

An  
Opportunity for  
Hope,  
Peace,  
Joy,  
and Love  
Advent 2024





# *Welcome*

Advent is a time of waiting, a time of anticipation and an opportunity for Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Advent is the beginning of the Christian Story, the preparation, the hope that the birth of the Savior brings. And yet, we know the end of the story. We celebrate the beginning of the story with the end in mind.

We are preparing still for the coming of Christ, again and again. Jesus has already been born; he taught, lived, died, and rose from the dead. Within each Advent we live in the expectation and hope, not only of the here and now, but of the second coming. We learn, read, reflect and pray from Advent scripture lessons.

This booklet is prepared for Trinity and by our congregational members. Each devotional page reflects someone's thoughts and interpretations of the scripture listed for that day. It is divided into sections of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. Our hope is that you will find opportunity for fellowship with our Lord and affirmation within our community as you read and pray each day.

Blessings,  
Rev. Karen Eickhoff

# *The Coming of God*

Our God is the One who comes to us  
in a burning bush,  
in an angel's song,  
in a newborn child.

Our God is the One who cannot be found  
locked in the church  
not even in the sanctuary.

Our God will be where God will be  
with no constraints,  
no predictability.

Our God lives where our God lives,  
and destruction has no power  
and even death cannot stop  
the living.

Our God will be born where God will be born,  
but there is no place to look for the One who comes to us.

When God is ready  
God will come  
even to a godforsaken place  
like a stable in Bethlehem.

Watch.....  
for you know not when  
God comes.

Watch, that you might be found  
whenever  
wherever  
God comes.

Ann Weems

# Week One -- Hope

## Sunday, December 1 | Day 1

Read Jeremiah 33:14-16

Rev. Karen Eickhoff

*"The days are coming," declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise, I made to the house of Israel and to Judah.'" v. 14.*

God promised to fulfill His ancient promises to save His People through an anointed descendant of David. As Jeremiah prophesied the siege of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity, King David's line appeared as dead. However, Jeremiah looked beyond the Exile to a twig sprouting out of the dead tree. "...I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is right in the land." v. 15.

Jeremiah spoke eloquently of God's new day. The early Christians saw this day dawn in the birth of Jesus, the seed of David, the righteous branch, the just King. This prophecy brought hope in a hopeless situation. Often, when I look around, I see shadows of hunger. When I observe and listen to the world, I see shades of injustice and talk of war. When I consider my community, I see faces of despair and disappointment. To some people they are in a hopeless situation.

But there is hope in the Messiah. Just as this prophecy brought hope, we have hope today. How unexpected that a tiny, holy baby enters an uncertain world to become mortal like me. "The Lord our Righteousness."

**Ask:** Can you recall a place where you experienced hope in an unexpected way? What is one way you can be a prophet of hope to those around you during this Advent Season?

### **Prayer:**

God of Hope --- Help us to know your light in the midst of our exiles --  
Your love in our brokenness,  
Your comfort in our despair,  
Your grace in our suffering,  
Your presence when we feel alone.  
Amen



# Monday, December 2 | Day 2

Read Psalm 25: 1-10

Ron Sneed

As I write these words, our nation is in the midst of electing our next President, in a race that the front runner seems to change every day. Similarly, the balance of power in both the House and Senate is at stake. That is true all the way down to the local races as we decide who will govern. Many call this the election year which will determine whether democracy will continue to exist in our country. Negative attack ads dominate radio, TV and the internet. A number of issues are important, probably led by the economy. Least important seems to be integrity. We do not know what David was facing when he wrote this Psalm of Hope. He was king, he was not facing an election, but he was dealing with his relationship with God. At the same time, he was dealing with enemies who could attack and destroy his country, both in battle and by making false accusations. Does that sound familiar to what leaders are facing today? Think of all the millions being spent to get candidates elected or defeated today.

David begins this psalm by saying: *"I lift my soul to you O LORD, I trust in you, O my God."* Does it provide hope to each of us that we are able to place our trust in God? Which raises a very important question, If we cannot place our trust in God, to whom do we turn? Certainly not to any human being. David also asks God to show him God's ways, to guide him in truth, to show him God's love and mercy and not to remember his sin and his rebellion. Interesting that David did not ask for wisdom, as his son Solomon did. David also calls God good and says that all the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful. But there is a caveat, which we often miss: we must keep God's covenant. Does it provide hope to you that you can place your hope in God? Certainly we cannot place our hope in any human.

As I was gathering my thoughts for this devotional, I pulled off the bookshelf an old tattered NIV Study Bible that was retired, probably had not been opened in 5 years. As I opened it, inside the front cover, a card which read: "Good Morning! This is God! I will be handling all your problems today. I will not need your help. . . So have a Good Day! . . . But please keep in touch." Is that the God in whom you put all your hope and trust? A God who keeps his word and provides hope to each of us.

**Prayer:** Father, thank you that we can place our hope in you and know that you hear our cries and see and meet our needs.



## Tuesday, December 3 | Day 3

Read Isaiah 9:2-7

Johnny Teal

Life can change our lives in a second and our hope, our peace, the light in our lives can feel depleted. We may begin to feel like darkness is surrounding us. Isaiah gives us a picture of hope and promise, a beacon of light in the darkness. As we journey through Advent, this passage reminds us of the amazing transformation that Jesus' birth brings.

Isaiah 9:2 2: *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.* These words resonate deeply as we wait and anticipate Advent. We reflect on the light of Christ breaking through the darkest nights, illuminating our path and bringing joy.

Isaiah in 9:6 then declares...*And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* Each title emphasizes a different aspect of Jesus' role and character. He is our guide, our strength, our Father, and the one who brings true peace.

Preparing our hearts for Christmas, embrace the peace and hope that these verses promise. Reflect on how Jesus, the Prince of Peace, wants to reign in our lives today. With all the hustle and bustle, be still and let His light penetrate any darkness you face.

Let this Advent season be a time where you have heartfelt joy and peace that comes from knowing the child born to us is the Savior of the world. Welcome His light—let it shine through you.

**Prayer:** Father, may we be a beacon of light, shining through the darkness, experiencing the hope, peace and light of knowing Jesus. May his joy shine through us always. Amen



# Wednesday, December 4 | Day 4

Read Hebrews 6:19

Angela Strickland

In life's tumultuous sea, hope is our unwavering anchor, steadfast and firm. Hebrews 6:19 reminds us that hope is not a flimsy wish, but a steadfast promise – *“an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”* It's deeply rooted in the sanctuary of God's unwavering love and faithfulness. When trials come, and the waters get rough, as life happens, this hope doesn't waiver. It keeps us grounded, reminding us of God's constant presence and promises.

Imagine being in a stormy sea, waves crashing all around. An anchor holds you in place, preventing you from being swept away. That's what hope does! It binds us to God's promises, assuring us that no matter what we face, we're not alone. Hope is a reminder that beyond the curtain of our present struggles lies the inner sanctuary of God's presence, where we find peace and solace.

In those moments when life seems overwhelming, and the path ahead is unclear, cling to this hope. Let it guide you and give you strength. It's more than a mere sentiment; it's divine assurance that God is with us, leading us to a place of rest and security. Let this hope be your anchor, firm and secure, holding steady in the stormy seas of life.

**Prayer:** God, anchor our souls in your promise. Secure us with hope, unwavering and firm, guiding us through life's storms. Amen





# Thursday, December 5 | Day 5

Read Isaiah 40:1-5

Rachel McHenry

The beginning of today's passage from Isaiah is familiar to many of us: *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."* While we often consider the Christmas season a comforting time as we sip hot chocolate by the fire and indulge in our favorite holiday meals, we are reminded that this is not the type of comfort that God commands of us. Instead, we are told to "prepare the way for the Lord" by doing what may seem impossible: creating a path to God despite barren and desolate circumstances, leveling the hills and the valleys so that we are all standing on equal ground, and smoothing the ruggedness of our ourselves and our world. Essentially, we are to create and provide comfort to those who need it most, so that all are able to participate together in this time of hopeful waiting.

Hope may feel distant for those around and among us who are hungry, sick, lonely, or grieving this Christmas. Thankfully, we are part of a beautiful community of faith and we each bring unique talents and gifts to the table. No matter what our strengths are, there are ways that we can bring comfort to those in need this season. Some may feel called to provide warm meals to our neighbors who would otherwise go without, while others may feel led to visit with someone who longs for connection and companionship. When basic needs for sustenance, visibility, and love are met, we create room for the hope of Christ to enter into someone's life.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to use the unique gifts you have given us to provide comfort to our neighbors this Advent season, so that all may experience the hope we have in You. Amen.



## Friday, December 6 | Day 6

Read Psalm 130:5

Gary Mills

Psalm 130; V1. :*“Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice.”*...V5: *“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits and in His word I put my faith”*.

Patience in our society has become a scarce virtue. In our modern world, especially with its “artificial intelligence”, we expect near-instant answers and resolutions to whatever issue we are dealing with. We tend to have little patience for waiting for results -- specifically the results we want, like a cure to our illnesses or resolution of other serious issues. Unfortunately, life usually doesn't work that way, and neither does God. At one time or another, we can find ourselves struggling with illness, depression, guilt, grief, poverty or other serious issues that are not easily escaped. They can drag us into the deep depths of despair. In such times, we may wonder where to turn and if God even hears our prayers.

Fortunately, Psalm 130 speaks of one who has cried out to God from the depths, but who has placed his hope in the Lord for mercy and who is willing to wait with full confidence and expectation that God has heard his prayers. In other words, he learned to turn his cares over to the Lord, trust that God has heard him and cares for him, and that God will have mercy. Though we cannot always expect the rapid responses that we would like, we can learn from the psalmist to place our hope in God and wait patiently with our whole being, with the confidence and assurance that He hears us, will have mercy upon us and will love us through whatever issues we face.

**Prayer:** Father may we cry out to you for mercy from the depths and have the assurance of knowing that you are faithful to your promise to hear us and grant mercy upon us in whatever befalls us.  
Amen



# Saturday, December 7 | Day 7

Read Michah 5:2-3

## In Search of Our Kneeling Places

In each heart lies a Bethlehem,  
an inn where we must ultimately answer  
whether there is room or not.

When we are Bethlehem-bound  
we experience our own advent in his.

When we are Bethlehem-bound  
we can no longer look the other way  
conveniently not seeing stars  
not hearing angel voices.

We can no longer excuse ourselves by busily  
tending our sheep or our kingdoms.

This Advent let's go to Bethlehem  
and see this thing tht the lord has made known to us.

In the midst of shopping sprees  
let's ponder in our hearts the Gift of Gifts.

Through the tinsel  
let's look for the gold of the Christmas Satr.

In the excitement and confusion, in the merry chaos,  
let's listen for the brush of angel's wings.

This Advent, let's go to Bethlehem  
and find our kneeling places.

Ann Weems

**Family Activity:** Find a nativity or creche and physically go  
and kneel in front of it.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, We kneel in awe of the savior you sent  
into the world. This little town of Bethlehem that protected  
this tiny baby. We pray with the hope that this child will be  
reborn in our lives this season. Amen.



# *Week Two -- Peace*

## *Sunday, December 8 | Day 8*

Read Luke 2:8-15

Rev. Taylor Miskel

### *Truth is Peaceful*

When we experience things out of the ordinary or change, in fear our bodies can go into a fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response. This physical response can serve our bodies well during times of crisis when we need preservation and security for self-protection, other times we have to retrain our minds from laboring and automatically responding to slowing actions to consciousness, intentional breath, and fact checking the truth we are responding to.

Have you had a life changing encounter with God? This was quite the memorable experience for people that work daily with sheep to see an angel. Though we do not know their words, the angel recognized their first response: terror. However, it did not stop there, the angel continued to address the terror with truth by announcing the Messiah had come, fulfilling the prophecy of the Torah. This truth brought peace, as Jewish people had been waiting for years for this to happen, and left the shepherds anticipating their time to meet Jesus.

The truth brought peace.

We live in a world where anxiety and fear run rampant. Addressing our perceived realities with truth is an essential practice to help know what to do with the fears that arise in this world. His truth reminds us of his presence, his peace. This is our comfort during challenging times.

He is here, with us.

### **Consider Breath Prayer**

In the summarized words of author, Jennifer Tucker, Breath Prayer is not a new age cure for all anxiety nor self-healing practice but rather a short, mostly one-sentence prayer rooted in scripture. Find a quiet place and with the rhythm of your breath inhale and exhale the prayer below.

Inhale

“Fear might be near to me,”

Exhale

“But your truth, presence is my peace.”



# Monday, December 9 | Day 9

Read Isaiah 40:28-31

Johnny Richards

Nobody likes to wait. That's the reason we have microwaves, technology, self check-out lanes and other things to speed up life. However, there are times when we have no choice but to wait. If you go to the doctor, you will wait. If you go to get a haircut, you will wait. It is just a fact of life that there are times when we are going to be forced to wait, whether we want to or not.

We are now in a spiritual season of waiting. It's called Advent. A time to wait and prepare for the day to celebrate the birth of Christ, our Lord. What do you and your family do while you wait for the day to celebrate Christ's birth? Let me share with you three things we can do as mentioned in Isaiah, as we focus this day on peace.

First, acknowledge God is God. He is bigger than any problem we face, than any waiting we have to endure. Second, give your weakness to God because He is your strength. God is stronger than any problem we face. Third, rest in the fact that God can renew your energy. As we think about the holiday season we think about a new year. We need strength for the new year and a renewed sense of hope.

Many of us may have grown tired and weak over the past year. If so, let me encourage you to give what you are facing to God. He is indeed the author of hope and peace.

**Prayer of Peace:** Lord, help me to remember when I am weak and tired, to find peace and hope to restore my strength in you. Help me use this time of waiting to renew my hope and peace in you. Amen.



## Tuesday, December 10 | Day 10

Read Isaiah 26: 3-4, 12

Dr. Randy McKinney

In his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard writes: “Jesus brings us the assurance that the universe is a perfectly safe place for us to be.” How do you respond to his statement? Instead of brushing off the statement as naive, take a moment to wrestle with its possible truth. Then ask yourself this question: Am I characterized more by fear or peace?

The words of the Prophet Isaiah are part of a song of victory about the future. The lyrics speak of a day coming when God will keep his people in perfect peace (v. 2). But notice that the state of perfect peace emerges from minds being steadfast (v. 2). And this steadfastness results from placing trust in God (v. 2). Therefore, peace will result when God’s people trust God with their minds (thoughts) - a mental activity.

However, peace also results from trusting God in other activities. In fact, the Prophet declares that all of our accomplishments are really God’s accomplishments in and through us (v. 12). So peace comes from recognizing the partnership, albeit unequal, we share with our Creator and Sustainer. Therefore, peace results from trusting the Lord, our eternal rock, forever (v. 4) with all that we are - our hearts, minds, strength.

For us, the Prophet’s words are not a future victory song. Through the one born in Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace, we have received perfect peace, and the universe is a perfectly safe place for us to be.

**Prayer:** Everlasting Rock, I trust in you and am at peace. Indeed, nothing in all creation is able to separate me from your love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39). Indeed, I know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28). Amen.



# Wednesday, December 11 | Day 11

Read Matthew 2:1-18

Ashley Glimasinski

The nativity narrative in the gospel of Matthew goes beyond the birth of Jesus to give us a peek into the early life of his family. Despite a joyous birth and warm welcome from shepherds, travelers from afar, and faithful prophets in the temple, there was one person who was not celebrating. King Herod's jealousy of a newborn king turned a joyous celebration into a frightful drama. Overnight, Mary and Joseph's lives were turned upside down as they were forced to flee beyond the political reach of a cruel king who threatened the life of their son.

In modern terms, a refugee is someone who flees their home country due to fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Given the circumstances surrounding their flight to Egypt, the Holy Family met at least a couple of these grounds, and would be considered refugees today. What incredible hope it took for Joseph and Mary to pack up all of their belongings and flee, following the best path they knew in order to keep their family safe!

Millions of people around the globe are forced to make similar choices every year due to war, political unrest, and many other forms of violence and danger that prevail in a broken world. Refugees make hope their home. Like the family of the Christ child, they choose to press forward into the unknown with a hopeful expectation of a safer tomorrow.

**Prayer:** Jesus, We are in awe that you would choose an embodied existence on this earth not in luxurious palaces but in the form of a refugee fleeing for your life.

We are grieved that so many individuals and families today face the same terrifying choice that your family endured generations ago. We ask that you be near in their sorrow and in their anxiety.

We pray for your hope in the refugee camps, in the boats bracing the choppy waters of the Mediterranean, and at the borders that divide us.

Lord, be near. Amen.



# Thursday, December 12 | Day 12

Read John 1:1-14  
Mary Ann Lambert

## *The Light*

Have you ever been to a place you didn't want to leave? Maybe a beautiful mountain cabin or a grand hotel beside the ocean or a visit with loved one. It is hard to leave such wonderful places, but can you imagine leaving heaven? Jesus became flesh and left heaven to live on earth. Why? John tells us that Jesus is life and that life was the light of men living in darkness.

Our long sunny summer days have come to an end, quickly changing to long nights of darkness. When I was a young child I frequently visited my grandparents who lived in a farm house without electricity. After sundown, our only source of light was an oil lamp and the light from wood burning in the fireplace. When bedtime came my granddaddy would take an oil lamp to each room to be sure everyone was in place and all was well. Only then would he extinguish (blow out) his lamp and retire. My granddaddy was not the source of the light but he provided the light we needed. Why did my granddaddy do this? Because he loved us.

Why did Jesus leave heaven and come to a world whose people lived in darkness and did not recognize him. Because he loves us -- ALL of us. The ones who let his light shine in their lives and the ones who live in darkness. Jesus came into the world so that all who believe in him might become children of God and walk in the light. In this Advent Season and always, let us recharge our batteries so the light of Jesus' love will shine in our lives.

**Prayer:** Father, we rejoice in this season of love and thankfulness. Thankful that you love us so much that you sent Jesus to give us new life and light. We pray we will reflect this love and light in our life and that those in darkness will see your light and come to you.





# Friday, December 13 | Day 13

Read John 14:27

Brooks Warren

With our ability to get information instantly from all over the world, it is so easy to get upset about what is going on in our world. There are wars, violence, famine, natural disasters, anger and so much negativity that distracts us and tries to steal our peace. If we constantly focus on these things, we can easily walk around angry and discouraged. However, Jesus tells us in John 14:27 that we can respond differently.

Jesus is preparing his disciples for His ultimate death, resurrection and ascension. He was not going to be with them physically much longer, and they needed to know He was leaving them prepared for whatever they may face. He had promised the Holy Spirit and now He was promising Peace.

The world defines peace as the absence of conflict, worry or anxiety. This kind of peace is temporary. The peace Jesus is talking about here is the inner peace or calmness in your heart despite troubles. It does not depend on circumstances, nor does it get rid of worries or anxieties, but it gives you the ability to endure with great confidence that God will see you through.

Jesus promises us Peace. He tells us to not let our hearts be troubled and to not be afraid. So yes, we live in a crazy world sometimes and that can be scary, but our response should not be fear. We are promised Peace from Jesus Himself, and that is enough to overcome any of our fears.

**Family Question:** How is the peace that Jesus offers different than what the world can offer?

**Prayer:** Thank you for the assurance of Peace even when the world makes me afraid. May I feel your peace each and every day, and may I live in peace with everyone I meet. Amen



# Saturday, December 14 | Day 14

Read Philippians 4:7

Kayla Daffron

While the world often tells us that peace comes when everything is going smoothly, the peace of God stands firm even in changing times. It protects us, guarding our hearts from anxiety and our minds from worry. When we surrender our fears and concerns to Jesus, we open ourselves to receive His peace—a peace that remains steady, regardless of life’s storms.

But isn’t that so much easier said than done? As someone who has struggled with mental health for most of my life, I have spent hours begging God for an unfamiliar stillness that would finally calm my racing mind. With a combination of my faith in God and mental health resources, He was able to do immeasurably more with the new found peace in my life. I could finally breathe.

Inhale: The peace of Christ.

Exhale: My busy burdens.

This peace comes through a relationship with Christ. As we draw closer to Him in prayer and focus on His Word, we become more anchored in His promises. In His presence, our burdens become lighter, and our hearts are filled with calm assurance. Remember, God doesn’t expect us to have everything figured out; He simply calls us to trust Him. Let His peace be a reminder that He is in control, and He cares for us deeply.

## Prayer

Lord, fill us with Your peace that surpasses understanding. Help us to trust You fully and let go of our fears. Amen.

## Family Activity

Write worries on slips of paper and place them in a jar, “giving them to God”. Discuss feelings as a family and reflect through prayer.



# Week Three -- Joy

## Sunday, December 15 | Day 15

Read Romans 15:13

Denise Rogers

JOY! JOY! JOY!

I look forward to the Christmas season because of the joy I see on children's faces, the joy of getting together with family and friends that I may not see often. This is earthly joy or seasonal joy but I can have eternal and everlasting joy (inner happiness) based on a relationship with Jesus Christ. A relationship is established by spending time with someone. Are you like me in finding it harder in this busy and noisy world to spend precious time with the special people in your life? Even spending time praying and reading the scriptures might be difficult to fit into our busy schedules. Jesus loves me and wants me to spend time with Him. Only through knowing Him can I experience His joy. Realizing that I am precious to Him, that He forgives me of my sins, and that I will live forever with Him in heaven gives me hope, peace and joy! As this wonderful season of celebrating Jesus' birth approaches I will focus on the eternal and everlasting joy we have through knowing Him. Joy! Joy! Joy!

**Question:** Who is someone who has made a difference in your life? Take a few minutes to reflect on the positive impact they had on you. Consider spreading some holiday joy by sharing these thoughts with that person.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us recognize the ways in which we can give of ourselves for the betterment of our communities and our world. Thank you for your selfless, generous spirit. Teach us to love others as you have loved us and spread a joy that only comes through you. Amen.



# Monday, December 16 | Day 16

Read Isaiah 12:2-6

Carol Dobyns

About two months ago, I faced a life-threatening health crisis that manifested itself over a two-day period. I went from good health to life-saving surgery, time spent on a ventilator, 29 days in ICU, 9 days in the step-down unit which included four emergency surgeries. While this is a scary situation to read, I felt no fear but only the trust and love of God as described in Isaiah 12:2.

- When the ENT surgeon told me and my family that I would be undergoing emergency surgery within the next 15 minutes, I asked my husband to pray over me and the entire surgical team. I gained a level of trust and peace in God that I have never felt before drawing from the wells of salvation shared in Isaiah 12:3.
- The stability I felt in my relationship with God during this whole 38-day hospital stay never wavered no matter what setback I faced. I had perfect assurance that God was my salvation-whether I lived through the surgery or if I died. The peace I felt was through my trust in God as my source of salvation as stated in Isaiah 12:4.
- Knowing that my church family was praying for me, my family, and for my surgical and nursing team continued to give me strength to fight the repeated infection and have confidence that I would survive. We are reminded of this through this passage in Isaiah 12:2-6.
- Our world is unpredictable. One day, I was driving to Trader Joe's grocery shopping, talking, and texting co-workers, friends, and family including my four grandchildren. And the next day, I was rendered an ICU patient on a ventilator, and I was unable to walk, eat, drink, or speak for over 3 weeks. Yet, I knew that God had done glorious things with this health crisis as described in Isaiah 12:5.
- It is no small thing to trust in the Lord when facing such a life challenge. Placing my fears in God's hands gave me peace and the courage to share my experience with so many at the hospital who did not have trust in God. Sharing the love of TBC and all that my church was doing for me, my family and the hospital staff enabled me to let them know the glorious things God was doing in my life through this crisis. For many people, this was the first time they had heard about God in a real and honest way which is shared in Isaiah 12:6.

**Prayer:** Father, God, we praise you for your unwavering love and care for each of us. Thank you for the wells of salvation, for the glorious things you have done for each of us. We ask that you continue to show us your love in every situation we face. Give us the courage to share the love and good news of you with others we meet.



# Tuesday, December 17 | Day 17

Read Mark 1:1-18

Bobbie Furr

## JOHN CAME FIRST

So many times, we forget that John came first to tell us about Jesus. I believe that sometimes we leave John out of the Christmas story. This passage tells us that John came to prepare the way for Jesus.

During the Christmas season we especially need to take our place beside John and introduce someone to Jesus.

Let's think about what you and I need to do to be like John in introducing people to Jesus this Christmas.

We need to have a spirit of joy if we are going to let folks know about Jesus. Years ago, I made a commitment which I have to renew over and over again. I told God that I wanted to be a happy Christian.

I would be myself. I would be real. I wouldn't act any more or less spiritual than I felt. I wouldn't know all the answers and wouldn't even care that I didn't.

I would laugh a lot and have fun. I would be positive about people and life. I learned a little poem years ago that I have to repeat to myself right often. "It's a funny thing but true, the folks you don't like, don't like you."

And then I made another rule. I would not set up camp in my own wilderness. Life has brought me some keen disappointments. Some so vivid and hurtful that right now I can feel the pain of them. But I must move on.

And I try to stay in touch with God's special plan for me. God has a dream for you, and won't it be wonderful if you can hear him say someday -- "Here you are -- in flesh and blood -- the answer to the dream I always had for you."

There is a story of a wise old man whom boys like to taunt. One day they brought to him a little bird held in the closed hand of one of them. They asked the man if the bird was dead or alive. The man replied, "As you will, my son."

As to the kind of people we will be and the type of world we will have, God says, "As you will, my Child."

Which will it be for you?

**Prayer:** Dearest Lord, help me to remember that you are with me during times of adversity. Give me strength when I feel I have no more to give and help me find you in knowing that you are holding me. May I be in your will, not mine. Amen.



# Wednesday, December 18 | Day 18

Read Luke 1:46-56

Edythe McKinney

The angel Gabriel has just told Mary she is going to give birth to a son. He will be called the Son of God and reign over Jacob's descendants forever. What a bold message, particularly for a teenage girl, pledged to be married.

Anticipating a child is a time for joy and excitement, but it can be a bit daunting as well. Thoughts go to the future. Will he or she be healthy? Will the world welcome or reject him? What if I can't take care of him? You recognize a child will change your life—but to be told your child will change the world. That is an overwhelming responsibility!

What is Mary's response? She Rejoices; She glorifies the Lord!

She praises Him for allowing her to serve in this way.

She readily commits to fulfilling His words. Oh, that we would respond similarly when God delivers a message to us.

This young girl responds with faith, rather than doubt. She confidently trusts God for wisdom and guidance in raising the child.

She experiences the joy of his presence and provision, as she recalls God's promise keeping to her and her ancestors.

She trusts God's plan.

May Mary's Song in the first chapter of Luke encourage us to respond to God's assignments with faith, trust, confidence and joy. Let's take life's daunting experiences and turn them into occasions to rejoice!

**Prayer:** Our Heavenly Father thank you for sending your Son to save us. May our lives manifest the joy, faith and trust of Mary. May we share this with those around us. Amen



# Thursday, December 19 | Day 19

Read Luke 1:57-80

Matt West

Joy is a natural feeling during the advent season. As we celebrate the birth of our risen Savior, we're reminded of what true joy is and how He provides. Think of the joy Elizabeth and Zechariah felt at the birth of their son. How they believed and affirmed "*He is to be called John.*" Even when everyone wondered "*What then is this child going to be?*", they still trusted knowing "*the Lord's hand was with him.*" Zechariah's Song (v. 67-80) shows the holy spirit leading a father with joy as he trusted the Lord to lead and provide for his son.

Where does our Joy come from? Joy comes from His presence (Psalm 16:11), His strength (Nehemiah 8:10), His deliverance (Psalm 71:23), after grief and suffering (Psalm 30:5), and through our trials (James 1:2). In every situation we encounter, we will find joy; if we are present and we seek for joy. As we journey through the advent season together, let us all commit to seek joy. Even in situations where it seems impossible to find joy, remember the joy Elizabeth and Zechariah felt and be bold in your faith just as they were. Encourage those around you, pray for those who are hurting, and share the true joy of the season – the birth of our risen Savior!

Verse 80 states that "*And the child grew and became strong in spirit.*" Our hope for you is that as you seek joy, your faith and spirit will increase as you reflect on the true Joy that is found in Jesus!

**Prayer:** Our Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the gift of your son Jesus and the true joy we find in Him. Remind us that seeking joy and being bold in our faith honors you. Help each of us commit to seeking and sharing joy. Amen.



# Friday, December 20 | Day 20

Read 1 Samuel 17:32-37

Sam Spilman

In these verses, David demonstrated his unquestioning readiness to serve our Lord ... whatever the task. This complete trust in God allowed him to act without reservation.

David's enthusiasm to serve the Lord is clearly demonstrated in his encounter with Goliath. David's heart was committed to God, and his actions reflected deep faith and trust in God's power. When others were paralyzed by fear, David did not hesitate to step forward. This readiness was rooted in the belief that God had equipped him for the task that was before him.

David's joy in serving the Lord is evident through his quick response to the trial. Even as he faced a daunting and seemingly insurmountable challenge, David's joy was not based on his circumstances but on the opportunity to bring glory to God. He was eager to fight, not for personal gain, but to honor God's name.

After the victory, David did not boast of his own strength but gave all the glory to God, understanding that it was God who had granted him success. His heart was filled with joy because he knew his service was pleasing to God, and through his obedience, God was glorified.

How often do we lose the joy of serving God because we lack the complete trust that the Lord can use us for any task before us. When faced with a crisis, David did not have to "pray about it". He was already in communication with God and was ready to serve. He knew the Lord would be with him, ... regardless of the challenge.

**Prayer:** Lord, May we, your people, experience the joy of salvation and celebrate the coming of your son this season. Help us to be in such communication with you that we are ready to serve with joy. Amen.





# Saturday, December 21 | Day 21

Read Psalm 126:1-6

Jo Anne Harper

In these verses we compare the return from captivity in exile to a long-awaited harvest. The anticipated return to Jerusalem from exile had been so long that it seemed like a dream. In the land of dreams, we are all complete, well, vibrant and full of laughter and joy. Then we awake to realize that there is much to be done. There are tasks to complete, obligations to meet, the will of God to be confronted. How can we possibly accomplish all of this! Bring back the dream! Fill us again with gratitude as we acknowledge the amazing work you, God, have done in our lives.

Let us have joy as we realize that as toilsome as our lives may be and as many tears as we have shed, all will come back to us with thanksgiving and joy because of the seeds sown in God's love. What are these seeds and what are we sowing? Are they the words of God to encourage others, the actions we take toward our friends and family, and the seeds of gratitude for the gifts from God?

These verses remind us that with joy we will receive the fruits of our labor. What we have cast out with tears and uncertainty will be returned with great joy when we acknowledge God's promise of peace, laughter and joy upon the completion of doing His will. What great joy that will be!

**Prayer:** Dear God, you are our source of joy and receiver of our gratitude for the amazing gifts you give to us. Let there be great laughter and joy as we sow your seeds. Amen



# *Week Four -- Love*

## *Sunday, December 22 | Day 22*

Read Matthew 1:18-24

Madison Lawson

We all know that love is an action. You don't always feel love when you and your spouse fight, or when your kids don't listen. We even get frustrated with our pets when they mess up. If love was a feeling, we couldn't call ourselves loving. Today's scripture demonstrates love as an action. How many of us would've acted like Joseph? He found out that his soon-to-be wife was pregnant—an adultress. This would cause any feeling but love. However, Joseph didn't sit in his anger. Despite what he believed to be Mary's complete betrayal, he planned to quietly end their betrothal rather than publicly humiliate her. That alone shows great love in the action sense: choosing someone else's well being when our feelings are hurt. However, that's not where the story ends. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him that the child Mary's carrying isn't a betrayal—the child is the Messiah. The angel assures Joseph of Mary's faithfulness and tells him not to be afraid to marry her. So, Joseph does just that. He marries her as soon as he can. This story doesn't have an entirely happy ending though. Imagine what other people must've thought. People are mean now, and they were mean then. Joseph likely endured ridicule and mockery for marrying an “adultress.” Yet, he chose to love. He loved Mary and protected her, and he loved Jesus as though He were his own son. That is a love that goes beyond action.

**Challenge:** Today, your challenge is to take love as an action seriously. When you inevitably get angry over something, choose to love that person all the more. Pray that God would teach you to love as He does.



# Monday, December 23 | Day 23

Read Luke 2:1-15

Dr. Andy Jung

When we think about the Christmas story, fear isn't the first emotion that we feel. Usually, Christmas is filled with memories of family gatherings, joyful carols, and meaningful gifts. Yet, for the shepherds in the field, fear was the emotion that they initially experienced.

After the angels suddenly appeared to the shepherds and the "glory of the Lord shone around them," they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." (vs. 10-11)

Why was this significant? The shepherds were likely considered ordinary people, even overlooked in society. Yet, God chose them to receive the first announcement of Jesus' birth. The initial fear they felt was natural – encountering something beyond their understanding, something holy and powerful. But the angel's message of "Do not be afraid" reveals that God's presence, even when it surprises or unsettles us, ultimately brings peace and purpose.

So, do not fear. The Good News of Jesus is for ALL people. It is for the powerful and the voiceless. It is for the rich and the poor. It is for those with status and the marginalized. The birth of Jesus is a reminder that God sees us and desires to be with us. That's why Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. This Christmas, let the Good News of Jesus coming to be with us bring you comfort and peace even amid the chaos that we find in the world.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for Jesus and for wanting to be with us, no matter who we are. Help us to feel your peace and love in the birth of Jesus, who is our Emmanuel, God with us.



## *Tuesday, December 24 | Day 24*

Read Luke 2:16-21

Susan Burnette

The shepherds had just been told by God's angels that the Savior of the world had been born. Their immediate response was that "they hurried off" to search for Him. After finding the baby Jesus, they spread the good news to anyone who would listen that the long-awaited, long-ago prophesied about Messiah was finally here! Then, they returned, and they worshipped Him, and they praised and glorified God for His goodness and grace.

God knew before He created the world that humankind was going to need a Savior. Out of His deep, abiding, eternal love for us, He set the plan in motion for Jesus to come to earth to die for the sins of all humanity. John 3: 16 says that "God so loved the world that gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

May we, like the shepherds, "hurry off" to tell anyone who will listen about the love of God and the salvation they can have in Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we praise you for your amazing love for us and for sending Jesus to the whole world. Please ignite a passion in all of us to share the good news of salvation with others.



# Christmas Day

## Wednesday, December 25 | Day 25

Read I John 4: 7-16

Dr. Jeff Roberts

On this Christmas Day we are reminded that the most important gift we have ever received is the gift of love from God. As John reminds us, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son (Jesus) as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." The word love can be an underused and over used word. Sometimes we long to hear the word love from another. We may have a spouse, parent or child that rarely utter those wonderful words, "I love you." However, sometimes the word love can be overused and undervalued. In our English language we only have one word for love that can describe how we feel about our closest friend, a bar of chocolate or the Christmas present we received. Love can lose its power in our language and in our use of the word. Yet, the love described by John is a powerful word. It is a word that describes a conscious act of sacrifice on behalf of another. God sending Jesus is the definition of love in this passage. God makes an intentional choice of the will to love us before we loved God. God acts in a decisive and sacrificial way on our behalf. This is the meaning of love. John then adds, "*we ought to love one another*" and "*if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*"

On this Christmas Day and all days that follow, how can we make the choice to love one another? In many cases to love another will take more than emotion, feeling or affection. To choose to love is a just that, a choice we make toward another.

**Prayer:** On this Christmas Day, remind me Lord that you loved me and sent Jesus for me. Help me to learn to love others as I am loved by You that your love may be evident in my life. In the name of Jesus, the one who came for us, Amen.



## *The Work of Christmas*

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
    To find the lost,  
    To heal the broken,  
    To feed the hungry,  
    To release the prisoner,  
    To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among others,  
To make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman



