**Advent Theme: Benediction.**

**December 4th, 2024 Midweek Advent I**

**Text: Numbers 6:22-24** 0751

**Theme: Benediction: Jesus Keeps Us.**

May the Advent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, humble your hearts and minds to worship Him in spirit and in truth remembering all His benefits. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: During the season of Advent and Christmas it is customary, while preparing for the celebration of our Lord’s birth and looking forward to His second Advent, to think back on all the things that God, through His Son, has done for mankind. For each and every one of us. Can we even count all of them? David said the same and marveled at the grace of almighty God: *“Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.” (Ps. 40:5)* The blessings and benefits given unto men, specifically Christians, is beyond what they can grasp fully. It is beyond our comprehension, for they proceed directly from the throne of almighty God, and are therefore eternal truths which we cannot know in full. However many of them are described in Scripture and even well known by us, for they are the very foundation of all that we believe. And thus, as I began preparing for tonight’s sermon I began to think of the current conception of Christmas in this world, and how much of the secular view of Christmas has crept into the church’s conception of Christmas. The holiday is now viewed more as a time of greed and expectation of receiving gifts from those around us. Many think endlessly about what they might receive from their parents or their friends and less what the day of Christmas is truly about.

This led me to think of the many gifts which we have received from God on a daily basis, the benefits and blessings of God upon His children. It is most true that Christians are the most blessed and benefitted people on the face of the earth. No other person or group of people can make the claim that they have received greater or more numerable gifts than the Christian can boast of. For God’s hand is never slack, it is never shortened, for He is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. He abundantly blesses us each and every day, and these things are spelled out and endowed upon us each and every worship service, often without us even thinking of what we are receiving. Many would point to the sermon as the most important part of the service, others might say the Bible readings, the hymns, or even some certain part of our liturgy. And while these are all important and necessary parts of our worship service, I believe that one of the most important is that which often goes unnoticed because it occurs right at the end of the service, and that is the benediction. It has become to many more of a marker of the end of the service than any actual benefit being derived therefrom. However, it is the moment in the service when the greatest benefit is being imparted to us, a confirmation of sorts of all that has gone before. The word benediction means: “to confer a blessing.” And this is not just some blessing pronounced by a man to other men, but a blessing imparted by God to us sinful men. It is the actual imparting of necessary spiritual and bodily blessings to all who receive it in faith. Thus we will use as our Advent theme: Benediction, looking specifically at the benediction pronounced by God in the Old Testament through His servant Aaron to the Old testament Church, Israel. We will do so by viewing these benedictions in the light of Christ’s Advent into the world. Let us then see the first of these benefits in our text for this evening which is found in the sixth chapter of the book of Numbers, beginning at verse twenty two.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O dearest Christ child, Thou who didst come to rescue and redeem mankind, we humbly fall before Thy manger and worship and praise Thee in recognition that Thou art indeed the greatest benediction which could ever be given to sinful man. Through Thee all nations of the earth are blessed and receive the greatest benefit. Through Thy work Thou hast turned away the wrath of God the Father toward sinful man, and thus hast turned His face toward us with pity and grace, from whence proceed all good gifts. We implore Thee, O Savior, to do as Thou hast so long promised, through Aaron, his sons, and all faithful pastors and teachers, to bless us, Thy children, through faith, by keeping them in both body and soul. Give us all that we need daily for this life, keeping us from harm, comforting us when we weep, feeding us, clothing us, and evermore tending to our necessities. Likewise, keep us the true faith in Thee and Thy work, that we may be Thy children throughout our lives and die in comfort and peace believing in salvation through Thy name. Help us to remember from whence these gifts come, so that we be thankful children, not spoiled and ungrateful. Grant us these things, O Lord, for Thine own merit’s sake. Amen.

Dear Christians let us learn at the manger of Jesus’ benediction, hearing first that we are:

1. **Kept in body.** The first blessing that we receive in the Aaronic benediction is that we are kept by God. It may seem that the time of Advent is a strange time for a study of the benediction that we hear every Sunday throughout the year, but be it noted that these blessings are only possible because Jesus was born into this world from a virgin, becoming man and redeeming us from the corruption and guilt of sin. It is in view of that day, and all that Christ accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection, that all gracious blessings are poured out upon us. Indeed none of them would be given unto us if God had not taken pity upon us and given us a Savior. According to the Law, there are no graces, no blessings due to us in any fashion, but only misery, sorrow, tears, and the like. No good thing would ever be given us, truly we would not even have earthly lives at all, without God’s grace in view of Christ’s coming into human flesh to redeem us. Thus each and every tiny little good that we receive every day of our lives may be to us like a little Christmas, for each and every day God gives us gifts for our bodies which are given only for the sake of our Lord’s birth. In the Garden of Eden, at the moment of man’s sin, all good was taken away, and all that remained was shame, guilt, corruption, sin, and death. But then a promise was given, we hear: *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:15)* This is the first promise that God would send a Savior who would save mankind from sin, death, and the devil, and it was in looking forward to that event that God would give all good gifts to men in the Old Testament. And after Christ came it was in looking back at that event that God gives all good gifts to men in the New Testament. James says: *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (Jms. 1:17)* Notice how James directly ties the good and perfect gifts of God with His unchangeable nature. This is because the gifts which He gives unto sinful men are according to His unchanging nature concerning grace and mercy through the gift of His Son Jesus Christ. This is the reason why Isaiah says: *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given.” (Is. 9:6)* He is the first gift of many, given in eternity from whence flows every other gift given by God.

And thus everything that God gives unto us on a daily basis for the welfare and support of our bodies and lives are given in view of the Advent of our Savior into this world and His subsequent work of redemption in our behalf. Thus every time we eat a meal, enter a warm and cozy home, hug our parents and family, have a faithful and loving spouse, put on our clothes and shoes, go to work, drive our cars, among innumerable other things we may think of Christmas Day and the greatest of all gifts. This is one of the reasons why we exchange gifts during the Christmas season, in recognition of all that God has given us graciously for the sake of His Son’s Advent. And it must be said that these gifts, all of them, are given in grace, for we do not deserve the least of them, we are in no wise owed them, but He keeps us in our bodies preserving us in our lives until He sees fit to take us from this life to eternal life. All this is summed up by the prophet Jeremiah when he said: *“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” (Lam. 3:22-23)* Like unto James, Jeremiah directly ties the mercies of God with His faithfulness. This means that God gives gifts out of the faithfulness to His promise to send the Messiah for our sins. And thus one of the things that should enter our thoughts as we hear the benediction each Sunday is the thought that God keeps us in our bodies because of Christmas Day. What a wonderful thought to have the whole year through!

Let us then hear secondly that we are:

1. **Kept in soul.** The servant of Christ, Jude said: *“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.” (Jude 24)* Jude knows from whence our preservation in the faith which saves a soul flows. It is not from some inner strength, faithfulness, or conviction, but it is due to that little infant who lies in the manger. It is due to the Savior alone that we remain in the faith, so that we may enjoy all the gifts of God in perfection in heaven, for all His gifts are comprehended in the gift of His Son for the salvation of man. In speaking of the Church the prophet Isaiah said: *“In that day sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it: I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.” (Is. 27:2-3)* We are the souls who receive the benefit of Christ’s coming in the flesh; is there any good thing He will withhold from us? Will He not care for the faith of His children, will He not water them every moment, and keep them night and day? Indeed He will. He is beside us and with us at every moment guarding our hearts and minds. He chastises us when we stray. He seeks us out when we wander. He upholds us by His gracious promises, for it is in the promises of a Messiah, a Savior from sin and death, wherein faith is founded and remains intact until the last day. That promise to Adam and Eve so long ago, fulfilled in time at Christ’s birth in Bethlehem is the very thing upon which faith is preserved. What if we were to neglect worship at the time of Advent or Christmas, or any time of the year for that matter? What would happen to us? We would cease receiving and hearing the promises and would therefore fall. The fall is not due to some unfaithfulness on the part of God, not of some lack of effort on His part, but due to our own unfaithfulness, because we neglect the promises of God in His Son Jesus Christ and forget all His benefits. We forget that the gifts given are from Him, we forget that faith itself is a gift, and that the preserving of that faith is another gift. We might begin to imagine that God owes us salvation for our “many wonderful works”; but grace knows of no such merit of reward. God’s promises are comprehended not in us, but in Christ Jesus the Savior born in humility at Bethlehem.

Thus it is, dear Christians, that when we hear the Aaronic benediction which is spoken each and every Sunday, or the benediction of St. Paul which we will hear at the end of the service tonight, that we remember what it is that is being spoken of and that is the conferring of blessings upon us, direct from God almighty. Do not pass by these words without remembering that little infant laid in a manger. Celebrate Christmas this year in a new way, in a different manner than that we are used to. Celebrate Christmas in view of everything God has done, still does, and will do for keeping us in both body and soul. Come to the manger of Christ our Savior in a new way, come in humility and praise for all His benefits. Come hearing the words: The Lord bless thee and keep thee. Amen.