



Year A (2025- 2026) – Advent

IMMINENT ARRIVAL

Note: to the worship planner

As you read through this plan, you will note that there are different categories of hymn choices for congregations at different places in their introduction of the *Christian Worship 2021* (CW21) suite. The Familiar category is for congregations that want to maximize use of the rich treasury of hymnody that was already in both *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) and *Christian Worship 1993* (CW93). The Introductory category is for congregations that are newly introducing the CW21 suite. Anything new in CW21 is noted so that it can be practiced ahead of time. It's never good to pick a new hymn and just hope for the best! The Advanced category is for congregations who have advanced to the point of making full use of the CW21 suite. Although it will probably take at least a decade to sample all the resources, this category is for congregations that have worked out their system for introducing unfamiliar music. Regardless of category, each hymn is linked to a page with more resources for worship planners. The appointed Psalm of the Day is also linked to helpful comments for worship planners.

This year's Advent theme, Imminent Arrival, calls to mind how people eagerly anticipate the Christmas season. The Latin word *adventus* means arrival, and in the Christian church we eagerly anticipate three arrivals of Christ: the commemoration of his birth, his return on judgment day, and the moments he touches our hearts in Word and sacrament. The Lord is near!

Congregations have different customs when it comes to decorating for Christmas. The spectrum runs from the church being fully decorated already early in Advent to not being fully decorated until Christmas Eve. If your congregation is more on the latter end of the spectrum (not decorated until Christmas Eve), this series lends itself to the heightened anticipation of rolling out Christmas decorations gradually throughout Advent. First Sunday—the Advent wreath up, wreaths on the doorways. Second Sunday—more greens/wreaths and ribbons. Third Sunday—trees up and lighted, but no decorations. Fourth Sunday—trees fully decorated. A Hanging of the Greens rite is included for congregations that want more careful attention paid to the decorating at any stage in the process.

Two minor festivals land on Sundays this Advent season. The first Sunday in Advent is supposed to be the Sunday nearest November 30, the Festival of St. Andrew, Apostle, the first apostle called by Jesus. This year it hits that date exactly. The fourth Sunday in Advent this year is also the Festival of St. Thomas, Apostle, who doubted the arrival of Jesus after his resurrection. Alternate worship plans are included in this set for celebrating the festivals on those two Sundays.



IMMINENT ARRIVAL

SERIES EXPLANATION

Do you remember the feeling when someone important is about to arrive at your place? It's a mixture of anticipation and excitement and nervousness. Did you make all the correct preparations? Will the person be happy to see you? When and how will the person arrive? Will there be any surprises?

During these weeks before Christmas, we anticipate the imminent arrival of Jesus. He's an important person! We are about to celebrate his birth. He could return on judgment day at any time. But in worship we realize that he impacts our lives when the Bible is read and when the sacraments are administered. Suddenly we feel the excitement of an imminent arrival.

Our worship in the season of Advent follows this path.

First Sunday in Advent	<i>Imminent Arrival of the King</i>
Alternate	<i>Imminent Arrival of the One Who Calls</i>
Second Sunday in Advent	<i>Imminent Arrival of the Judge</i>
Third Sunday in Advent	<i>Imminent Arrival of the Messiah</i>
Fourth Sunday in Advent	<i>Imminent Arrival of Emmanuel</i>
Alternate	<i>Imminent Arrival of My Lord and My God</i>



First Sunday in Advent

November 30, 2025

IMMINENT ARRIVAL

IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF THE KING

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

The king is an important person. His arrival at our place can mean something quite different to us depending on our relationship with him. We might fear his arrival if we expect him to punish us. We might welcome his arrival if we expect him to validate us. Either way, we expect his arrival to be a big deal. How would it make us feel if we heard that his arrival would be informal and familiar?

Advent marks the start of a new Church Year. We begin at the end, watching King Jesus ride into Jerusalem on a donkey colt, knowing full well that he will be killed before the end of the week. The events of Palm Sunday serve as a microcosm for all Jesus' work, proving the King of the universe was willing to humble himself and endure anything for our salvation. That is precisely why Christ came. That is why we anticipate his imminent arrival not with worry but with joy.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Isaiah 2:1-5 – In the future, when our King arrives again, he will transform this world.

*Philippians 4:4-7 – Our present life is transformed from nervousness to excitement and joy because of the arrival of the King.

Matthew 21:1-11 – The King of all creation arrives in total humility, willing to do everything necessary to save us from the consequences of our sin.

The alternate readings work equally well with the theme.

Preacher Notes

The Second Reading is chosen as the basis for the sermon because it makes the connection between the imminent arrival of the Lord and our emotional reaction. The Lord is near! Do not worry! Rejoice! Our joy does not stem from our present circumstances but from the anticipation of promises kept. The King who came once to save us will come again (*Commentary on the Propers, Year A, NPH, 2022*).

The King imagery comes from the Gospel. Although the arrival of King could be cause for concern, our King comes to us humble and riding on a donkey. His humility is evident in his birth and in the veiled glory of the Word and sacraments. Even when he comes again in great glory on judgment day, he arrives as our Savior.

[Psalm 24](#)

Click on the link to help choose which psalter setting will work best in your congregation.

PSALM INTRODUCTION *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to singing the Psalm)* – The Church sings Psalm 24 in services anticipating the arrival of Christ the Lord.

Hymns

	<u>Familiar</u>	<u>Introductory</u>	<u>Advanced</u>
Opening	309	548	487
HOD	301	301	301
Third/Distr	305	306	326
Closing	319	524	524

[301](#) (Savior of the Nations, Come) is the featured hymn for Advent this year in the NPH *Hymns for Life* series used in many of our Lutheran elementary schools.

[305](#) (Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates) is CW93 Hymn 3. It's in a lower key in CW21 to make it easier to sing.

[306](#) (Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates) is a shortened version of hymn 305. The tune is familiar from CW93 Hymn 84.

[309](#) (The Advent of our King) has been familiar to WELS worshipers since 1941.

[319](#) (Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring) is well-known to WELS worshipers.

[326](#) (O Jesus, Grant Me Hope and Comfort) is new to us and is worth the effort it takes to play and sing it. It may be familiar to some from a version sung by the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Chorus.

[487](#) (Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending) calls for strong singing and accompanying. It is the tune from *CW: Supplement*, not the tune from CW93.

[524](#) (Rejoice, the Lord Is King) is a very familiar tune from CW93 (used for three hymns in that book) and has an ideal text for the themes of the service.

[548](#) (The King of Glory Comes) is familiar from CW93 Hymn 363. The same tune is used for the refrain of the Psalm 24 setting in the pew edition.



First Sunday in Advent - ALTERNATE

November 30, 2025

IMMINENT ARRIVAL

IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF THE ONE WHO CALLS

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

November 30 is the Festival of St Andrew, Apostle. The Christian Church sets the first Sunday in Advent as the Sunday closest this festival day, commemorating the choosing of the first apostle. This year the first Sunday in Advent lands on the festival.

Advent marks the start of a new Church Year. Jesus calls us anew to follow him. As we learn his importance for our lives, we are moved to tell others about what we have seen and heard. Soon we will celebrate the first arrival of the Savior on earth. We look forward to the time when he will arrive again, and we celebrate his arrival in the lives of our family and friends.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Ezekiel 3:16-21 – Jesus calls us to speak both law and gospel to the world.

*Romans 10:10-18 – Jesus calls people to faith and to service in his kingdom.

John 1:35-42 – Jesus calls his followers to recognize him as the Lamb of God.

Preacher Notes

The Second Reading is chosen as the basis for the sermon because it makes the connection between the call to faith and the call to serve in the public ministry of the gospel. Either truth could make for good applications. The first truth might be emphasized for the sake of evangelism, and the second truth might be emphasized for the sake of recruitment for the ministry of the gospel. Guest preachers for missions or ministerial education could be requested.

When Jesus called Andrew, Andrew immediately went and told his brother Simon Peter what he had seen and heard. The first Sunday in Advent is an excellent time to encourage people to invite anyone in their personal network to Christmas services.

[Psalm 66](#)

Click on the link to help choose which psalter setting will work best in your congregation.

PSALM INTRODUCTION *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to singing the Psalm)* – The Church sings Psalm 66 in services that include joyful praise of God for his amazing saving activity.

Hymns

	<u>Familiar</u>	<u>Introductory</u>	<u>Advanced</u>
Opening	711	892	892
HOD	301	301	895
Third/Distr	745	716	716
Closing	640	640	301

[301](#) (Savior of the Nations, Come) is the featured hymn for Advent this year in the NPH *Hymns for Life* series used in many of our Lutheran elementary schools.

[640](#) (God's Word Is Our Great Heritage) can be sung from memory by many worshipers.

[711](#) (Jesus Calls Us o'er the Tumult) is a familiar text and tune in a lower key than it was in TLH for ease of singing, with the setting of CW93 Hymn 326 for ease of playing

[716](#) (O Christ, Who Called the Twelve) may be familiar from *CW: Supplement 770*.

[745](#) (Hark, the Voice of Jesus Crying) is often chosen with personal evangelism texts and is well-known to most worshipers.

[892](#) (By All Your Saints Still Striving) is familiar from CW93 Hymn 552, where the Andrew verse (sung as the second stanza) was verse 23. In CW21 the Andrew verse is verse 5 (still sung as stanza 2).

[895](#) (Preach You the Word) has a familiar text but a different tune from the distinctive tune used in CW93. The new tune is milder and is familiar as "Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide."



Second Sunday in Advent

December 7, 2025

IMMINENT ARRIVAL

IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF THE JUDGE

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

The judge is an important person. You stand when he enters the courtroom. What he says must be obeyed. If you are the one on trial, his determinations make a big difference in how your life will continue.

You might be quite nervous if the judge is about to arrive. John invited people to turn their nervousness to repentance. He says that the arrival of the Judge is imminent, and the kingdom of heaven is near! You are invited to hear John, repent, and believe the good news of the coming Savior.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Isaiah 11:1-10 – Isaiah gives the credentials of the one who would come to judge.

Romans 15:4-13 – God’s people face the coming judgment with hope, not fear.

*Matthew 3:1-12 – John prepared people for the arrival of the Judge by emphasizing the nearness of the kingdom of God.

Preacher Notes

The Gospel is chosen as the sermon text, as will be the case for the Third Sunday in Advent as well. This Sunday is the opportunity to talk about repentance. The imminent arrival of the Judge brings to mind the nervousness and anxiety people feel about any legal proceeding. It’s an even bigger deal when eternal life is at stake!

This is not the courtroom scene of justification, where the Father is the judge. This is the courtroom scene of judgment day, where Jesus is the judge. Wouldn’t you like to have a judge who has already paid the price demanded by your guilt? He will not forget what he has done! You can look forward with confidence to eternal life through faith in Jesus, the Judge and Savior.

[Psalm 130](#)

Click on the link to help choose which psalter setting will work best in your congregation.

PSALM INTRODUCTION *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to singing the Psalm)* – The Church sings Psalm 130 in services that emphasize repentance and forgiveness through faith in Jesus.

Hymns

	<u>Familiar</u>	<u>Introductory</u>	<u>Advanced</u>
Opening	312	302	311
HOD	316	316	316
Third/Distr	317	308	651
Closing	318	318	318

[302](#) (Prepare the Royal Highway) is set to the tune of a Swedish folk song, so the melody is easy to pick up.

[308](#) (There's a Voice in the Wilderness Crying) is harder than it looks. Even though it was in *CW93*, it should probably still be introduced by a choir or cantor.

[311](#) (Dawning Light of Our Salvation) was originally written for guitar accompaniment but is quite suitable to be accompanied by piano or organ.

[312](#) (Comfort, Comfort All My People) is a familiar and musically comforting tune and text.

[316](#) (On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry) has been sung in WELS churches every Advent since 1941.

[317](#) (When All the World Was Cursed) was put into a lower key in *CW93* to make it easier to sing and play.

[318](#) (Hark! A Thrilling Voice is Sounding) has a familiar text from TLH, but a new tune was introduced in *CW93* to make it easier to sing.

[651](#) (In Hopelessness and Near Despair) is set to a different tune than the one that appeared in *Christian Worship: Supplement*.



Third Sunday in Advent

December 14, 2025

IMMINENT ARRIVAL

IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF THE MESSIAH

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

The Messiah is an important person. “Messiah” is the same word as “Christ” or “Anointed One.” He is someone who has been anticipated for a long time. Now we look at a time when his arrival is imminent!

The historic Christian Church gave Latin titles to each Sunday. They titled the Third Sunday in Advent “Gaudete,” which means “Rejoice!” As we reach the midway point of Advent, we ask Christ to empower us to do just that. We rejoice because God fulfills all his promises in Jesus.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Isaiah 35:1-10 – Isaiah tells us that the coming of the Messiah would change everything.

James 5:7-11 – James points to Job as an example of perseverance in the face of suffering.

*Matthew 11:2-11 – John’s disciples wanted to verify that Jesus was the Messiah.

Preacher Notes

The Gospel is chosen as the sermon text, continuing the discussion of John the Baptist, but advancing it by having John’s disciples ask for proof. They may have had the mistaken impression that there would be no suffering before the promised Messiah, Christ, Anointed One would be revealed. If the Messiah were about to be revealed, shouldn’t there be some more glorious signs?

When our present circumstances seem out of line with God’s promises, doubt contends with faith. John sent his disciples to the right place, to Jesus. As the Anointed One, he fulfills every type of prophet, priest, and king. There were king references in the First Sunday in Advent (unless the alternate St. Andrew festival was observed), so there may be more prophet and priest references here. Catechetical illustrations that the preacher uses in the Second Article for Christ’s office can be brought to bear.

Psalm 146

Click on the link to help choose which psalter setting will work best in your congregation.

PSALM INTRODUCTION *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to singing the Psalm)* – The Church sings Psalm 146 in services that emphasize repentance and forgiveness through faith in Jesus.

Hymns

	<u>Familiar</u>	<u>Introductory</u>	<u>Advanced</u>
Opening	315	315	322
HOD	324	324	324
Third/Distr	358	310	307
Closing	313	519	519

[307](#) (When the King Shall Come Again) is a new text sung to the tune of “Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain.”

[310](#) (Arise, O Christian People) has been around for a while, both text and tune, but it still takes some effort to sing.

[313](#) (Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes) is upbeat and familiar.

[315](#) (Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord) is well-known to Lutherans around the world.

[322](#) (Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus) is a familiar text set to an unfamiliar Southern folk tune.

[324](#) (O Lord, How Shall I Meet You) is sung to its original melody, which was CW93 Hymn 18, and the Second Tune in TLH Hymn 58.

[358](#) (Of the Father’s Love Begotten) is quite familiar even though it is a little difficult to sing.

[519](#) (There Is a Redeemer) looks difficult but is usually learned very quickly, partly because of the simple refrain.



Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 21, 2025

IMMINENT ARRIVAL

IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF EMMANUEL

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Emmanuel is an important person. “Emmanuel” means “God with us.” It was a special name given to Jesus already 700 years before he was born. Who is with us when Jesus is with us? God himself. God became a human being in a special way, becoming truly human but remaining God.

God is still with us. We encounter him in a special way when we gather with two or three others in worship. He is so near to us that the thrill of anticipation is almost unbearable. Let it wash over you as you celebrate Christmas this week.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

*Isaiah 7:10-14 – Isaiah prophesies that a virgin would give birth to God in the flesh.

Romans 1:1-7 – After thousands of years of God’s promises, Paul looks back and sees every one of them kept when God became man.

Matthew 1:18-25 – Joseph knew full well that Mary would give birth to a son who would be Emmanuel, God with us.

Preacher Notes

The First Reading is chosen as the sermon text. The geopolitical situation in Isaiah’s time was desperate. Judah’s enemies had joined forces to attack. There was no chance of survival until God said, “It will not take place. It will not happen.” Our own enemies have proven impossible to withstand. There is no chance of our survival until God says, “It will not take place. It will not happen.”

The sign of God keeping his promises is the virgin birth of Emmanuel. The preacher has a wealth of Word and sacrament references available to emphasize and highlight God with us in the present and into eternity.

[Psalm 89](#)

Click on the link to help choose which psalter setting will work best in your congregation.

PSALM INTRODUCTION *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to singing the Psalm)* – The Church sings Psalm 89 in services where we thank God for keeping his promises over long periods of time.

Hymns

The Fourth Sunday in Advent is an ideal time to use The Great O Antiphons of Advent as part of the service. In place of the sermon or the Prayer of the Church, the idea is to have a brief meditation before

the congregation sings each stanza of CW 327, “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel,” the Advent hymn based on the twelfth-century antiphons. If your service time allows it, seven stanzas based on the original seven antiphons are available at the link for Hymn 327.

The “Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols” in *Service Builder* is especially suited as an order of service for Christmas Eve but could also be used on the Third or Fourth Sunday in Advent.

	<u>Familiar</u>	<u>Introductory</u>	<u>Advanced</u>
Opening	360	320	325
HOD	327	327	327
Third/Distr	321	330	924
Closing	333	333	333

[320](#) (As Angels Joyed with One Accord) really emphasizes the various ways that Christ arrives.

[321](#) (God’s Own Son Most Holy) has an old German sound.

[325](#) (My Soul in Stillness Waits) is a modern alternate presentation of the O Antiphons. It is regularly introduced with a choir or a cantor and accompanied by piano.

[327](#) (O Come, O Come, Emmanuel) can be used in many ways in the service.

[330](#) (Peace Came to Earth) should be practiced ahead of time, since it is harder than it looks.

[333](#) (O Little Town of Bethlehem) acknowledges that we have almost arrived at Christmas.

[360](#) (Behold, a Branch Is Growing) can be heard in popular Christmastime music.

[924](#) (Abide, O Dearest Jesus) is appropriate anytime we remember God with us.



Fourth Sunday in Advent - ALTERNATE

December 21, 2025

IMMINENT ARRIVAL

IMMINENT ARRIVAL OF MY LORD AND MY GOD

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

December 21 is the Festival of St. Thomas, Apostle. According to church tradition, it is the day he died a martyr's death while doing mission work in India. On Easter evening, Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared to the other disciples, and he famously refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he could see and touch Jesus' wounds. After seeing the risen Jesus a week later, Thomas cried out, "My Lord and my God!"

There are still skeptics today who think that Jesus' virgin birth or resurrection from the dead are myths. It is appropriate to invite those skeptics to find out what the Bible says about those events. The Holy Spirit can work on their hearts just like he did with Thomas.

READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the lesson)*

Judges 6:36-40 – Gideon asks for proof that God would keep his promises.

Hebrews 10:35-11:1 – We have faith that God will continue to keep his promises.

*John 20:24-29 – Jesus continues to demonstrate that he is our Lord and our God.

Preacher Notes

The Gospel is chosen as the sermon text. So near to Christmas, it's useful to jump ahead to Easter, especially to address skeptics who take advantage of the sentimental nature of Christmas to denigrate the faith. The peace on earth promised by the Christmas angels is fulfilled when Jesus brings peace to his disciples after rising from the dead.

What grace we see in Jesus! He reappears to the disciples and gives the ultimate proof that sin is forgiven. His reappearance to skeptics today is imminent. He wants to bring them peace as well.

[Psalm 25](#)

Click on the link to help choose which psalter setting will work best in your congregation.

PSALM INTRODUCTION *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to singing the Psalm)* – The Church sings Psalm 25 in services that encourage a Christian life of repentance and faith.

Hymns

	<u>Familiar</u>	<u>Introductory</u>	<u>Advanced</u>
Opening	360	892	892
HOD	327	468	468
Third/Distr	321	327	327
Closing	333	333	333

[321](#) (God's Own Son Most Holy) has an old German sound.

[327](#) (O Come, O Come, Emmanuel) can be used in many ways in the service.

[333](#) (O Little Town of Bethlehem) acknowledges that we have almost arrived at Christmas.

[360](#) (Behold, a Branch Is Growing) can be heard in popular Christmastime music.

[468](#) (These Things Did Thomas Count as Real) is harder than it looks and should be introduced by a choir or a cantor.

[892](#) (By All Your Saints Still Striving) is familiar from CW93 Hymn 552, where the Thomas verse (sung as the second stanza) was verse 24. In CW21 the Thomas verse is verse 6 (still sung as stanza 2).



THE HANGING OF THE GREENS

The Hanging of the Greens is a Western Christian ceremony for the adornment of churches with Advent and Christmas decorations. This is typically done at the start of the Advent season or whenever a congregation decorates the chancel for Christmas. The rite involves the placement of evergreen vegetation and other decorations in the church. Bible passages help explain the significance of the Advent wreath, Chrismons on the tree, and any other special decorations. Christmas trees are occasionally erected during the hanging of the greens, although a great deal of preparation is necessary to make it work.

The idea of the ritual is to have certain things brought forward from the back of the nave in procession during the stanzas of the opening hymn. Individuals or families can bring the items forward. Any of the following rubrics, as locally appropriate, can be printed in the service folder between each hymn stanza.

The processional cross leads us into worship as the long-awaited King of kings is drawing near.

The candles follow the cross of Christ to symbolize the Light that only Jesus can bring to the world.

The altar book is brought into the church to remind us that we begin a new Church Year of worship.

The altar flowers follow these symbols to represent the joy of God's people as we look forward to celebrating the birth of Christ.

The evergreen wreaths are placed throughout the chancel to remind us of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

Next the Christmas tree is decorated. Evergreens symbolize the assurance of eternal life. The white Chrismons are symbols of the Christian faith.

The Christmas banner reminds us of the coming Savior.

The flame is brought forward to light the first candle on the Advent wreath.