



THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Daily Devotion at Zion + December 20, 2020 AD + [Advent Season](#)

This Week: The Devotion of Listening

“In the beginning was the Word.” (John 1:1)

When St. John the Evangelist had to choose a word to describe the eternal, divine person of Jesus, he chose the word “Word.” Before creation existed, there was the Word. You and I live because of the Word. It endures even after we pass from the earth. The Word of God remains forever (Isaiah 40:8).

“And the Word became flesh.” (John 1:14)

God’s Word, the Word through which everything else exists, became human. He *came down to earth*, visible, touchable, hearable. True man, He spoke words in language that we may also speak. True God, He became the message that we preach.

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

Without Jesus, the Word-made-flesh, there is no faith and no devotion. We therefore celebrate His birth best by receiving with joy the gift that it gives: *the Word*, spoken, written, painted, sung, and however else it may come. Yes, strange as it may seem to say, the big celebration of Christmas is *preaching*, the Church’s proclamation of what this Child did for us. How may we listen to that preaching well?

About the Cover Art

The illustration on the front comes from a devotional book made for Count Charles of Angouleme in the 1400s. It shows the angel announcing Christ’s birth to the shepherds. The angel appears in blue, almost invisible against the sky. Beneath him, in the foreground, some shepherds dance merrily around a tree. Do they dance because they hear him, or do they not hear him because they’re dancing? In the background, two shepherds point at the angel and listen to his words: “Glory to God . . .” It’s a striking scene, inviting us to consider what it means both to hear the Word of God and not to hear it.

“Parents Should Explain the Sermon”

Nicholas von Amsdorf became the first Lutheran bishop in 1542 (in Naumburg-Weitz). In 1562, he wrote a little pamphlet, “Parents Should Explain the Sermon,” to assist parents in teaching their children to listen to the Word of God. His advice is simple and straightforward:

- 1) Parents should encourage their children to listen to the sermon before attending divine service.
- 2) Parents should review the sermon with their children after divine service, emphasizing its main points and a) how the sermon preached God’s wrath, and b) how it promised His mercy and forgiveness.
- 3) Parents should amplify these points with Biblical examples of each.

How might Von Amsdorf’s advice help the children in your life?

Daily Readings for the Week of December 27

S	Proverbs 8:22-30 1 John 5:1-12 John 13:20-35	2 Cor. 5:16—6:2 John 8:12-19
M	Isaiah 49:13-23 Isaiah 54:1-13 Matthew 18:1-14	F Genesis 17:1-12a, 15-16 Colossians 2:6-12 John 16:23b-30
T	Isaiah 12:1-6 Revelation 1:1-8 John 7:37-52	Sa Genesis 12:1-7 Hebrews 11:1-12 John 6:35—42, 48-51
W	Isaiah 25:1-9 Revelation 1:9-20 John 7:53—8:11	<i>These readings correspond to pages 139-159 and 163-170 in Vol. I of <u>For All the Saints</u>. To acquire <u>For All the Saints</u>, please contact the church office.</i>
Th	Isaiah 26:1-6	

Risen Ears Beginning to Open: Tips for Hearing a Sermon

Preaching is a strange thing: pastors sent across the world to proclaim what God has done as it's recorded in Holy Scripture. God Himself commanded this preaching (Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47), and promises that it saves (1 Corinthians 1:21, Romans 10:17). In the proclamation of the Church, our "risen ears," the ears of the new creation, begin to open. Here are some tips for using those ears:

- 1) **Pray for both speaker and listener.** Like all good gifts in the Church, preaching comes from God, His own voice. Pray for the Holy Spirit to be with your preacher and with his listeners, that the Word would be duly shared. One simple prayer for this task: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," for it is by the Word and faith that God's kingdom and will are done among us.
- 2) **Trust God to answer the prayer.** As tempting as it may be to sit back and evaluate whether or not God has answered your prayer for good preaching, instead listen in the full expectation that He will ("All the promises of God are 'yes' in Christ," 2 Cor. 1:20). Expect to hear God's own voice, and open yourself to be personally addressed by that voice.
- 3) **Listen for both Law and Gospel.** The law is God's condemning and critiquing word; the gospel is His forgiving and merciful word. Listen for both, and take them personally. Don't let feelings alone determine a sermon's value. Sometimes, if a sermon leaves us feeling uncomfortable or sorrowful, it is still doing exactly what God needs done in us that day. At the same time, always know that the final word from God is merciful and forgiving; if a sermon fails to deliver it—be sure to add it in your own mind!
- 4) **Chew on the Sermon.** Let it be your bread for the week. Hold onto a word, a phrase, a point, and return to it in prayer and reflection until you come to your next sermon.