



*"The Lord is coming, always coming...
Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord."
- Henri Nouwen*

Jesse Tree Devotional 2024

*Daily reflections for Advent beginning December 1st
and continuing to Christmas Day.*

Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us, in order that we might have hope through the patience and encouragement which the Scriptures give us. And may God, the source of patience and encouragement, enable you to have the same point of view among yourselves by following the example of Christ Jesus, so that all of you together may praise with one voice the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you. For I tell you that Christ's life of service was on behalf of the Jews, to show that God is faithful, to make his promises to their ancestors come true, and to enable even the Gentiles to praise God for his mercy.

May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit.

-Romans 15:4-9a & 13



Journey to Hope

Dec. 1st: Jesse Tree Origin—Jeremiah 33:14&15

“The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will fulfill my gracious promise with the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time, I will raise up a righteous branch from David’s line, who will do what is just and right in the land.”

This passage reminds us of God’s faithfulness. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God assures His people that He will fulfill His promise to send a Savior. The “righteous branch” from David’s line is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who brings justice, righteousness, and hope to a broken world.

Just as the seasons change in their time, we realize God’s promises unfold faithfully in our lives, even when we cannot see them right away. With renewed hope, we can thank God for His presence in both the small, everyday miracles and in the grand fulfillment of His Word.

As we journey through Advent, the Jesse Tree helps us trace the story of God’s promises, from the earliest days of creation to the birth of Christ. Each symbol on the Jesse Tree points to the hope we have in Jesus, who came to bring light to the darkness and peace to all who seek Him.

Let this season of waiting and reflection fill us with renewed faith in God’s promises. Just as He fulfilled His covenant through Jesus, we can trust in His continued work in our lives and the world.

Reflection: God’s promises are exhibited in Jesus Christ’s life and even in life’s smallest moments. Our faith increases when we pause and open our hearts to see the promises revealed.

Prayer: Lord, we thank You for Your faithfulness in fulfilling the promises You made long ago. As we prepare our hearts for Christ’s coming, help us live with hope and trust in Your righteousness. May the light of Jesus, the Righteous Branch, shine through us as we seek to bring justice and peace to our world. In His holy name, we pray. Amen.

Rhonda Parmer



Dec. 2nd: Creation—Genesis 1:3&4

God said, “Let there be light.”

And so light appeared. God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness.

I feel so blessed to be living in a time and place where God’s word is so readily accessible to be read, prayed over and meditated upon. Mary was not as blessed growing up. As a young Jewish girl she no doubt went to the synagogue on the Sabbath where a copy of the Torah was kept and God’s word was read and commented on. She did not have a personal scroll of the Torah to read. Still, she certainly loved God’s word, listened intently to the reading of the Torah, had faith, remembered God’s promises, and was in advent of the fulfillment of the coming of the promised Messiah as most Jews of the time were. Mary was rewarded by her faith and the belief that grew out of many Sabbaths, prayers and readings of God’s words. As the angel said, “Blessed are you among women ... you will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus.” (Lk. 1:31) And as Elizabeth said referring to Mary, “Blessed is she who believed.” (Lk. 1:45)

I pray that all of us in the body of Christ, like Mary, during advent listen, meditate, pray, have faith and believe God's words and promises.

Prayer: Father, Son and Holy Spirit grant us the blessing of having and exercising faith and believe in your promises as we continue to be in advent of Jesus return, amen.

Rose Huss



Dec. 3rd: Adam and Eve—Genesis 3:15

[The Lord God said to the serpent,] "From now on you and the woman will be enemies, as will your offspring and hers. You will strike his heel, but he will crush your head." (TLB)

Initially, I thought this was God talking to Adam, that He was going to put conflict between man and woman. But in studying this verse (and speaking to Pastor Lindsay) it was determined that this is the serpent (Satan) and Eve. Embedded in the message is the seed or offspring, which will be Jesus. This is sometimes considered to the "first gospel".

However, also think of the comparisons of the injuries: head versus heel. Certainly we would all consider a foot injury to be inconvenient and even painful, but a head injury can be lethal. Have you ever heard of a foot ICU? I haven't.

The hope and joy come from Jesus, the offspring of the woman's lineage, overcoming the evil of the serpent (Satan).

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for giving us all the ability to rise victorious over many of our hardships or attacks on us. Help us to continue to have enmity or contempt against Satan and hope in the Savior who will strike at the head of evil and leave us victorious. Amen.

Glenna Tolley



Dec. 4th: Noah and the Flood—Genesis 8:11

The dove came back to Noah in the evening, grasping a torn olive leaf in its beak. Then Noah knew that the waters were subsiding from the earth.

After the rains had stopped, Noah sent out a raven to see if the water was receding. The raven came back without anything. Later, Noah sent out a dove. The dove came back with an olive branch in its beak, proof that the water level was dropping. However, as I read the story again, something new occurred to me. When the dove returns, Noah doesn't then get off the boat. It will still be some months before everyone exits the ark, builds new houses, and starts their new lives.

Looking back at difficult times in my own life, I can see moments where God gave me olive branches. Once, I received a call from a friend on a particularly difficult day, even though she would normally only text. Another time I received an encouraging note while feeling very discouraged. Just like Noah, my difficult times weren't yet over, but these kindnesses gave me the umph to keep going.

The image of a dove with an olive branch is a universal symbol of peace. However, I now think it could more accurately be used as a symbol of hope. Or maybe the peace it symbolizes is the peace of mind that comes from knowing that the difficult time will pass.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your continued care during the difficult times of our lives. Please send us messages of hope and peace when our spirits are weak. Amen.

Jaye Lynne Rooney



December 5th: Covenant with Abram (Abraham)—Genesis 15:5&6

Then the Lord brought Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think you can count them." He continued, "This is how many children you will have." Abram trusted the Lord, and the Lord recognized Abram's high moral character.

In chapter 15 of Genesis the Lord speaks to Abram in a vision. He promises to be his protector and that Abram will receive a great reward. Abram immediately questions God and asks, "What can you possibly give me, since I have no children? The head of my household is Eliezer, a man from Damascus. Since you haven't given me any children, the head of my household will be my heir." (Gen 5:2) Abram hears God's promise but can't imagine how it could come to be. His wife Sarai was well past the age of having children, so Abram had followed an ancient custom where a servant could be adopted as the heir of a childless couple. This servant would inherit their wealth in exchange for assuming the duties of a son. Abram couldn't see a way that he would receive a great reward. God offers immediate reassurance. He tells Abram that Eliezer will not be his heir and takes Abram outside. He tells Abram to look at the sky and count the stars if you think you can. Then God says, "This is how many children you will have." Abram now has a choice to make. He has to decide if he will trust the promise God is making. It says in verse 6 that, "Abram trusted the Lord, and the Lord recognized Abram's high moral character." Throughout our faith journey we will have seasons in our life where we, like Abram, will have to decide if we will trust God. I'm sure Abram must have had many nights when he looked up at the stars and remembered God's promise. In this Advent season we have the hope of another star, the star of Bethlehem. The star that led the wise men to baby Jesus is the same star that reminds us today that we can always put our trust in God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that each day I will make the decision to place my trust in you. I thank you for the gift of salvation through the birth of Jesus. Amen.

Janice Williams



December 6th: Testing of Abraham—Genesis 22:15&18

The Lord's messenger called out to Abraham from heaven a second time and said ... "All the nations of the earth will be blessed because of your descendants, because you obeyed me."

I have found a 4 letter word that is probably more offensive than any other. (I bet this isn't how you envisioned my devotional starting!) It's the word: obey. You can tell how offensive a word is by the reaction it elicits. So let me ask

you- would you be more upset if someone used an off-color word in your presence, or if they told you, you needed to obey? Uh huh. That's how you know!

We're a nation of self-starters, of creatives and innovators. We like a challenge. You tell us we can't do something, and that's just an invitation to prove you wrong. We can go to the moon. We can fit a computer on the point of a ballpoint pen. But to obey? That's not something we're set up for.

The story of Abraham offering his son Isaac on an altar is my least favorite story in the Bible. I cannot make sense of our good God using Isaac like that, just to teach Abraham a lesson. Just imagine how messed up Abraham's and Isaac's relationship was afterwards. Sometimes I wonder if Abraham actually failed the test. Maybe he was supposed to argue with God the way he did on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah. I don't understand the story and I'm not sure I ever will.

Regardless of how you feel about this story, it does show what obedience requires. Sometimes when I tell my kids to do something, they ask why. I actually like that, because it's good to have a habit of being clear about why you're doing what you're doing. But sometimes I refuse to tell them, and I ask them to obey anyway, because one of the truths of life is that sometimes we have to choose to obey even without knowing why, and as their parent I have a responsibility to give them opportunities to practice that.

Is there something God is telling you to do? Are you willing to obey, even if you don't understand it? Can you get past your independent streak and just submit? I'm working on it myself. Let's work on it together.

Prayer: Father God, help me to obey you even when I don't want to. If Jesus can submit to being human, I can submit to your will for me. Amen.

Rev. Lindsay Kirkpatrick



December 7th: Jacob's Dream—Genesis 28:22

[Jacob said,] This stone that I've set up as a sacred pillar will be God's house, and of everything you give me, [Lord,] I will give a tenth back to you."

I have always tried to be helpful, especially when I got into high school. Then when I was going through my divorce, I found helping out where I could actually helped me get through that difficult time.

Now at Asbury I am always looking for ways to help because the Lord saved me. Twice I have tried to leave and run away. Once, I called Lindsay about how I was feeling, and she told me to come and talk with her right away. On the way over I nearly turned around more than once. We talked, and I stayed. Another time during the service I went up for prayer. As I stood there I felt two heavy hands on my shoulder and a voice said, "Don't run." And I've never left.

You have to listen to the Lord and let Him tell you where to go. He'll let you know your limits, so don't be afraid to move.

Prayer: Lord you are always with us. We thank you for saving us. Amen.

Ron Epperson





Journey to Peace

December 8th: Joseph and His Brothers—Genesis 45:3&15

Joseph said to his brothers, “I’m Joseph! Is my father really still alive?” His brothers couldn’t respond because they were terrified before him. Joseph kissed all of his brothers and wept, embracing them. After that, his brothers were finally able to talk to him.

When it comes to families, there is rarely, if ever, one that is perfect (even if others might think so). It’s intriguing how the story tellers and later the writers of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) didn’t idealize the people in their stories. The family in today’s passage presented one messy bunch when it comes to family relationships. For starters, the “brothers” were the sons of Jacob by four different mothers, and as expected, they often bickered with each other. Over two decades earlier, out of jealousy, they had sold their younger brother Joseph into slavery (they had wanted to kill him at first), because he was their father’s favorite. Unknown to them however, because of his unwavering faith in God and his gift of interpreting dreams, Joseph had become the governor of Egypt, second only the Pharaoh. Not having revealed himself before this particular (for they didn’t recognize him after so long) meeting with his brothers, Joseph had already been able to help his family during a severe and devastating drought.

As soon as he found out his father was still alive, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and they were “terrified” of what he might do to them with his great power. Immediately, Joseph then told them to forgive themselves for what they had done to him years ago because God had guided him to be in his present position to be able to save them and all their families. Joseph’s kissing, weeping, and embracing his brothers acknowledged his sincere forgiveness of their horrible treatment of him.

In your own family, how have you responded when someone has hurt you badly (perhaps not as extreme as selling you into slavery) or when you perceived some family member felt wronged by you? To give or to ask for forgiveness can also be seen as “making peace” (this week’s Advent focus). As difficult as forgiveness can be at times, it can most definitely be such a blessing in healing some big hurts, especially considering the long ago example of Joseph and his brothers and the profound example of Jesus’ plea on the cross of, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” (Lk. 23:34)

Prayer: In this Advent season, dear God, help us be open to offering and receiving forgiveness with the peace it can bring within us. Amen.

Janet Reed



December 9th: Moses and The Commandments—Deuteronomy 5:29

[Moses said, "The Lord told me,] 'If only the people of Israel would always feel this way! If only they would always honor me and obey all my commands, so that everything would go well with them and their descendants forever.'" (GNT)

What I Interpret this verse to mean is that our lives would be so much easier if we just listened to God. Here’s an example with a baby bat rescued at the Israeli Bat Sanctuary (on a side note, if you want to see cute bats visit either the

people Israel and the fertile land that you have given us—a land full of milk and honey—just like you promised our ancestors.”

This is a powerful verse, where Moses calls out to the Lord with hope and anticipation, remembering promises already fulfilled while trusting in more blessings yet to come. The Israelites were so close to the end of their 40-year journey; they could almost touch the promised land they had longed for. It was a land flowing with milk and honey, just as God had promised, but it had been a hard and winding road to get there, marked by challenges and trials along the way.

This verse beautifully parallels our journey to Christmas, especially as we celebrate Advent. Each year, we take this sacred journey again—remembering and anticipating the birth of Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to His people. Although Advent traditions may remain the same, we bring new experiences to them each year because life has taken us on a unique path of its own. Over the past 365 days, we have experienced grief and joy, endured losses, and welcomed gains. We arrive at Advent as people shaped by another year’s journey, transformed by all we’ve encountered. In all of this God remains the same, and His promise still stands.

Advent invites us to reflect on this journey with God—the ups, downs, and everything in between. It’s a season to pause, give thanks for how God has walked with us, and look to the future with expectation and anticipation, trusting in God’s faithfulness.

Prayer: Dear God, as we prepare to celebrate Jesus’ birth, help us to remember that you have always been faithful. May we lean into your promises, both fulfilled and yet to come. Amen

Laurel Waller



December 11th: The Fall of Jericho—Joshua 2:12&14

[Rahab said,] "Now, I have been loyal to you. So pledge to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal loyally with my family. Give me a sign of good faith." The men said to her, "We swear by our own lives to secure yours. If you don't reveal our mission, we will deal loyally and faithfully with you when the Lord gives us the land."

Peace is the offspring of courage and trust. Courage to stay silent when words may further wound, and a trust that silence can speak a resounding truth. Courage to do the right thing, though one may be riddled with fear, while trusting your actions can pave a road of peace and tear down a dividing wall. Rahab listed in the genealogy of Jesus is a prophetic witness of the ever-widening embrace of God. She was a woman who acted with courage by standing up to political powers. She trusted in the God who she heard dried up the Red Sea riverbed and guided a group of former nobodies (the Hebrew people) into freedom. Rahab’s courage to hide the Hebrew spies and negotiate protection for her family highlights how seemingly small acts can make big waves.

I have only one sadness of how I learned about Rahab growing up in Sunday School. Rahab is often reduced to her scandalous nature of being an outsider, a Gentile, and her profession of “inn keeper.” Sadly, that Hebrew word has been translated as prostitute or harlot. An unfortunate translation since we don’t know what it meant that Rahab operated a hostel along the city walls. But, her inclusion is our inheritance. We are grafted into this story of salvation. We are to be the followers of Jesus whose actions or words usher in peace and tear down the dividing walls. To be faithful is to be courageous. To be a peacemaker is to sometimes stir up good trouble.

Prayer: God of Abraham and Sarah, Rahab and Boaz, help us be faithful members of your family. Let us follow the example of the many faithful followers whose courageous acts bring peace to this weary world. Thank you for the witness of Rahab who acted with courage and put her whole trust in You, the One who, to this day, continues to part the seas of chaos and violence to make a way of peace. Come Lord Jesus, come. Amen

Melissa Maher, Texas UMC
Director of the Center for Leadership Vitality



December 12th: Gideon's Army—Judges 8:25

Gideon replied to them, "I'm not the one who will rule over you, and my son won't rule over you either. The Lord rules over you."

This past May I went to the eye doctor with a problem. He ordered an MRI to understand what was going on. After getting the results he asked me, "Do you believe in Jesus?" I replied that I most certainly do. He then told me the MRI had found a tumor, and that MRI led to a much earlier diagnosis.

God's power is at work everyday. He is able to use our circumstances to care for us. We can praise Him in every situation, because He truly works for the good of those who love Him as the Bible promises.

Prayer: Dear God, you truly do work in mysterious ways. Thank you for your care. Amen.

Shelley Bracher



December 13th: Naomi and Ruth—Ruth 1:16&19a

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to abandon you [Naomi], to turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God ..." So both of them went along until they arrived at Bethlehem.

Because of a famine, Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, left Bethlehem, Judah and went to live in Moab. She and their two sons remained there 10 years after Elimelech's death. Her sons married the Moabite women Ruth and Orpah. Then Naomi suffered the deaths of both her sons. Now the three widowed women, Ruth, Orpah, and Naomi, had to decide how they were going to survive. This was not easy since during this time, women were dependent on men (husband or men in the family) for income and protection.

Naomi felt she needed to return to Judah, her home. She encouraged her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab with their families and remarry. Because of their love and compassion for Naomi they vowed to accompany her on her journey and into an uncertain future. After more urging from Naomi Orpah returned to her family. However, Ruth insisted, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay ..." Naomi realized Ruth's determination, and it must have given her much peace and comfort. She relented and then the two of them went on to Bethlehem.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to recognize the loving support our family and friends offer us. May we give thanks for their

blessing upon us. May we also be that person who give our time and compassionate gifts to assist others. Amen.

Angelle Warneke



December 14th: Hannah's Prayer—1 Samuel 2:2

Then Hannah prayed: "No one is holy like the Lord - no, no one except you! There is no rock like our God!"

According to the internet the word “rock” is used 142 times in the Bible, and it is more often a reference to God than any other instance. In the book of Psalms, the word “rock” is used about 24 times with a reference to God. As I was preparing this devotional, I looked at 5 different biblical translations of 1 Samuel 2:2. They were all the same in saying that, “no one is holy like the Lord,” and that, “there is no rock like our God.” The word rock can symbolize strength, power, protection, and provision.

Hannah was a woman at her wit's end, and she turned to the Lord for rescue from her situation. Hannah pours out her soul to God, doesn't hold back, lays it all out for God, and then rests in peace. She fully trusts in God and surrenders everything to Him in prayer, releasing all anxiety and worry. Hannah then found true peace with God before He even answered her prayer, as she was fulfilled before she had her son, Samuel.

Her heartache was turned into hope and true peace. Her life was forever changed and she found joy and strength, even when she dedicated her son Samuel to God and left him at a young tender age at the temple with Eli. And in 1 Samuel 2:2, Hannah says, “No one is holy like the Lord – no, no one except you! There is no rock like our God!” She rejoices over God's deliverance from her barrenness as well as His granting that her husband's name would continue on to many generations. Hannah's heartache was turned into hope, and her faith and experience of God's presence is a beautiful reminder to trust God in the midst of our pain and troubles. God is our sure foundation, He never changes.

No matter how many times we stumble, or how many times we find ourselves knocked back down into a valley feeling totally defeated, God is always there as a source of unwavering strength. He is a rock that we can lean and depend on, giving us a firm foundation of strength, power, protection, and provision. When life's troubles seem to be chipping away at us, we can rely on God as our pillar of strength, to guide us and lead us to a peace that surpasses all understanding.

As we journey through Advent, let's put our trust in God the Rock to unconditionally provide His love and support. God never changes and He can hold us steady, grounded and rooted in his love to help us through any uncertain and changing times that we may face.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your love and grace, and for being our rock-solid Savior that we can always turn to. Help us find our peace in you like Hannah did and remain steadfast in our faith even during challenging times. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Paula Zikogiannis





December 15th: David Faces Goliath—1 Samuel 18:6

After David came back from killing the Philistine, and as the troops returned home, women from all of Israel's towns came out to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with tambourines, rejoicing, and musical instruments.

As they were coming home, when David returned from slaying the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with timbrels, with songs of joy, and with instruments of music.

The story of David and Goliath is the story of a hero. A young boy who was confident in his ability, because he knew the living God was with him. The whole country of Israel rejoiced with songs of praise because David and the living God saved them from the Philistines.

During the season of Advent, we feel joy, because the birth of Jesus has saved us. We show our joy by singing songs of praise. Songs like *Joy to the World* and *Hark! The Herald Angel's Sing*. I hope you feel joy when you sing those lovely carols.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to feel joy when we sing songs that celebrate the birth of Jesus. Amen.

Kay Lunsford



December 16th: Prophecy of The Prince of Peace—Isaiah 9:7 & 11:6

There will be vast authority and endless peace for David's throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever ... The wolf will live with the lamb ... and a little child will lead them.

In Isaiah 9:6- it says that a child will be born, a son will be given to us, and that the authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father and **Prince of Peace**.

I have light blue wrapping paper that says "Prince of Peace" on it in pretty silver letters in different fonts all over it. Every year when I am frantically wrapping presents as quickly as I can (usually the day before Christmas Eve), and wondering why I didn't get this done earlier; I end up pulling this paper out, and I always stop and smile. With unwrapped presents, tape, wrapping paper, scissors, ribbon, and gift tags all around me I stop and look at the chaos. I get this big smile that slowly creeps across my face, and I realize that in less than a day I will be celebrating the arrival of the biggest present of all—the celebration of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The doubt and fear of, "Will I be able to finish everything on time?" goes away and is replaced with anticipation and excitement for Christmas Eve services, lighting the candle, and singing Silent Night. Then I look down at the wrapping paper in front of me once again thankful that I have a God and a Savior that gives me a moment of peace in my busy chaotic world. I hope that you find some minutes of peace in your soul as we embark on this busy holiday season of celebrating the wonderful birth of Jesus.

A Prayer for You: Dear heavenly father, in the chaos of life I seek refuge in the stillness of my soul. Grant me the serenity to find peace within myself, to calm the storms of doubt and fear that rise within me. Help me to discover the

quiet strength that is within me and let it guide me on the path to inner peace. Thank you for the peace that flows from your boundless love. Amen

Suzanne Morgan



December 17th: King Nebuchadnezzar's Testimony—Daniel 3:28

Nebuchadnezzar declared: "May the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be praised! He sent his messenger to rescue his servants who trusted him. They ignored the king's order, sacrificing their bodies, because they wouldn't serve or worship any god but their God."

King Nebuchadnezzar had decreed that "all" should bow down and serve his god and worship the huge gold statue that he had set up. Anyone who would "not," would immediately be thrown into a fiery furnace. There were three young Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who ignored the king's command.

The three men stood firm in their belief in God and told the pagan king that their God was able to rescue them from the fiery furnace but if he didn't, that was fine because they would never serve his gods or worship the gold statue he'd set up. The king had the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, they were thrown in and the king witnessed "four men" walking around unharmed! They were brought out of the fire and found to be totally unharmed. Then the king believed in their God. He praised God and decreed to people and nations that they would now serve and worship their God because there is no other god who can rescue like this.

Imagine the joy that was felt by the three men and by King Nebuchadnezzar when he witnessed the mighty power of God and then believed their God to be the one true God. He now believed in Him and praised Him.

When you find yourself looking at a fiery furnace, remember that you serve an all powerful God who is able to keep you safe and is able to save you and bring you through for His glory.

There is joy when we share our faith with others and joy when someone decides they want to have God in their lives. By standing firm on our belief in God and doing the right thing even when others don't, our faith is a testimony to others. It allows God in all His sovereignty to show who He is and allows others to witness God's greatness and power. Be watchful in this season for whom the Holy Spirit leads you to share with and watch for joy.

Prayer: Dear God, help us accept the furnaces of life and to stand firm in our beliefs and to trust you to bring us through any rough times. And lead us to share with those who need to hear. Amen.

Jackie Williams



December 18th: Prophecy of Bethlehem—Micah 5:2

As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are the least significant of Judah's forces, one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from you. His origin is from remote times, from ancient days.

In today's verse and continuing through verse 5 we learn that God has named the small town of Bethlehem of Ephrathah to be the future birthplace of our Lord and Savior, the Prince of Peace. We know Bethlehem was somewhat

of an insignificant town, a few miles from Jerusalem. It wasn't powerful or important but still God chose this place. It's also amazing to think about how this prophecy of the birthplace of Jesus was made hundreds of years before the events of the Gospels took place. God put the idea of a census for tax purposes in the mind of Caesar Augustus, which when implemented, meant Joseph and Mary had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register, and then Mary gave birth to Jesus there. This was all arranged. It was God's plan that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

This verse reminds us that God can use every place and every person to fulfill His plans. God can use folks in important positions like Caesar, but He also can use ordinary folks that aren't necessarily famous or wealthy to be part of His plans. So today, we can all be confident in going about the work of the Lord to help build His kingdom on earth. We can be certain of our ability to share His love and to serve others., even here in Pasadena, Texas.

We also know that because God sent us the Prince of Peace, God is faithful. His promises to us are very old, and they are forever. We can celebrate this season knowing He is with us today, He is preparing a place for us in Heaven, and we know that our Savior will come again!

Please Join Me In Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us. Thank you for scriptures like Micah that send us a message of truth and the knowledge that Your promises are old and stand for ever and ever. Forgive us God for times when we worry, when we lose faith in Your promises and when we let doubts and fears take over. Help us to keep our mind focused on You. Help us to have courage when we are serving. Help us to remember your promises and the hope that we have in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Diana Choma



December 19th: Jehovah Robi: The Lord, My Shepherd—Ezekial 34:15

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will find them a place to rest. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken. (GNT)

Sheep have always been innocuous to me. They are part of the animal kingdom that have an innocence, a harmless demeanor and a mild presence. Sheep are functional. From an apparel perspective they offer warmth and security from the cold. Still, the daily life of a sheep is one of vulnerability facing danger, threats and looming challenges, even death. What could be more treacherous than a predator who preys on sheep? The life of a shepherd is not only one of little rest but also a life of great responsibility. The familiar hymn, *Savior, Lead Me, Lest I Stray*, rings out a refrain: "Lead me, lead me, Savior, lead me, lest I stray; gently down the stream of time, lead me, Savior, all the way." The good shepherd leads sheep into safe and secure places. Yet the prophet Ezekiel expands a broader perspective of bad shepherds of Israel; those shepherds who have not strengthened, healed, rescued and sought the lost. The good shepherd seeks the lost, rescues the lost, binds up the broken, heals the sick and strengthens the weak. The prophetic message of advent enters the faith community by way of a caring, good Shepherd. This may be our time to observe where we are negligent in our caring for the most vulnerable people we serve. The Lord God says, "I myself will be their shepherd..." I wonder if we will embrace the Savior's Prophecy to lead us with justice and peace.

Pray the Hymn: Savior, lead me lest I stray, gently lead me all the way; I am safe when by Thy side, I would in Thy love abide. Amen. (*Lead Me Savior* by Frank M. Davis)

Vincent Harris, Texas UMC

District Superintendent, SE District



December 20th: Birth of John the Baptist—Luke 1:17

[The angel told Zechariah, "Your son] will go forth before the Lord, equipped with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will turn the hearts of fathers back to their children, and he will turn the disobedient to righteous patterns of thinking. He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for this time together to reflect on Your Word. Open our hearts and minds to understand the significance of the birth of John the Baptist and how it speaks to our lives today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

As we reflect on the birth of John the Baptist, it's fascinating to consider the divine purpose woven into his life even before his arrival. In a world often filled with disheartening news and fleeting distractions, John's birth represents hope, preparation, and God's intricate plan. John was born at a pivotal moment in history. His arrival was not just a personal milestone for Zechariah and Elizabeth, but a key part of God's redemptive plan. This teaches us that God's timing is perfect. When we face uncertainty or waiting seasons in our lives, we can trust that God is at work, preparing hearts and circumstances. Are there areas in your life where you need to wait on God's timing?

The angel's announcement emphasizes that John would "turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous." What a profound calling! It reflects the heart of God—a desire for reconciliation and restoration. In our daily lives, we are challenged to consider how we can turn our own hearts toward our loved ones and guide others back to righteousness. Are there relationships in your life that could benefit from reconciliation or encouragement? How can we embody the spirit of John by being vessels of God's love and truth?

Finally, John was to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Preparation is a crucial process in our spiritual journey. Just as John prepared the way for Jesus' ministry, we are called to prepare our own hearts and the hearts of those around us for Jesus' return. This involves prayer, studying the word, and living out our faith authentically. How can we actively prepare ourselves and others to encounter the Lord in our daily lives? As you go through your day, remember that you have a role in preparing the way for Christ in your community, family, and among your friends. Seek opportunities to encourage, reconcile, and turn hearts toward God, just as John the Baptist did.

Some questions to think about:

- In what ways does the story of John the Baptist resonate with your personal life and faith journey?
- Are there specific relationships or situations where God is calling you to turn your heart or others' hearts back to Him?
- How can you intentionally prepare your heart to encounter the Lord this week?

Closing Prayer: Lord, thank You for the powerful message of John the Baptist. Help us to open our hearts to You and to those around us. Grant us wisdom as we seek to turn our hearts towards love and truth. May we always be prepared for Your coming, living in a way that reflects Your goodness and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Kyle Leonard



December 21st: John the Baptist's Testimony—John 1:33&34

[John testified,] "Even I didn't recognize Jesus, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'The one on

whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and testified that this one is God's Son."

We can plan our happiness. We can plan to watch our favorite team play, to go to a movie, or to go see our family. Joy is much tougher to plan. It is the surprises we find along the way, even amid our plans. The joy of the good news our family shares with us or the joy of a great twist in a story. Similarly, we can envision the happiness that we will find in being a servant of God, but there is the Joy of the Lord that is still waiting for us, currently out of sight until we will later experience it.

John always had a sense about God's mission for him, however he couldn't have imagined the surprises along the way, including baptizing God's Son. Yet the gospels show the joy he finds along the way, and his excitement to share that joy with others. The joy of finding out who the Messiah really is, not the version on paper they had been told was coming. There is a joy for us and for those around us when we become involved in someone else's story of coming to Christ. To see the walls tear down as they encounter the life changing baptism that is in front of them and the escape to a different path. The sharing of our Joy with the world returns to us as we get to engage with the joy being made around us.

Prayer: Almighty God, may we find the joy in sharing your good news, and may we look forward to the joy in those around us. Let us engage the skills and talents you have placed in us and use them to reflect your glory. We pray in your name, Amen

David Lieberman



Journey to Love

December 22nd: An Angel Appears To Mary—Luke 1:30,31,&33

The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is honoring you. Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will rule over Jacob's house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom."

As I was sitting and thinking about these verses, I began to think about when I had heard the voice of an angel and felt the presence of God myself. I remember several times in my life where I felt the presence of an angel. One of these times was in March of this year when I was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, Arthur and I spent some time talking to Pastor Lindsay about what we had just learned. She suggested that we start praying together as a couple. We started that night by praying and turning our fears over to God. We asked for God's will to be done, not our will. After that prayer I felt a presence in my body. I knew how Mary felt when the angel spoke to her. I knew that God was going to do what was right for me.

I believe now more than ever, we should take time to sit quietly and pray daily, then listen for the voice of an angel and maybe if we listen hard enough we will hear the voice of God and feel His presence.

Prayer: Dear God, spending time with you can bring us so much peace, but we often don't take the time. Please help us to be still and rest in your love. Amen.

Jewel Morgan



December 25rd: An Angel Visits Joseph—Matthew 1:20&21

While he was thinking about [breaking his engagement], an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus—because he will save his people from their sins.” (GNT)

Joseph had his future all mapped out. And then he found out Mary was pregnant. He thought his dreams for the future were over. He was ready to walk away, but God told Him to stay and trust His plan.

I, too, had a clear picture of the future that disappeared overnight (literally for me). My daughter and her husband had taken jobs in Houston. When she first told me, I said I had never heard of Houston, North Dakota. That’s when I learned they would be moving all the way to Texas. However, they later asked my husband and I to follow them to Texas to help care for my grandchild. A year after moving here I awoke one morning and couldn’t move from the neck down.

I came to learn I had Guillain Barre Syndrome. As scary and difficult as those first weeks were, God was with me through it all. From the doctor who could diagnosis me because his wife had had the same illness to the Holy Spirit who prayed for me, when I couldn’t form the words, God provided for me. And now I have regained all but the use of my legs. I can do everything for myself that I would like to do.

Like Joseph, I learned that you may not be able to map out your future, but when you trust in God you can live a beautiful life. Because of my experience I am able to offer a message of hope to other people. I can tell them honestly, that things will be okay. They won’t be the same, and it won’t be easy, but it will be ok. God has blessed me through this experience, and I am happy to share that blessing with others.

The Holy Spirit prays: “Dear God, help this person. They can’t pray right now, but they love you. Amen.
(This is an adaption of the prayer I believe the Holy Spirit prayed on my behalf)

Connie Savoy



December 24th: Mary’s Song (Magnificat)—Luke 1:46,54,&55

Mary said, “With all my heart I glorify the Lord! He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, just as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”

God promised Abraham that He would make Abraham into a great nation with the land of Canaan as his own, that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the night sky and that He would bless all the families of the earth through Abraham. When God promised these things, Abraham was a childless nomad. Even though there were many times over the intervening thousands of years between Abraham and Mary when God’s promises must have seemed impossible to the Jewish people, God’s love for His people and for “all the families of the earth” remained strong and true.

When Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, Elizabeth declared, “God has blessed the child you carry.” (Lk. 1:42)
I believe Elizabeth’s prophetic greeting caused Mary to realize that God was about to bless His people Israel along with

all the families of the earth just like He promised Abraham He would, and that the child she was carrying was going to be a major part of that blessing.

Mary's response to God is key. Despite all the turmoil and doubt she had experienced since the Angel Gabriel visited her, she was able to focus on God and glorify Him for His love and mercy toward Israel. She was excited, humbled, and honored that God chose her to be an important part of His plan.

When things don't go the way we planned, or when everything seems to be spinning out of control, we must respond like Mary. We have to realize that God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our lives. He loves us so much that He sent His Son to Earth to be born as a helpless baby, put to death on a cross, and then raised from the dead to glory so that we can be blessed with God's gift of eternal life. Our souls must glorify God for His promises and His deep love for us.

Prayer: Father, thank you for loving us and for working in our lives, even when we can't comprehend how You are working. Remind us that Your love for us knows no bounds and Your promises remain true. Help us respond to Your love for us by putting your Son Jesus at the center of our lives. Amen.

Duncan Williams





Arise at Christmas

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.*

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

This has been another year of continued change in the world. We have relearned to be in rooms with people again. The election cycle has brought concern, stress, and a great deal of anxiety. AI continues to blow our minds, and its uses range from terrifying to life-changing.

Parts of our world are on fire, while other parts are under fire. Parts of our world are under water and others experienced drought.

There is suffering and pain, loneliness and disruption, chaos and noise that cause our prayers to be fervent and unceasing.

We pray that peace, wisdom, compassion, and justice may come to rule in our hearts and communities.

AND YET, in all this we know that **JOY** comes in the morning, that light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

We pray for a miracle again this night. A miracle that will set the world in a new trajectory.

A miracle of promise of what God can do in the lives of every day ordinary people. Miracles that are hard for our eyes and hearts to perceive.

We have experienced time and again how this tiny baby breaks us open and changes everything. May it be so for us again this night.

For we know that this is the season when we most hold on to the promise of hope, peace, joy, and love.

Help us to face the future unafraid and with the confidence that Jesus comes again today to do a new thing in us and in the world.

Jesus is the gift of light to the world and to all people.

Jesus was born in the lowliest of places and it was shepherds who were the first to encounter Jesus. Not the smartest, not the richest, probably not the best smelling either, but those who would know what it means to come into a world longing for light. We are many of those same characters – we come with our meager presence and offer a fragile prayer of hope for a world that longs for light.

Silent Night

*Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon virgin Mother and Child! Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar; heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Savior is born! Christ the Savior is born!*

*Silent night, holy night! Son of God, oh, love's pure light!
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord at Thy birth!*

(by Joseph Mohr)

May the peace and light of Christ be with you this night and in all of your tomorrows.

Bishop Cynthia Harvey, Texas UMC