

365 DEVOTIONAL READINGS WITH
MARTIN
LUTHER

DAY
by
DAY



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INTRODUCTION



ven after nearly 500 years, what you will read in this book sounds as though it were written yesterday. Martin Luther's writings have a poignancy and power that continue to captivate readers. A daily dose of Luther is good for the soul, because Dr. Luther points us directly to Jesus Christ and the Gospel. These daily readings, selected and edited so well by my colleague, Dawn Weinstock, are drawn from the many volumes in the American Edition of Luther's Works, including the new volumes now being released, thus providing material from Luther never before available to English-speaking readers. We pray this book is a blessing to all who use it and all who are touched by the passionate enthusiasm demonstrated by Luther for what we need the most, day by day, our dear Lord Christ!

Rev. Paul T. McCain

*And at the end of eight days, when He was
circumcised, He was called Jesus.*

LUKE 2:21



Circumcision and Name of Jesus



is name is rightly called on this day “Jesus,” which is [translated] “Savior,” for Savior means one who helps, redeems, saves, and cures everyone. The Hebrew language calls this one “Jesus.” So the angel Gabriel spoke to Joseph in sleep: “She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Here the angel himself explains why He is called Savior, “Jesus,” namely, because He is help and salvation to His people. . . . What, then, is our name? Doubtless as Christ gives us all that is His, so He also gives to us His name. Therefore, all of us are called Christians from Him, God’s children from Him, Jesus from Him, Savior from Him, and whatever is His name, that also is ours. As St. Paul writes: “In this hope you were saved” (Romans 8:24), for you are “Jesus” or “Savior.” See, there is therefore no limit to the dignity and honor of a Christian! These are the superabundant riches of His blessings, which He pours out on us, so that our hearts may be free, joyous, peaceful, and fearless. Then we keep the Law willingly and cheerfully.

From the *Church Postil*, sermon for New Year’s Day on Luke 2:21
(Luther’s Works 76:47)

*For whatever was written in former days was
written for our instruction, that through endurance
and through the encouragement of the Scriptures
we might have hope.*

ROMANS 15:4



Watch, Read, Know



This is the advice: Keep watch! Study! *Attende lectioni!* (“Attend to reading!” 1 Timothy 4:13). Truly, you cannot read in Scripture too much, and what you do read you cannot read too well, and what you read well you cannot understand too well, and what you understand well you cannot teach too well, and what you teach well you cannot live too well. . . . It is the devil, the world, and the flesh that are ranting and raging against us. Therefore, beloved lords and brothers, pastors and preachers, pray, read, study, and keep busy. Truly, at this evil, shameful time, it is no time for loafing, snoring, or sleeping. Use your gift, which has been entrusted to you (see 1 Timothy 4:14), and reveal the mystery of Christ (see Colossians 1:26). As St. Paul says, “If anyone refuses to know it, let him be unknowing” (1 Corinthians 14:38). Since Baptism and the Sacrament are present, we must not keep silent about the Word of the mystery.

From Luther’s preface to Johann Spangenberg, *German Postil*
(Luther’s Works 60:285)

“Our Father in heaven.” MATTHEW 6:9



Our Brother, Not Our Enemy



herefore, though I feel and experience that unfortunately I cannot say “our Father” with my whole heart (as no one on earth can say it completely—otherwise we would already be in perfect bliss), yet I will experiment and begin as a little child to suck at His breasts. If I cannot sufficiently believe it, I will still not let it be false or say no to it. Although I cannot play the game as it should be done, I will not promote the opposite (as the monks and despairing hearts do, who do not regard Christ as their Brother but as an enemy and a jailer), for that would be to turn Him into the devil. Rather, I will daily learn to spell, until I learn to repeat this Our Father and this preaching of Christ as well or as poorly as I can, no matter if it is stammered and stuttered or babbled, so long as I somehow accomplish it.

From the *Church Postil*, sermon for Easter on Mark 16:1–8 (Luther's Works 77:33)

“Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

MATTHEW 6:10



The Purpose of Trouble

Let us learn, therefore, to submit ourselves to the counsels of God and to refrain from the cares and thoughts that God has not commanded. There is nothing safer or more acceptable to God than if we refrain from our own counsels and rely on His Word. There we shall find sufficient guidance about what we ought to do. His commands to us are faith, love, and bearing the cross. With these things, I say, we can happily occupy ourselves. Let us deal with everything else as it comes into our hands, leaving to Him the concern about its outcome. . . . But God has given men this trouble or affliction not in order to destroy them but in order to call them back from their foolish wisdom and schemes and to teach us that our wisdom amounts to nothing. . . . For it is not wisdom that accomplishes anything, not even genuine wisdom, but the will of God, so that we learn to pray (Matthew 6:10): “Thy will be done.”

From *Notes on Ecclesiastes* (Luther's Works 15:25)

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. JAMES 5:17



Cling to Christ in Prayer



These words “in My name” [John 16:23] demand faith when one prays. They show that our own worthiness should not demand that we pray or achieve fulfillment, and that our unworthiness should not prevent us from praying; they show that we are surely heard solely for the sake of Christ, our only Mediator and High Priest before God. Therefore our prayer must be centered in Him alone. All Christendom prays in this manner; it concludes and seals all its prayers and cries with the words “through Jesus Christ, our Lord.” In this way it brings its offerings to God in faith. Therefore you should do likewise, in order that you may defend yourself against the terrible thoughts which detain and deter you from prayer. Be sure not to let the devil delude you when he tells you that you are unworthy; but for this very reason fall on your knees when you feel that you are not worthy and cannot become worthy. Cling to Christ, make your prayer dependent on Him. . . . By no means be in doubt or uncertain when you pray; but believe confidently that your prayer has come before God, has reached its goal, and has already been granted. For it has been offered in the name of Christ and has been concluded with the amen with which Christ Himself here confirms His Word.

From *Sermons on the Gospel of John, Chapters 14–16* (Luther's Works 24:393–94)

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary His mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. MATTHEW 2:10–11



The Epiphany of Our Lord



These Magi here teach us the true faith. After they heard the sermon and the word of the prophet, they were not idle or slow to believe—and look at the obstacles and hindrance they faced! First, they made a mistake and came to Jerusalem, the capital, and did not find Him. The star disappeared. . . . Moreover, they were frightened They underwent a good, strong battle for their faith. . . . The light of nature and the light of grace cannot be friends. Nature wants to perceive and be certain before it believes. Grace believes before it perceives. For this reason, nature does not go further than her own light. Grace joyfully steps out into the darkness, follows the mere word of Scripture, no matter how it appears; whether nature holds it true or false, [grace] clings to the Word.

From the *Church Postil*, sermon for Epiphany on Matthew 2:1–12
(Luther's Works 76:102–3)

And behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

MATTHEW 3:17



The Supreme Preacher



He is the supreme Preacher, preaching from the highest and greatest pulpit—from heaven. Because He is the supreme Preacher, His sermon is accordingly the highest sermon, and no more sublime sermon has come into the world than this one, which the almighty, eternal, merciful God delivers concerning His equally omnipotent, beloved Son, saying, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* . . . So, likewise, the greatest Student and Hearer of this sermon is the Holy Spirit Himself, the Third Person of the divine Majesty. These are all sublime indeed—Preacher, Sermon, and Hearer—and there can be none greater. This is why the dear angels keep silence and do not make themselves heard. Rather, they are listening to the supreme Preacher: God, the almighty Father, and what He is preaching concerning His beloved Son, with whom He is well pleased. . . . But now you may say: "What good does it do me? Christ is God's Son, begotten of the Father in eternity, conceived by the Holy Spirit without sin and born true man of the Virgin Mary. . . . But I am a poor sinner, conceived and born in sin. Therefore, because of my sin, surely my Baptism will not be such a glorious occasion?" You

should by no means speak or think like this Rather, you should not separate your Baptism from Christ's Baptism. You must come with your Baptism into Christ's Baptism so that Christ's Baptism is your Baptism and your Baptism Christ's Baptism, in every respect one Baptism.

From *Two Beautiful and Comforting Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther*
(Luther's Works 58:361-62)

January 7

And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But He answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” MATTHEW 4:3-4



The God of Life



ere Christ gains the victory and teaches [us] how to gain the victory—because God is to be preferred to food, for He is not a God of the belly, but the God of life, just as He proves on the basis of Moses that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word,” etc. (Deuteronomy 8:3). Therefore, man possesses not only this life of the body by means of bread, but also the present life and the life to come in the Word or in God. This temptation is one of greed and of caring for this life so that you neglect the Word of God.

From *Annotations on Matthew* (Luther's Works 67:25-26)

“If you knew Me, you would know My Father also.”

JOHN 8:19



To Know the Father

No not begin backwards, or from above, attempting to know the Father beforehand. You will fail. But do this. Close your eyes, and say: “I know nothing of God or of the Father unless I come here and listen to Christ.” For anything preached or invented outside this Man’s Word, no matter what it may be or how sublime it may sound, is not the Father, but remains blindness, error, yes, the devil himself. “If you knew Me, you would know My Father also. But if you do not know Me, you also know nothing about the Father; for He has declared that He wants to be recognized through the Son.” The Father takes us away from all universities, from the laws of all wise people, from the lives of all the saints, from all religions, faiths, and doctrines, from all monastic cowls and tonsures, and says: “He who would know Me, the Father, must give ear to Christ, the Son.”

From *Sermons on the Gospel of John, Chapters 6–8* (Luther’s Works 23:351)

*“For the gate is narrow and the way is hard
that leads to life.”*

MATTHEW 7:14



The Christian's Narrow Path



he life of a Christian is as hard as if he were walking on a narrow path, in fact, on nothing but razors. Beneath us in the world is the devil, who is continually snapping at us with his jaws in order to bring on impatience, despair, and murmuring against God. In addition, the world is advancing on us, and it refuses either to yield to us or to let us pass. And around our neck lies our own flesh. Thus we are hemmed in on every side. The way itself is so narrow that it would be difficult enough even if there were no dangers or obstacles in the way. Nevertheless we have to go through or become the property of the world and the devil. Think about this, and guide yourself accordingly. If you want to be a Christian, then be one. It will never be any different. You will never make the way any wider But let this be your comfort: first, that God is standing next you; and second, that after you have gone through, you will enter a beautiful and wide room.

From *The Sermon on the Mount* (Luther's Works 21:245-46)

I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 3:8



Where Our Treasure Lies



Therefore, as the dear children and heirs of God, we ought to glory in neither our wisdom, nor strength, nor riches, but in this, that we have the “pearl of great value” (Matthew 13:46), the dear Word, through which we know God, our dear Father, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent (John 17:3). That is our treasure and heritage, and it is sure and eternal and better than all worldly possessions. Whoever has this treasure may let others gather money, live riotously, be proud and haughty. Let him not be troubled by such things, though he be despised and poor in the eyes of the world. But let him thank God for His inexpressible gift (2 Corinthians 9:15) and pray that he may abide by it. . . . St. Paul was an unworthy, miserable man on earth, and the devil and the world assailed him most violently. To God he was a dear, worthy man. He was so poor, too, that he had to provide for himself with the work of his hands. And yet, despite such great poverty, he was richer than the emperor in Rome, though he had no other riches than the knowledge of Christ, in comparison with which, he says (Philippians 3:8): “I count all things (nothing on earth is excluded) but loss and refuse.”

From *Commentary on Psalm 23* (Luther's Works 12:161-62)

*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness
to everyone who believes.*

ROMANS 10:4



Justified through Faith



Outside of Christ there is no blessing or justification, not only because of the Law but also because there is no other faith. God wants to keep His promise made to Abraham, to whom He promised blessing for all the world in his Seed and in no one else's seed (see Genesis 22:18). Therefore, He will not sanction a new or different faith for anyone, or let His promise be a lie or recall it. Therefore, faith in Christ justifies, as Paul says, "Christ is the end of the Law; whoever believes in Him is righteous" (Romans 10:4). What does that mean? Nothing else than that all who believe in Christ are justified through faith and receive His Spirit and grace. With that there is an end of the Law, so that he is never under the Law.

From the *Church Postil*, sermon for New Year's Day on Galatians 3:23–29 (Luther's Works 76:13–14)

*God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God,
and God abides in him.*

1 JOHN 4:16



The Picture of Love

If we were to talk for a long time about how love is a high, noble quality in the soul, the most precious and perfect virtue of all—as the philosophers and teachers of works do—that is all nothing compared to what he loudly pours forth, saying, “God Himself is love, and His essence is nothing but pure love.” If someone wanted to paint God accurately, then he would have to find a picture that is nothing but love, since the divine nature is nothing other than the fiery furnace and ardor of love, which fills heaven and earth. In turn, if someone could paint and picture love, then he would have to make a picture which is not artistic or human, not angelic or heavenly, but God Himself. So the apostle can paint things here in such a way that he makes out of God and love just one thing. He does this to coax and draw us through this noble, precious, and delightful picture all the more to strive also to have love for one another and to be on our guard against envy, hatred, and dissension.

From Several Beautiful Sermons from 1 John (Luther's Works 78:371)

*Little children, let us not love in word or talk
but in deed and in truth.*

1 JOHN 3:18



The Pretense of Sanctity



he sectarians today . . . have abandoned Christ, chopped down the tree, and subverted the foundation. Therefore they build on the sand (Matthew 7:26) and cannot build anything except wood, hay, and stubble (1 Corinthians 3:12). They make a magnificent show of love, humility, and the like. But in fact, as John says (1 John 3:18), they do not love in deed and in truth but in word and speech. They also make a pretense of great sanctity, and by this pretense of sanctity they impress people into supposing that their works are wonderful and are pleasing to God. But if you shine the light of the Word on them, you will discover that they are mere trifles having to do with silly and meaningless matters. . . . Therefore it is as necessary that faithful preachers urge good works as that they urge the doctrine of faith. For Satan is enraged by both and bitterly resists them. Nevertheless, faith must be implanted first; for without it one cannot understand what a good work is and what is pleasing to God.

From *Lectures on Galatians* (1535) (Luther's Works 27:52–53)

*So also faith by itself, if it does not have works,
is dead. . . . I will show you my faith by my works.*

JAMES 2:17-18



Praise for Noah's Faith

Noah is praised as an example for us because he did not have a dead faith, which is actually no faith at all, but a living and active faith. He is obedient when God gives him a command; and because he believes God both when He gives a promise and when He utters a threat, he painstakingly carries out God's direction in regard to the ark, the gathering of the animals, and the food. The particular praise of Noah's faith is that he stays on the royal road; he adds nothing, changes nothing, and takes nothing away from God's directive but abides completely by the command he hears.

From *Lectures on Genesis* (Luther's Works 2:77)

*Christ Jesus . . . became to us wisdom from God,
righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

1 CORINTHIANS 1:30



To Know Christ



You may ask, “What does it mean to know Christ? Or, what does He bring us?” Answer: You learn to know Christ when you comprehend the words of the apostle recorded in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “Christ was given to us by God to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.” You comprehend this fully when you realize that all your wisdom is damnable stupidity, your righteousness damnable unrighteousness, your purity damnable impurity, your redemption miserable damnation; and when you thus discover that before God and all creatures you are actually a fool, a sinner, an unclean and condemned man, and when you show not only with words but also with all your heart and your deeds that you are left with no other comfort and salvation than the fact that Christ is given you by God and that you believe in Him and partake of Him, whose righteousness alone can preserve you, as you appeal to it and rely on it.

From *Exposition of the Lord’s Prayer for Simple Laymen* (Luther’s Works 42:58)