

The Third Sunday in Advent

Gaudete · Middle School · Parent Edition

For the parent: Read each part aloud and work through the questions together. Your answers are printed in blue italics, so no preparation is needed. Your child uses the Student Edition.

Step 1 Understand the Collect

Most collects follow a five-part pattern: the **address** (the One to whom we pray), the **reason** (what God has done or promised), the **petition** (what we ask), the **purpose** (what we hope will result), and the **ending** (the closing that names the Trinity).

Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

1. Mark each part of the collect. Which parts are missing?

***Answer:** Address: "Lord Jesus Christ." Petition: "we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts." Ending: "for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit." Both the reason and the purpose are missing. The prayer is almost all petition, like a cry for help.*

2. To which Person of the Trinity is this collect addressed?

***Answer:** To the Son. He is named outright in the address, "Lord Jesus Christ," and the ending confirms it.*

3. By what means does the collect ask Jesus to lighten our hearts?

***Answer:** "By Your gracious visitation," that is, by coming to us. Jesus does not lighten our hearts from a distance. He comes, and today He comes in His Word and Sacraments.*

Step 2 Understand the Gospel

Read the Gospel on your own.

Matthew 11:2-11

2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples **3** and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" **4** And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: **5** the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. **6** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? **8** What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. **9** What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' **11** Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

1. John had preached that the Christ would come with an axe and a winnowing fork (Matthew 3:10-12). Now John sits in Herod's prison. Why might he ask this question?

***Answer:** Jesus' quiet works of mercy did not look like the judgment John had announced, and John himself was not set free. Scripture does not say whether John asked for his own sake or for his disciples'. Either way, the question went to the right place: to Jesus.*

2. Why does Jesus answer with a list of works instead of a simple "Yes"?

Answer: The list echoes Isaiah's promises of what the Messiah would do (Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1). Jesus points John to Scripture being fulfilled before his disciples' eyes. Faith rests on God's Word, and here that Word is coming true.

3. What does "blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (v. 6) mean?

Answer: To be offended is to stumble over Jesus because He does not act the way we expect. Blessed are those who trust Him anyway.

4. Jesus says the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John (v. 11). How can that be?

Answer: John stood at the doorway, pointing to Christ before the cross. Those in the kingdom now know the cross and the empty tomb and receive Christ's gifts. Greatness in the kingdom is a gift, not an achievement.

Step 3 Find the Collect in the Gospel

1. Find at least two places where the collect's words appear in the Gospel. Explain each one.

Answer: "Hear our prayers" matches John sending his question and Jesus answering (vv. 2-4). "Lighten the darkness of our hearts" matches John in prison with a troubled heart, and "the blind receive their sight" (v. 5). "Gracious visitation" matches Jesus' works of mercy and the good news preached to the poor (v. 5). Any two, well explained, are enough.

2. The collect calls Jesus' visitation "gracious." How were His works in verse 5 gracious?

Answer: None of those people earned healing or good news. Jesus came to the blind, the sick, the dead, and the poor with undeserved kindness, not with the judgment they deserved.

Step 4 The Small Catechism

The First Commandment. You shall have no other gods. **What does this mean?** We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Cross-reference. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

1. John asked, "Shall we look for another?" Why is that a First Commandment question?

Answer: It asks whom to trust above all things. Jesus answers by showing He is the promised One. To look for another would be to look for another god.

2. Luther names fear, love, and trust. Which one does verse 6 speak to most directly?

Answer: Trust. Not being offended by Jesus means trusting Him even when He does not match our expectations.

3. Proverbs says, "Do not lean on your own understanding." How does that fit John's situation?

Answer: John's own understanding may have told him things were not going as expected. Jesus pointed him away from his own reading of events to God's Word being fulfilled.

Parent note: the question they may ask. "Even John the Baptist doubted. Is it a sin to doubt?" Doubt is a weakness of faith and part of our sinful condition, and God does not want us to stay in it. Notice what John did with his doubt: he took it to Jesus. Jesus answered with His Word, not a scolding, and then praised John in front of the crowd. When we doubt, we go to the same place: Christ's Word, our Baptism, and His Supper, where He strengthens faith.

Step 5 Wrap It All Up

1. Write a short Advent collect of your own. Use all five parts.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible. Small Catechism quotation from Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, © Concordia Publishing House.

Answer: Answers will vary. Example: "Lord Jesus, You answered John in prison with good news. Come to us in our doubts and fears, that we may trust You above all things; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen."

Pray today's collect together. Then answer:

2. What does Jesus do for you when your heart is worried or unsure?

Answer: He hears my prayers and answers me with His Word. He comes to me, lights up my heart, and shows me that He is the Savior I can trust.