

Trinity Ecumenical Parish

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Advent Devotional 2022



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Dear friends in Christ,

As we enter into this season of Advent, the pages before you hold words, prayers, pictures, poems, questions and reflections that make up this year's Trinity Advent Devotional.

Inside, you'll find daily entries that begin on Sunday, November 27th and walk you through the days of Advent until Christmas. Each day holds an assigned Scripture reading followed by a devotional provided by different members of Trinity Ecumenical Parish. You are invited to grab a Bible and use this devotional on your own, with your family, or invite a few friends together.

Our hope and prayer is that this Advent devotional will be a way for you to make this Advent season one of connection and reflection. As we anticipate Christ's birth together, may we experience connection through the holy words we share.

Many thanks to the members who have shared their words this season. We offer special thanks to Lee Anne DeMonbreum for bringing to life this lovely devotional and supporting its development.

With peace and much hope this Advent season,
Pastor Sarah

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27— ROMANS 13:11-12

Do you know what time it is? Advent is all about preparing and getting ready - getting ready to celebrate the first coming of Christ at Christmas and getting ready for Christ to come again. For Paul, the end of time was coming soon. That is what this reading reflects - 'time to wake from sleep, salvation is near, the day is near, darkness to light'. Truth be told, we don't know when Christ will come again, but Paul says we should act as if Christ is coming tomorrow. If we did, we would put aside things that don't matter and instead focus on the things that do. I don't know about you, but I spend a lot of my energy and worry on things that really aren't all that important or significant when all is said and done. I remember the question sometimes asked: "If this were the last day of your life, what would you do, how would you act?" For most of us, there are a lot of unimportant things that would fall away so we could focus on what mattered the most. This is what Paul is encouraging us to think about - what is important to us, and why? And what does all of that have to do with Christ?

In the passage prior to this one in Romans, Paul reminds us to 'love our neighbor as ourselves'. This is the foundation for what we do and how we do it. This is what gives shape to our actions. Perhaps living as though Christ is coming soon helps us 'put on this armor of light'. Perhaps, living as though Christ is coming soon helps us turn our attention to the most important things. Perhaps living as though Christ is coming soon can help us to truly 'love our neighbors as ourselves'. Do you know what time it is?

PRAYER: Come, Lord Jesus. Come, and set us free from all that doesn't really matter so we can be free to love our neighbors as we love ourselves - as you love us. Amen, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

-Richard Carbaugh

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28— ISAIAH 11:1-3

We moved to Roanoke on a cloudy, raw December day in 2003. Leafless branches shuddered in the wind as movers trudged back and forth along the sidewalk bearing the weight of our furniture and seemingly endless boxes of belongings.

As the weather improved, Stephen and I began eating lunches on our front porch where we watched spring unfold right before our eyes. The most spectacular herald of the season was our Bradford Pear. Its gorgeous white puff-ball blossoms were a sight to behold. How we looked forward to that signal of the season each year!

And then, disaster happened...at 2 AM in 2006, lightning struck our beautiful tree. A crew from the city came the following day to assess damages to house, and vehicles, and, of course, to saw the tree all the way down to the ground. Yes, I cried; sobbed, if truth be told. Houses and cars can be repaired relatively quickly; but not so with magnificent trees.

But, by the spring of 2022, we were still able to enjoy eating lunches on our front porch, admiring the beautiful snow-white flowers on the original Bradford Pear that was miraculously resurrected from that inch-high stump cut by workers so many years ago. It was a tiny little toothpick shoot at first...an unbelievably small, skinny sliver. Now, its wide branches stretch beyond the cable wires.

But, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” This verse gives me faith, confidence, and hope. What is small can become great and strong. Such it is with God’s Kingdom. God made it possible in the past; God makes it possible now.

-Jackie H. Stanley

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29— ISAIAH 64:1-2

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, in this time of trouble and unrest in our world, we look to you for strength and guidance. Come to us and be with us in our hearts and minds, in all our being – we need you now! We watch and wait for your arrival.
Amen

Scripture Isaiah 64:1-2

- 1) Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tumble before you!
- 2) As when the fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down and make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!

Devotional

Part of a lament by the third writer of Isaiah toward the end of the book, God's people are looking for Him to come with power and blaze a path before Him – look at the imagery of the words in the text! With the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and the surrounding lands, the subsequent forced exile and captivity in Babylon and no restoration coming soon, they have felt abandoned by God and wonder where He is. Remembering how He performed mighty acts of deliverance to free them from bondage in Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land, ascending to dominate the region, they now want the same kind of display from God to assure He is still with them, even though they have turned away in the past and now want to be reconciled.

How ironic that the messiah arrives, not as the expected and longed for warrior king with brilliant flashes of lightning and loud claps of thunder to show his might and put fear and awe in people with conquering deeds, but as a little baby born to common folk in an overflow space with livestock.

Give us ears to hear and eyes to see. Come Lord Jesus!

-Bill Clutz

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30— ISAIAH 64:4

From ancient times, no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any god but you who acts on behalf of those who wait for him!

I am a solitary night walker, a habit which certainly worries my neighbors. It is something I have done for most of my adult life and need in the most basic way for it is in that dark silence that I find God. I cannot see Him or hear Him, but I know He is there.

I observe the extreme vastness and majesty of the night sky with its predictable march of stars through the seasons, the phases of the moon, and the appearances of the planets. He set them all in place and patterned their motion. How can one witness this creative wonder and power without perceiving Him? And in those moments, I also experience how infinitely small I am in the great multitude present now and those gone before me. Yet even in that most humbling reality I know with confidence that He's walking there with me, giving me full attention. How can this be? It is incomprehensible yet I truly believe.

Clouds sometimes hide the stars from my sight, and difficulties cause my faith to sag, and disappointments foster anger. Yet just as the stars are still there on those cloudy nights, God still surrounds me in my moments of doubt and fear. Even in the darkest moments of the heart when I *feel abandoned, I know I still walk in His promised presence. It is not with eye or ear that I know Him, for it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Father is revealed.*

Though a neighbor peeking out of a window may see my solitary figure, I am not alone. I hold communion with the One who walks and acts on the behalf of all His children. I walk knowing He loves this little sheep as He loves His whole flock.

-Linda Worman

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1— PSALM 80:1-3

*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and
Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!
Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

Perhaps the most beloved image of God in the Bible is Shepherd. We see God as the One who guides and protects us on our way and who seeks us out when we get lost. This psalm calls on God in a time of trouble and despair, when enemies are threatening. It also hints at the first time God is called shepherd in the Bible, Genesis 48:14-16. The elderly Jacob, who had been renamed Israel by God, is dying, and his son Joseph asks him to bless his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. In his blessing, Jacob/Israel says “The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys, and in them let my name be perpetuated and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow into a multitude on the earth.” (Jacob’s favorite sons were Joseph and Benjamin, the sons of his beloved wife Rachel, so here their tribes stand for the whole nation of Israel.)

From times of trouble in ancient Israel to Jesus’ day to today, we look to God for guidance and help. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...” (Psalm 23) and “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11) are always true. No wonder shepherds were the first people to hear the joyous news of Jesus’ birth, despite being on the lowest rungs of society. How has the Lord been your shepherd in your life?

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for being our Good Shepherd. Watch over us as we wait for your coming this Advent season. Amen.

-Gael Chaney

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2— 1 CORINTHIANS 1:5-8

In his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul hears of the difficulties and faith challenges they were having. He reminds them first that the Holy Spirit through the Gospel has given them faith and hope beyond measure. Through the Holy Spirit they have assurance of salvation. Regardless of this inner comfort, the Christians at Corinth were continually faced with doubt-creating worldly influences.

Put ourselves in the listener's ear. Think of hearing your conscience saying "everyone's doing it" and thinking it must be okay. Besides, I can follow any earthly trend I want! Apparently, it is that mindset that Paul was trying to correct and guide in this text and the rest of this chapter. Through encouragement and reminders Paul was asking them to only follow the truth found in God incarnate. Paul told them that God's Word would sustain them if they stood fast and waited for the "revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ".

Imagine Paul writing to us living in a world of evil and sinful influences. What doubts might we be wrestling with? What would he say today? Would we follow his advice and truly be assured of his conclusion if we followed it? Well, I believe Paul would say the exact same words to us today as he did to the people of Corinth.

Through our baptism we have been given special gifts and Christ living within us. Each time we stand or kneel before the rail to receive the Holy Sacrament we accept and take on Christ within us. Having that gift, we can live with the assurance that as we wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ He will sustain us. We will be tempted by influences of this world, but the voices of "everyone does it" become silent and we hear the chorus of angels singing Hosanna in the highest.

Our Lord Jesus Christ reveals Himself in the words, actions and guidance found in Scripture. Read, study and stay true to Scripture and then we will have the assurance that we will be able to stand guiltless before God on the last day. All this as we wait and prepare once again for the true Word to be born -- in our hearts.

Prayer: Lord of Heaven and earth, baby born in a stable, we wait. Help us to prepare to receive you in our hearts once again this Christmas. May your presence be a shining light for all to see you as the Savior of all, especially those who need hope and assurance of being able to stand blameless before you. We ask this all in the name of your son the baby Jesus. Amen

-Les Daenzer

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3— PSALM 9:1-2

2022- It's been 16 years since I was baptized - moving from (and with) my Jewish heritage into the awesome love of Jesus. Reading what I wrote then - now knowing the joy of Christmas Eve at my church home, with my church family - the now familiar carols and candles - the feeling of deep richness in my soul as I leave my church in the quiet glow of knowing Jesus - This year and always I thank God for God's many blessings - and especially for Jesus in my life.

2006- This is my second Christmas as a Christian, and I anticipate it as eagerly as a small child. Not for the gifts and glitter of the Christmases I have known in the past—but for the joyful wonderment of Jesus' birth.

I remember many, many Christmases past that were full of parties, decorating, cookie making, and last-minute shopping. They were great fun. But they were also filled with questioning in my heart as I secretly puzzled over what all this activity could really mean. Asking my Christian friends, I received many, many different answers, but they always came back to the main concept: the birth of Christ. Of course, I knew that Christmas was Christ's birthday, and I truly thought I knew what those words meant. But it always seemed to me that I was missing something, some central understanding that would *really explain Christmas to me. And so I would wait for the next year while I thought about what color I would decorate with and searched for new ornaments for the tree.*

I received my first Communion on Christmas Eve last year. Scarcely able to breathe, my heart almost bursting with awe, I realized for the first time the enormous magnitude of Christ's birth. The old, familiar carols suddenly had new meaning. The manger had become real. My first Christmas, like that of a wide-eyed child, gave me the true gift of Christmas—to celebrate the birth of Christ in my life.

This year I don't think I'll be decorating as much as before. Of course, we'll still have a tree and lots of pretty things around the house, but I want to focus my time and thinking on the real meaning of Christmas. I'll put my energy into recapturing the naive wonderment I experienced last year in celebrating my first Christmas. The real gift of Christmas, for me, has been the gift of Christmas.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, I joyfully celebrate and thank you for the birth of your son, Jesus Christ. Help me to hold onto my childlike wonder at Your gift to us, and to share this joy with others. Amen.*

-Gail Meltzer

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4— MARK 13:30-31

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.”

During Advent, these words pour out at the beginning of a much loved Christmas tradition, a performance of Handel’s *Messiah*. *God sent comfort to the world when the love he had for creation came incarnate in the human body of Jesus Christ.*

Jesus brought comfort, and healing, and teachings with his words. What were words he brought that will not pass away? Love God and each other, don’t give up, keep connected with God and each other - these are easy messages to pull from the New Testament. But, as he challenged the people of his time, would Jesus challenge us for the words we focus on, if he came again today?

“Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heav’n to earth come down”¹, God’s love came down at Christmas. May we keep listening together for his words each day.

¹ First lines of “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” by Charles Wesley

-Patty McMican

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5— MARK 13:32, 35-37

Mark 13:32, 35-37— “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. Therefore watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back- whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping What I say to you, I say to everyone” Watch!

So, an email arrives from Pastor Sarah asking if I would like to prepare a reflection or prayer for Trinity’s Advent devotional. Hmm, not really something I have ever done before. Why not just say, “no, but, thank you for asking”. But now I’m curious – why exactly was this passage chosen for reflection? So, I say “yes”, and begin to re-read it many times all the while Googling away. Slowly, I begin to understand what it means for God’s kingdom and how it applies to Advent.

Jesus calls for the disciples to pay attention. Otherwise, they will miss what should be seen and known. And that’s the message – keep wake and be on the watch. Something is going to happen. We may not know what is to come, but

we know WHO is to come.

As we begin the season of Advent and the celebration of Jesus's birth, let us be awake and watch each day for his presence in our lives. How blessed we are that Jesus is always on-watch walking with us.

-Cindy Decker

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6— 2 PETER 3:8-9

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

This passage from Peter reminds us of the frustration we will endure by forgetting that God's promise of a world without cruelty, heartache, disappointment and death is made on HIS infinitely-patient timetable. So we cannot expect that His promised state of GLORY will occur here on earth during our earthly lifetimes. Rather, it will happen when we enter heaven, through the gates God has promised to keep open to sinners who repent and accept Christ as their Savior.

So why bother to offer our Lord short-term prayer requests—as in our prayers for healing of a loved one, safe travels, wisdom for our leaders, consolation for the bereaved, a cure for cancer? My take: God's promise of an ultimate utopia is the biggie that we won't experience during our earthly lifetime. But that doesn't mean that His all-seeing kindness is not also at work shorter term. It does not preclude an answer tomorrow or next week or next year to prayers we offer today. At the very least, those prayers serve to keep us connected to the Father, just as regular correspondence with family and friends, in whatever form, keeps our relationships with them alive and healthy and primed for occasions when we need them most.

Thanks be to God.

-Jerry Hale

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7— 2 PETER 3:13-15

ADVENT AWAITS

Now, there is a holy way of waiting.

God waited, in the beginning, to create by His Word.

He waited to separate the dark from the light.

He waited for life to come forth from nothingness.

He waited for starlight to reach us from across the universe.

He waited to mold us and fashion humanity into His own image.

He waited to hear His children's willing response.

He waited to send His Son, in the fulness of time.

Now Jesus the Christ came to offer His life.

Jesus waited to begin His public life.

He waited to raise Lazarus.

He waited in the garden to go to His Cross.

He waited in His tomb, for death to rise to life again.

He waits to be born in His Church anew.

He waits to complete in us what the Father and the Spirit began. Now, in Advent, and we wait for God to come and come again. We wait to discover our purpose in waiting for God.

We wait to be born anew in Him.

We wait for the world to change.

We wait to receive what will come to us.

We wait to share the gifts that only love can give.

We wait with Mary, who waits to bear our new humanity.

Now Advent awaits the ancient and future promise, that is waiting for us still: O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel.

-Father Stephen Stanley



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8— ISAIAH 40:1-2

This is the beginning of the section of Isaiah known as Deutero-Isaiah, pertaining to the ending of the Babylonian exile of southern Israel from 587 - 539 BC. Their exile was the result of many aspects of waywardness from Yahweh and not caring properly for the wellbeing of others. Yahweh, their covenant God, has not forgotten them, even in his disciplining love. He has been shaping Israel within His electing Love to cherish, care, and bring them back into His promise of a nation and granted land. They need His word and presence of “comfort,” of a renewed promise (“speak tenderly”) as a loving parent, and in the hopeful knowledge that the nation has been humbled by the 70 years of exile. Hopefully, they are ready once again to surrender into His care! The “valleys, “mountains” of life will not hinder His longing for them and bringing His people back into Devotion to Him. “All people shall see it together,” Yahweh’s faithfulness to provide for His people. After great turmoil, loss, and tragedy, God has not forsaken His people and his “mouth has spoken” hope, renewal, and the acceptance of his wayward yet beloved children.

This is the promise that runs through both Old and New Testament covenants. Divine Love may have to reshape us to realign our ways within God’s holiness, but this holy Love is richly merciful, willing to suffer with His people. God has promised us that He will never leave us or forsake us! This is indeed our “Good News” to experience through our saying “yes” to God in Jesus. The biggest struggle we have with such “good news” is: Do we have the courage to trust (accept) that God accepts us? No matter how we think/feel about ourselves? To what degree does our heart, our life, entrust ourselves into the hands and person of Jesus to overcome our fears and anxieties, our guilt, shame, and feelings of lack of self-worth? To truly accept that we are forgiven, and nothing is held against our “account” with God? This will be the meaning of peace for us as we anticipate the coming of Christ this Advent season. Shalom.

- 1) In the midst of your life’s trials and anxieties, what does the statement, “The courage to trust that God accepts you “(Tillich) mean for you?
 - 2) Have you ever thought that God has abandoned you in some way when you can’t “feel” or sense His presence? What has God promised you in this Christian life?
- Mike O’Donnell

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9— ISAIAH 40:1-5

In Is. 40:1-5, Yahweh has promised great comfort and renewal of hope to His exiled people. The “road” to restoration is open once again, where “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed” to His people. All will experience it, know it, and rejoice in their ‘renewal salvation’. Yet, in the midst of this restorative promise and hope, comes a message of a warning reminder to humility, to God’s graciousness, and of who is lovingly in charge. He reminds them metaphorically through the prophet that their lives are like grass: vulnerable, finite, temporary, and dependent upon the creativity of Yahweh. This God, in love, can both give and take away. The “taking away” deals with the sobering understanding of their mortality and ultimate lack of control over their lives. Only the “word of God” is consistent and stands forever! So “take care” how you respond to Me and one another!

Our lives, today, and of every human being, ha a “grassness” about it. It relies, whether we recognize it or not, on the graciousness of God to give, sustain, and direct all life ultimately into His Love and very Being. This Word of God is creative; is written; is spoken; is proclaimed; is living in the enfleshed, resurrected form of His Son. This Living Word stands and endures forever! Nothing changes this truth. Whether one believes this or not will not change this truth! The better we understand this biblical truth, the more our lives will reflect attitudes of gratitude, accepted vulnerability, and a humility that all flow into trust. “The Word of God endures forever.” This is our trusting hope both now and into our futures! Let us this Advent draw near to this Living Word so that we may experience this Living Word drawing near to us and taking us up into Himself! Secure, safe, and assured through Jesus Christ! Shalom.

- 1) In what ways have you experienced the “grassness” of your life?
- 2) what does the truth of “the Word of God endures forever’ mean to you today?

-Mike O’Donnell

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10— ISAIAH 40:11

COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE is the focus message we read in Isaiah: 40.

TAKE COMFORT: In the beginning verses of Isaiah, God reminds us that He is the creator and sustainer of the universe. He is almighty, omnipotent and all powerful. Yet, He loves and cares for His fallen people. How could the God of the universe know and love me? Because He is God.

“Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arms He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.” verse 11

TAKE COMFORT: Verse 11 are words of great encouragement to God’s people. There is a Savior coming, who is God Himself in human flesh. He will care for His people the same way a shepherd tends to his sheep with love and compassion. He tells us that He will give special care for His weak and heavy burdened. How can that be? Because He is God.

TAKE COMFORT: The Savior is the baby born in Bethlehem. He is the incarnate God Almighty, Jesus the Christ. God came as Christ to redeem us by His Grace. God came as Christ to save us from our sins by His death and resurrection. How can that be? Because He is God.

TAKE COMFORT: Christ wants to have a personal and intimate relationship with us. Scripture tells us He knows our name and even the number of hairs on our head. He cares about every aspect of our life. His desire is that we put our trust in Him for everything making Him the Lord of our life. How can that be? Because He is God.

PRAYER: Gracious God, We thank and praise you that Jesus is Christmas! Make us mindful each day of Advent, that you are the reason for the season. Increase our prayer time and study of your word so that we are better equipped to do your will in our lives. Amen.

-Elaine Mattson

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 11— MARK 1:1-3

Let's face it. Mark is not our "go to" Gospel when we are preparing for Christmas. No Mary and Joseph. No angelic messengers talking about the birth of a baby. No manger in Bethlehem. No heavenly choirs in the sky or shepherds abiding in the fields. No star in the east or Magi riding camels. Just BOOM! "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Mark is a "man on a mission" with an earth-shattering, life-changing message that cannot wait. God has done it! The Son of God, the anointed One, the Savior of the world has arrived! The gates of the Kingdom have been opened! Repent: throw off the shackles of the past and embrace God's future. Believe: trust that this is what God has promised. Follow: stake your life on Jesus for He is the way to life in God's everlasting realm.

Read Mark's Gospel and pay close attention to the disciples, for they are us and we are them. They do not grasp who Jesus truly is. They misunderstand His teaching and His actions. They fail in their mission, betray Him, deny Him, and flee in fear and confusion at His crucifixion. But Mark has good news for all disciples! Jesus never abandons those whom Jesus has called. The risen Christ loves them and forgives them and promises that they will see and understand.

Advent calls us to let go of all of the ways we have failed as disciples. Advent calls us to renew our trust in all of God's promises. Advent calls us to prepare to follow Jesus the Christ as He calls us into God's future – even us.

-Liz Scheidt & Pastor Gary Scheidt

MONDAY, DECEMBER 12— MARK 1:4-5

I grew up in a little Baptist church in East Tennessee. It was the church of my parents and of their parents before them. At age 9, I was baptized in the church's big metal baptistry. The water was sulfur water from the well. The warmer sulfur water gets, the more fragrant it gets (think of the smell of rotten eggs). I remember walking down the metal stairs into the water, wearing the bright yellow dress that my mother had made for me. My pastor reached for my hand to help me walk to the middle. The water was quite warm on the bottom of the baptistry and cool near the top. There was a bit of sediment that had

settled to the bottom that moved and swirled with each step. I held my nose, as I had been instructed, and was dunked backwards, while my pastor said the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”.

To me, this day was the beginning of my life in Christ and my ministry here on earth. I give thanks for the remembrance of my baptism, and I especially give thanks that I have found my place in liturgical ministry.

-Sharon Witherell

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13— JOHN 1:6-9

I marvel at the magnitude of story that is set forth in the Gospel of John. A sweeping arc that reaches from creation, to the coming Christ child, in just the first chapter. The beautiful reference of God as the light of the world, and the light that shines in the darkness, immediately precedes verses 6-9 which speak of John the Baptist, the one who will bear witness to the light. The idea of God as the light of, and in the world, is so simple yet so profound. John the Baptist states he is not the light, but rather comes to bear witness to the light. His purpose in being a witness to the light, is so that through him, all might believe.

Like John the Baptist, each of us is called to bear witness to God, so that others may believe. We are all blessed, through the grace of Christ crucified, to have the light of God in us. Our challenge is not to be the light, for only God is the true light that gives light to everyone; but rather to reflect the light of God in all that we do. Recall how one candle light in a dark room gives a glimmer to your immediate surroundings. Add another candle light, and that glimmer becomes a warm glow. Add more lighted candles and the darkness fades, the room becomes larger, and more around you is revealed. The room becomes bathed in a shimmering light all around.

It can be a daunting task, to reflect the light of God, but it need not be. If we endeavor to reflect God in all that we do, then we ourselves become a better reflection of God, in us. And one by one, we turn the glimmer in the darkness, to the radiant warmth of God in us, and among us.

-Lee Anne DeMonbreum

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14— JOHN 1:19-21

Who are you? What do you say about yourself? How do we respond to such piercing questions? John did...and later Jesus would as well. John's answer was likely met with confusion. His response is identified (in verse 19) as his testimony – the very purpose for which he walked the earth. John found his purpose in Scripture, Isaiah's words that would have been familiar to those curious about his identity. "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" Who was John? – the one who would prepare the world for Jesus. His method? A ministry of repentance – preparing hearts to receive the immeasurable grace Jesus came to offer.

Of the word testimony we know this – the Latin derivation testimonium, root being testis...a witness. John's response to the questions of the Pharisee's was what he witnessed. While the Pharisees wanted to know who **John** was – his response makes clear that he wanted the Pharisees to know who **Jesus** was. John's life would point others to Jesus. This is who he was.

"Who are you? What do you say about yourself?" Anticipating Jesus' birth yet again, might we pause to wonder who we are and what we say about ourselves in light of who we know Jesus to be? What do we witness of Jesus born into our lives in this generation? How might we respond to the "Pharisee" of today? Perhaps we, like John and Jesus, will find the answer to these questions in the words of Scripture.

May we find time to settle down with a warm cup of comfort, ponder the greatest Word that is both written and became flesh, and find our answers. Be glorified Lord Jesus.

-Sharon Sicher

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15— MATTHEW 1:20-22

But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the prophet.

So, you know, I mean... (which seemingly is the modern way to begin a sentence) ... Can you imagine what was going through Joseph's mind? “What to do? My future bride is pregnant, and it's not mine.” Being a decent person, to protect the reputation of Mary and her family, he was considering marrying her anyway. And then in a dream, God's angel said to him, “It's Okay, Joseph. Don't be afraid to marry her, for the child she carries is miraculously given by the Holy Spirit. And this baby boy will be called Jesus, which means ‘Yahweh saves’ or ‘God saves.’ He will be ‘God with us’ or the ‘Child of God,’ and he will save people from their sins.” And when Joseph woke up, he agreed that he would take Mary as his wife and take care of her and hers – and ours.

Throughout all of this, I wonder how Mary was feeling. What was she thinking? Song writer Mark Lowry sang it this way:

*Mary did you know,
that your baby boy, is Lord of all creation?
Mary did you know,
that this baby boy will one day rule the nations?*

-Clif Collins

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16— 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

What does it mean to find joy in the midst of personal trials? That thought is definitely contrary to the way we feel. Faith is not based on feelings. When we examine our Faith we find it is based on Truth revealed in scripture and Trust that our lives are being guided by The LORD. With that knowledge we are free to allow the resolution to develop in its own time.

When earthly problems arise we need to focus on the larger vision of our situation.

Everyone has struggles, be it health, family, economic or faith related. Focus your attention on the fact that most are temporary. Try to remember that everything that happens in your life has a time and place in your spiritual development and growth.

So live each day with Joy in your heart and have an attitude of Thankfulness for the gifts that you experience on a daily basis. Make your life a Living Sacrifice and learn in your trials you are being purified in mind, body and spirit.

Hopefully, you will be better able to love, serve and grow in Christian witnessing to those within your sphere of influence.

-Barbara Fansler

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17— ISAIAH 61:1-2

Isn't it amazing the biblical teachings we have, and the gentle reminders that life is not all about our individual selves. That we need to care for our neighbors through living our own lives as Christ would, as well as sharing the word of Jesus. The Holy Spirit lives within us, constantly nudging us in the right direction, if we keep our eyes and ears open to it. To remind us that being filled with the Holy Spirit places us in the position to be the hands and instruments of God. To provide comfort and service to those around us who are in need.

In this season of our Lord's birth, let us all remember to think of and help those who are less fortunate. Let us remember to share the spirit of the Lord.

-Travis and Debbie Cressell

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18— ISAIAH 61:10

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

The book of Isaiah has several prophetic passages about the Messiah (His birth, life, and second coming). In Isaiah 61:10 we find the prophet writing about faithful Israel rejoicing in their Lord, and promised Messiah, with joyful praises. Two key words in this passage are **salvation** and **righteousness**.

Salvation, in Christianity, means deliverance from sin and consequences, brought about by faith in Jesus. Since the writing of Isaiah, we, of the Christian faith, believe that Jesus was the Messiah who came to save us from our sins, died on the cross for our sins and gave us eternal life. **Righteousness** in Christianity is “being right in the eyes of God.” This righteousness is based on God’s standard, of the individual’s character, attitude, actions, and words. NOT OURS.

Isaiah talks about the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness. I am sure that many of you have a piece of clothing or a garment that you really like. It may be something that lifts your spirits, makes you feel good, or keeps you warm all over. This passage to me means that the garment of salvation keeps us warm and comfortable, is free of cost, secures us from sin and hell, and gives us the spirit of Christ for eternity.

Just like the bridegroom, who decks himself with ornaments, and the bride, who adorns herself with jewels, we too are covered with the robe of righteousness-the righteousness of Christ. We also are clothed with garments of salvation and saved by grace, through our faith and belief in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Isn’t that wonderful news! It is indeed a time for celebration, great joy and rejoicing.

Prayer:

Dear God, as we approach Advent, may we look with anticipation of the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Let us be humble servants and loving stewards full of gratitude and joy. Let us sing praises and give thanks to our God of salvation for He has covered us with his robe of righteousness. Let us reflect God’s love, grace and message to all people today and always.

In Jesus, name we pray, Amen.

-Nancy King

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19— ISAIAH 61:49:15

*Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion for the child she has borne?
Though she may forget, I will not forget you!*



The young girls come to Door of Hope at the age of 10 or 11. The parents release them to Door of Hope knowing that they will not see them or have contact with them until their education is finished. The mothers know that they will not forget them and that God will keep them safe.

-Pidge Morgan

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20— PSALM 89:1

Broken Vessels

Given:

As bread is broken so are we, and in the breaking is the beginning of our giving and sharing who we are. It is about you and me, the person and who we are! It is about sharing a wholesome life. We are spiritually given the freedom to let go and love.

Yes, we know God loves us. Yes we love God. How can we be given to the world? Through the holes in our lives we have learned to not give up, and to keep on learning and trying. We serve others by listening and caring. We are being filled with God's spirit so that we can share it with others. We can learn to share ourselves with others without fear of judgment.

We are being prepared for meeting God. I truly believe that our home is with God, and all that we are learning is leading us closer to him. Our greatest gift to give is our inner peace, our silence, and our listening ear.

Prayer:

God, show me how to love unconditionally without expecting others to love me in return.

Show me how to love those who seem unlovable, and teach me to see in them what you see.

Show me how to reach out to others in love but also how to receive love, because I often fail to love myself or let others love me.

Show me how to use the energy of love to make my life, and the lives of everyone around me, brighter and happier.

Dear God, show me how to love the way you love me.

Amen.

-Anne Motley

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21— 2 SAMUEL 7:8-9, 16

Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel, ⁹ and I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Reflection:

“Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever”

We encounter in 2nd Samuel the Lord talking rather candidly to Nathan words to be relayed to King David. Before the words of God are uttered above it bears meaning for our understanding of the entire passage that we note that David is questioning whether he should build a proper dwelling for God’s Ark. David cannot justify the fact that the Lord’s Ark, the holy kingship and presence among God’s people, is kept in a simple tent while David, a simple earthly king, resides in a permanent elaborate dwelling. David’s questioning is answered by the Lord in the verses above. The Lord remarks that David himself will be the new dwelling through which the Lord will make his presence fully known, not only to God’s people, but also to the entire world.

The Lord’s soliloquy concludes in an assurance to David that his throne will עולם נכון ^{נָכוֹן} ^{נָכוֹן} (navon ad olam), “endure permanently for eternity.” The Lord takes this humble earthly man who is sinful, fragile, and finite in life and promises to make a kingdom who’s impact on the world will last for all eternity.

Today, we Christians recognize this eternal king to be none other than Jesus the Christ who is born of the lineage of King David. Jesus is the one whom we wait for in this and every Advent season. He is the one who sits on the everlasting throne of God and who will come again one day to reconcile all of God’s people into his Heavenly Kingdom which will have no end. In this Advent season let us rejoice in the faithfulness of King David, in the words of our Lord, and in the eternal king where we find our salvation.

-Vicar Joel Antley

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22— LUKE 1:26-31

As I prepared for writing this, the song “Mary did you know...” kept going thru my mind. But this scripture clearly shows us how Mary was told and what she was told. Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that she was about to have a baby that was from God and to be named Jesus. She paused long enough to consider it all and to make sure that she knew what she was agreeing to! She was fearful at first, but PAUSED to remind herself that she trusted God and His request of her had to be a good request, and if He had asked it of her, then she could trust and respond OK! Let us also remember that requests that come to us from God’s messengers (angels or angels with skin on) need to be listened to, and we need to PAUSE to remind ourselves that if this request is truly from Him, then we should know not to be afraid. Remember: Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. (ooooohhhh, another song to get stuck in my head...)

-Marsha Melkonian

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23— LUKE 1:38

“Mary responded, ‘I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true. And then the angel left her.’”

This verse is Mary’s response after the visit to her by the angel Gabriel, telling her that she has found favor with God and will conceive a son to be called Jesus, the Son of God. He told her, “Nothing is impossible with God.”

Mary didn’t know fully what was to come, but she trusted God, and that He was asking her to serve him. She willingly obeyed, even in seemingly impossible circumstances.

This verse encourages me to trust God no matter what is happening in my life. I don’t know the future, but I know my life is in His hands. I know that God and the Holy Spirit are with me to guide me and comfort me if I but listen and trust each and every day. My heart is full of gratitude for his love.

Prayer: Thank you God for giving me so many blessings in my life, and for being with me in good times and trying times when life seemed hard. I pray I'll continue to trust and obey and listen for your guidance. I know you love me and will always hold me in the palm of your hand. Amen

-Mary Hamlin

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24— LUKE 2:1-7

In those days a decree went out from Ceasar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The Advent time of waiting closes in with these words of Luke. As I read the birth story once again, I remember and I wonder. Warm memories of childhood Christmas Eves when my family gathered around our tree reading this passage aloud enfold me. Then the baby Jesus was placed in our crèche and Christmas was finally here. I remember sharing this tradition with our children, watching these words take meaning in their eyes. I see the glow of church candles during Silent Night after a Christmas Pageant, the holy music going deep into my soul, anticipating that magical moment when we all sing “Christ is born today”.

And the wonder of it all. How hard was it for Joseph to fulfill his duty, traveling on foot with a pregnant wife? And Mary; what in the world would happen, with labor pains and no inn on a cold night? We all know how this ends. But they didn't. I wonder at the way God pulled so many prophecies and circumstances together to create this miracle, giving us the ultimate gift of love, his Son. A birth in a barn among animals and angels; changing the world forever. Advent waiting is over, for now. But the remembering and the wondering go on and on.

-Christine Collins

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25— LUKE 2:8-14

This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.”

This will be a sign for you. Historically we have looked at this statement as guidance for the shepherds so that they might find the messiah that has been announced to them. In other words, this is how you will know it is him. What if this sign is for us so that we can know the messiah, the one into whose promise we are born anew?

The child is wrapped in bands of cloth and is placed where no savior should be placed. He is in an animal's feed trough in what we have come to understand was a cave carved out of the earth providing shelter from the elements. Fast forward to Easter morning. We find this child again, wrapped in bands of cloth, placed in a cave with a stone rolled across the door. Jesus' birth mirrors his resurrection. The child's first cry mirrors his cry from the cross. The ones who come to see the child are outsiders. The ones for whom Jesus focuses on in his ministry are outsiders. We can see this now on the other side of the cross.

Jesus is the fulfillment of every promise that was ever made to his people. We can see this fulfilled in scripture and we can see this fulfilled in the arc of his life. This is how we come to know him. May your Christmas morning be filled with revelation. Angels may not appear above you, but Jesus is being announced to you just the same. Do not be afraid. It is Good News for you and for everyone you touch in his name. Today a child is born. Today a child of God has new life because of him. Today, you are the ones to stream from your field and announce that the one everyone is looking for is here.

-Rev. Dr. Philip A. Bouknight

illuminate this Advent Season!



Join us on Wednesday evenings in Advent from 6-8:30pm for a prepared meal, fellowship, and festive, faith-filled activities.

NOV

30

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HANGING OF THE GREENS

DEC

7

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ST NICHOLAS & HELPING
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14

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DEC

21

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