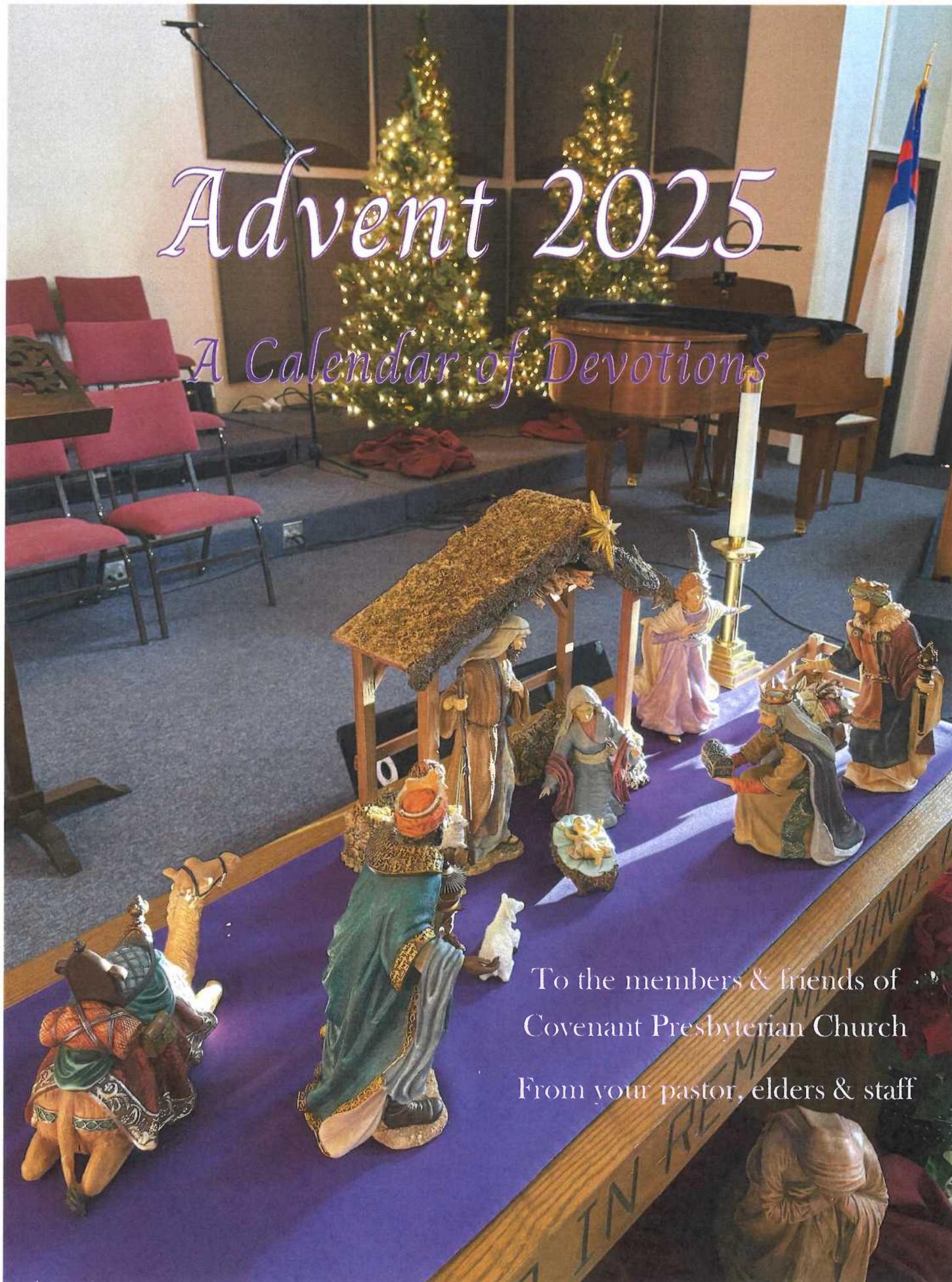


Advent 2025

A Calendar of Devotions

To the members & friends of
Covenant Presbyterian Church
From your pastor, elders & staff



A Calendar of Devotions

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Dear Friends:

Welcome to our 2025 Advent Devotional Booklet!

This year during Advent here at Covenant our theme is “A Jesus Christmas.”

Lots of folks have lots of ideas about what makes for a good Christmas. Amy Grant sings that a “Tender Tennessee Christmas” is the only Christmas for her. Keith and Kristen Getty encourage us to enjoy with them an “Irish Christmas.” Michael W. Smith tells us that the happiest Christmas is a “Homecoming Christmas” echoing the sentiments of Perry Como from the 1950’s who sang “There’s No Place Like Home for the Holidays.” Bing Crosby famously shared his dream of a “White Christmas,” while Elvis Presley suggested that anything but a “Blue Christmas” would do. And all the while everyone reminds us that the thing to do is to have a “Merry Christmas” full of joy and cheer and glad tidings.

Here at Covenant, we are going to be suggesting repeatedly that the best Christmas, the real and lasting Christmas, is “A Jesus Christmas.” This is a Christmas made rich and beautiful by Jesus Himself as we place Him at the center of things. And this is a Christmas that helps us see and experience the joy and cheer and glad tidings of an eternal love relationship with the Living God our Creator through His gift of faith in His Eternal Son Jesus Christ. And this is a Christmas that lasts throughout the year and into forever.

We hope that our Advent Devotional for this year proves to be a meaningful and effective part of this effort for you. With the Bible readings and devotional thoughts provided by our Elders and other gifted writers from our Covenant Church family, you will be encouraged to remember and celebrate Jesus throughout this Season of “peace on earth, good will to men” because of Him. We will remind ourselves of the years and years of preparation and prophecies as God’s people looked forward to the coming of



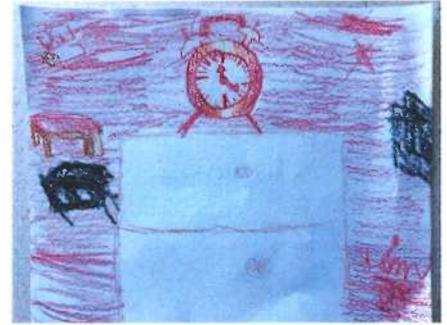
Gerard van Honthorst – Adoration of the Child (1620)

~~We will consider the God-inspired thoughts of His~~ special spokesmen as they provide insights into the meaning of His arrival here on earth. And we will hear once again the Biblical account of the days when God Himself entered our world wrapped in human flesh in that little town of Bethlehem. Along the way, our church-member writers will be helping themselves, and hopefully helping you as well, to make 2025 truly “A Jesus Christmas.”

Pastor Jay Hull for Covenant Presbyterian Church,
Advent 2025

DECEMBER 1

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son ...



Text: Galatians 4:1-7

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Reflection:

When we were younger, there seemed always to be a lot of waiting. We had to wait for the bus to take us to school. We had to wait for the teacher to call on us to answer the question. We had to wait for recess to begin, and we all anticipated the bell to ring at the end of the day so that we could head home... and wait for dinner. In my house, the only time we received presents was on our birthdays and Christmas. So, if we wanted to have that new toy or video game, there was a lot of waiting.



Advent is a season of waiting. The celebration only begins at Christmas and the anticipation is not for presents but for God's presence, which starts with Jesus' birth. We wait for God's timing to be fulfilled.

We wait for the Son to be born of a woman. We wait for the redemption, and we wait for our adoption as Children of God. Ultimately, Advent prepares us for this new relationship with God through Jesus. It's not just about waiting for a baby; it's about waiting for the transformation that His coming brings and receiving our inheritance as heirs of God's promise.

As an adult there are many other things that we wait for. We wait in traffic, and we wait for that paycheck. Maybe we are waiting to retire or something else. Whatever we are waiting for, rarely do those things bring the same excitement of our youth. I want to be excited again.

Response:

What are you waiting for? Are you ready to accept the inheritance of God's Promise this season? Are you ready to be renewed? Now is the time.

Prayer:

Father God, thank You for having a plan for me. Thank You for teaching me patience to wait for *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

- Ryan Ludwig



*Tomorrow shall be my dancing day,
I would my true love did so chance
To see the legend of my play,
to call my true love to my dance.*

*Sing, O my love, O my love, my love, my love, my love,
This have I done for my true love.*



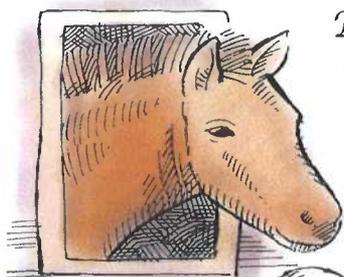
*Thus was I born of a Virgin pure, of her I took fleshly substance.
Thus was I knit to man's nature, to call my true love to my dance.*

*Sing, O my love, O my love, my love, my love, my love,
This have I done for my true love.*

*In a manger laid and wrapped I was
So very poor. This was my chance.
Betwixt an ox and a silly poor ass
to call my true love to my dance.*

*Sing, O my love, O my love,
my love, my love, my love,
This have I done
for my true love.*

*- Medieval
English
Carol*



DECEMBER 2

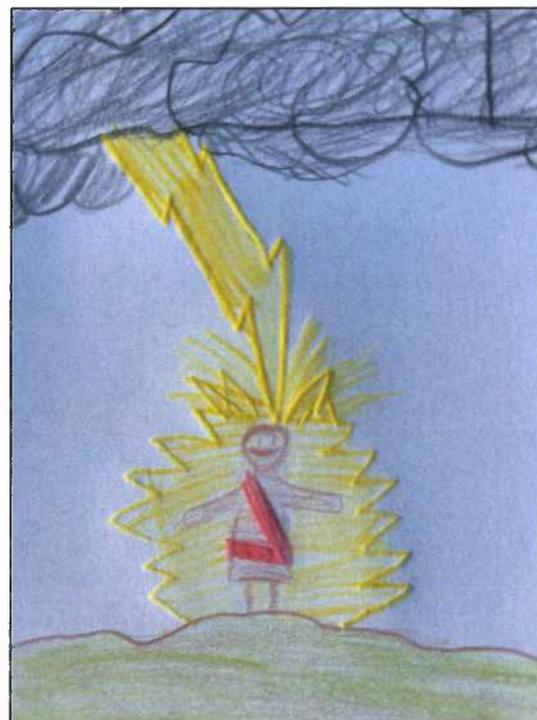
Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect...

Text: Matthew 24:3-5, 23-27, 36-44

³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray...

²³ Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴ For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ So, if they say to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out. If they say, 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. ²⁷ For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man....

³⁶ "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. ³⁷ For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. ⁴² Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.



Reflection

As I read these verses preparing to write this devotional I was reminded of when I first "gave myself" to Jesus. I was in Junior High. My 8th grade English teacher would openly talk about Jesus and God during class... a lot. (This was in the south and life was very different back then). One Friday night this teacher took a few of us to a movie called "A Thief In The Night." The movie turned out to be more like a revival. The movie, if you don't know, was someone's interpretation of the 2nd coming. It scared the heck out of me! After the movie there was a call to come up to the front and give

your life to Jesus. I couldn't run fast enough! It made me a really good kid... for a while. Now, as I said, this was the first time I gave myself to Jesus. I still had a lot of livin' to do and a lot of mistakes to make until I eventually got my head and heart straightened out and turned back to him again. But I remember that night vividly...

In these verses Jesus warns of 1) false prophets and 2) to understand that only God knows when Jesus will return. We are told that "many" will try to persuade followers that they are the Messiah, maybe even through fancy trickery of some sort. Matthew tells us that if someone promotes themselves as the Christ or says they are the Messiah... know that they are not! We won't need to be told it's Jesus when He comes... We'll know. There will be no doubt for us of His presence.

He also teaches us always to be ready. Live each day as if it's the day He will come. It's not for us to know when. We are to have faith.

Response:

We need to be ready. We are to live our lives knowing that His return is definitely coming. We just don't know when. Just as a homeowner never knows when a thief might break into their home, they still take precautions by locking doors, putting valuables in a safe, setting up security cameras, etc. In the same way, Jesus urges us to be alert, attentive, always watchful because just as a thief's main weapon is surprise, so Jesus' 2nd coming will be as jarring

and sudden. Don't let yourself be distracted by so much of what this world offers. Live each day as if it is the day Jesus is coming.

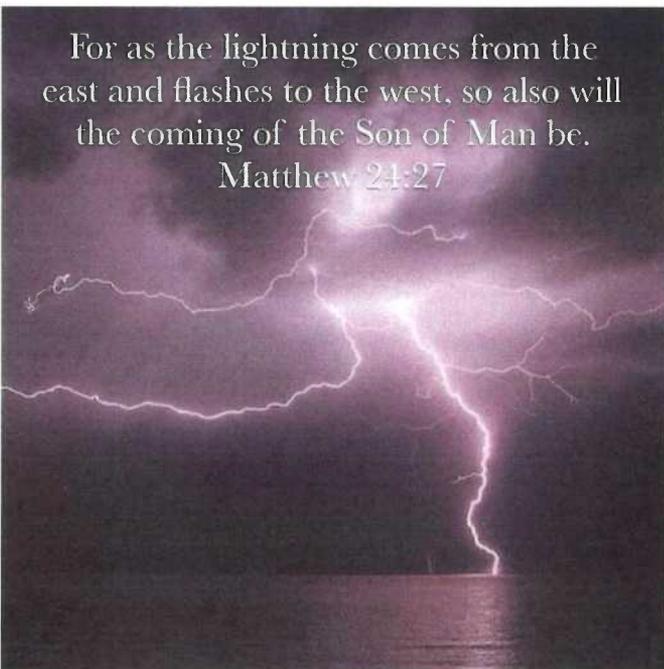
Prayer:

Holy Father, please guide me today and every day. Please surround me with the Holy Spirit, so that I may live my life in a way that pleases You. Help me to be vigilant and watchful so that when the day comes and I am face to face with Jesus, He welcomes me rather than saying "I don't know you." Thank You for all You have given me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

- Jake Armer



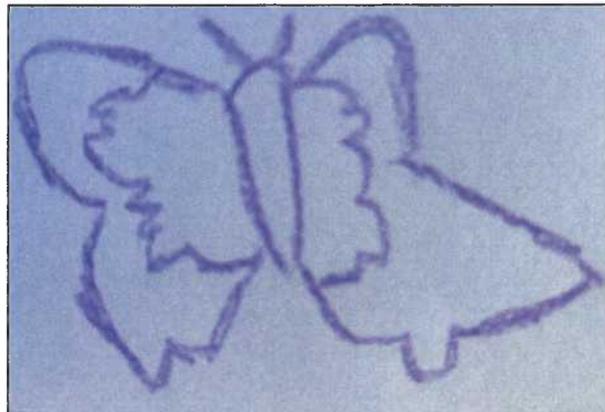
For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.
Matthew 24:27



DECEMBER 3

*And he who was seated on the throne said,
“Behold, I am making all things new.”*

Text: Revelation 21:1-7



Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

Reflection: The Whole Bible

These seven verses from the twenty-third chapter of Revelation are a pure delight. 100% sugar. Like a bowl full of jelly beans to a three-year-old.

In many hard times of my life I have treasured God’s promise, “...neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more...”

The Presbyterian church acknowledges that the Bible—all of it—is the word from God. How much of what God wants to tell us is the sugar like these seven verses from Revelation? How much is concerned with the Heaven that awaits us?

The answer is very, very little. Someone once counted and found that if you cut out all the passages relating to the afterlife and paste them together, they would fill only three pages. And the Bible is a big book.

What is God interested in having us hear?

It’s not about pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die. New Christians and dying Christians like to hear about our sure-and-certain future, but that bowl of jelly beans isn’t God’s chief message to us *now*.

It is this life—the life in the Shadowlands, as C.S. Lewis called it—that we are to pay attention to. There is plenty of *now* to occupy our thoughts. There are plenty of

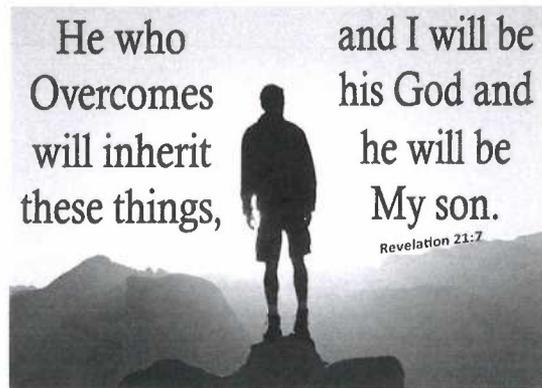
people for us to fall in love with. Some are attractive and appealing. Some aren't. Do the best you can.

Response:

Who do you know that could use some extra care, concern, love these days? How might you function as God's agent and help "make things new" for them?

Prayer:

Thank You for Your astounding promise of a sure and glorious future with You. Thank You also for Your gracious call to us to be Your partners in Your redemptive work here in the Shadowlands today. - Stan Schmidt

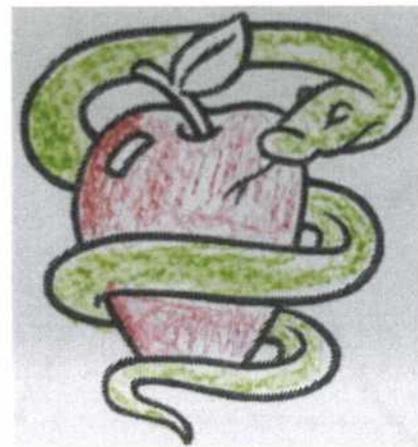


PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS

DECEMBER 4

I will put enmity between you & the woman... he shall bruise your head, & you shall bruise his heel...

Text: Genesis 3:8-15



⁸ And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." ¹¹ He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring & her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Reflection: The Dawn of Grace in the Shadows of Sin

In this passage we see the sovereignty of God and the Covenant Framework of Scripture, and it is one of the most foundational passages in the Bible. It marks the devastating breach of the Covenant of Works, and simultaneously it offers a glorious, immediate introduction of the Covenant of Grace. It is the first Gospel.

1. The total depravity of man (verses 8-13)

The first effect of Adam and Eve's disobedience, their attempt at autonomous self-determination, is not a lightning bolt but alienation and fear.

- *Hiding from God* (verses 8-10) – God, in His faithful love, comes seeking fellowship, walking “*in the cool of the day.*” But the man and woman, now tainted by sin, hide. This is the immediate, damning effect of sin upon the human condition: a desire to flee the loving, holy presence of the very God who is our life. This illustrates our total depravity—not that we are as wicked as we could possibly be, but that sin has corrupted every part of our being (mind, will and emotion), making us spiritually dead and incapable of seeking God on our own terms.
- *Blame shifting* (verses 11-13) – When confronted, the man blames the woman and implicitly blames God (“*the woman you put here with me*”). The woman blames the serpent. This demonstrates the corruption of the will: We instinctively refuse to take responsibility, proving that our natural inclination is now towards self-justification rather than humble confession. Sin blinds us to our own guilt.

2. The sovereign intervention/The *Proto-Evangelium* (verse 15)

The most astonishing part of this dark narrative is God's response. After pronouncing judgment and curses on the serpent, He speaks the first prophetic word of hope. This verse is traditionally called the “Proto-Evangelium” (the “First Gospel”).

- *Grace before justice* – God did not enact immediate, eternal death upon them, which would have been just. Instead, He interrupts the stream of judgment with a promise of redemption. This is a sovereign act of unmerited favor (grace). God's plan of salvation was not a “plan B.” It was established before the foundation of the world.
- The seed of the woman – God establishes a perpetual enmity (warfare) between the Kingdom of Darkness (the serpent's offspring) and the Kingdom of Light (the woman's offspring). This offspring is Jesus Christ, the Second Adam.
- *A bruised heel for a crushed head* – This verse foretells the entire plan of salvation through the substitutionary atonement of Christ. “*The serpent will strike his heel.*” This is a painful but non-fatal wound, a clear prophecy of Christ's suffering and death on the Cross. But He (Christ) will “*crush the head,*” a fatal, decisive blow that destroys the power of Satan, sin and death.



The Serpent & The Baby - Gavin M. Doyle (2024)

out “*Where are you!*” is the same God who sent His Son to be the seed, the fulfillment of that first promise.

We are saved not by anything we do, but by the finished work of Christ whose “*bruised heel*” secured our eternal victory.

Response:

1. Confess your own tendency to hide from God and to shift blame when you sin.

2. Thank God for His immediate, sovereign grace, shown to us just three chapters into the Bible (3:15), and for making Christ the ultimate fulfillment of His promise.

3. Pray for strength to live in the freedom that comes from trusting Christ’s finished work and not in our own ability to obey.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, by the power of Your amazing grace, help me to come out of hiding in my relationship with You and with others. Give me strength and wisdom beyond my own to trust in You and in the completed work of Your Son, Jesus our Lord and Savior, in whose name I pray. Amen.

- Bobby-Gospel Bertrand

Conclusion

This passage teaches us that our problem is radical: Our sin is total, and our natural response is to hide and blame. But our hope is even more radical! Even as humanity fell from the Covenant of Works (salvation by perfect obedience), God, in His absolute sovereignty, established the Covenant of Grace, declaring the coming of our Savior.

We do not have to hide in the trees of self-justification or fear. The God who came walking in the garden to call

Adam Lay Bound

*Adam lay ybounden,
bounden in a bond,
Four thousand winter
thoughte he not too long;
And al was for an apple,
an apple that he took,
As clerkes finden writen,
writen in hire book.
Ne hadde' the apple taken
been, the apple taken been,
Ne hadde' nevere Oure
Lady ybeen hevene Queen.
Blessed be the time
that apple taken was:
Therefore we mown² singen
Deo Gratias.³
- Medieval English Carol*

1.had not 2.May 3.Thanks Be to God

DECEMBER 5

God will provide for himself the lamb ...

Text: Genesis 22:1-19



After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”² He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

Reflection: The Knife, the Cradle, and the Rear-View Mirror

When I read the bible for the first time from cover to cover when I was 16 and hungry for truth, I read straight through till I finished in just a few months. I can remember the lightbulb shining bright as I read Genesis 22:1-19. What a wonderful

way of foreshadowing what the Lord would do. This strengthened my faith and showed me how God works through time, even thousands of years, to bring us into relationship with Him. That moment didn't just inform my faith; I suddenly grasped that God is not a cosmic puppeteer, He is the Master Storyteller who plants seeds in Genesis that only fully blossom in Bethlehem. Every syllable of Scripture is a breadcrumb leading to the Cradle and the Cross. The Bible stopped being a collection of ancient stories and became a single, seamless love letter written across millennia, addressed to me.

Reflecting on this, it always amazes me how personal God is with us, how in the rear-view mirror you can see His actions, allowances, governance over our lives. We have free will, yes, but God even uses our poor choices that He can turn into blessings. He is always faithful.

In this real-life test of faith, the knife was already in Abraham's hand, Isaac had wood on him, Abraham had fire. This had to be tormenting and agonizing, but Abraham kept his promise to God by being willing to sacrifice his beloved son. When you think about Abraham's relief when God provided the ram stuck in the thicket, think about your own relief when you knew and believed God provided Himself as the Lamb who was



Abraham & Isaac, from Hulbert's Bible Story (1932)

sacrificed to spare your very soul from condemnation. Wow, what a great relief, beyond every wonderful feeling I have ever experienced.

This is such great news because Free will is real; I have made every foolish choice. Yet somehow, in the wreckage, I keep finding God saying "I was here. I am turning this for the good."

Abraham's obedience blessed nations he would never meet. My stumbles, redeemed through faith, have quietly steadied people I didn't know were watching. Faith of believers being steadfast especially when challenged is the example God's people are intended to show to an unbelieving world so that they too might believe.

I used to think Abraham's test was about the size of his faith—offering his only son. Now I think it was about the length of it. Three days of walking, questioning, grieving, obeying. Three days of silence from heaven. Three days that must have felt excruciating and painful.

And then I remember: the Gospels give us another three-day silence. From Friday's scream to Sunday's sunrise, the Father's heart was breaking too. The knife did fall—but



Rembrandt van Rijn – The Sacrifice of Isaac, 1635

on the Lamb God provided. The Son was slain—so that every other son and daughter could live.

Abraham named the mountain Jehovah Jireh— “The Lord will provide.” If you are struggling with anything today to include your faith, remember that God will provide.

Where in your life are you climbing a mountain, facing a test of trust with God?

In my life, like most everyone, these challenges of faith have come in many forms such as relationships, jobs, and family. They seem insignificant compared to what Abraham faced with trusting the Lord with the life of his son. But that’s just it with God. He tells us to bring Him our burdens and requests, and He is faithful to answer.

Abraham walked with his son for many agonizing hours and must have been thinking to himself, “Why is God doing this to me?” but because he was faithful he said, “I must do what the Lord has demanded.” Abraham could not have known how greatly God

would bless him and all the world through his act of faith. I believe God used this extreme test of faith for Abraham so that we could more appreciate him sacrificing Himself as His One and only Son.

Response:

During this Advent season remember that God wants to bless you because of your faith and through scripture and life, you can observe that God has always been faithful even unto His sacrificing of His only son, so that like Isaac we can be given new life everlasting.

Prayer:

Lord God, help me to see Your presence with me in times of joy and times of sorrow, when things are going well and when I seem to be challenged beyond my abilities to understand and overcome. Help me to remember how You blessed world through Abraham’s greatest challenge and how You sacrificed Yourself, Your Son, to bring life to Your people and to bring me from Your Cradle to Your Cross... and beyond. Amen.

- Patrick McNeely

DECEMBER 6

A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel...

Text: Genesis 49:10-12; Numbers 24:15-17



¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. ¹¹ Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. ¹² His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

And he took up his discourse and said,

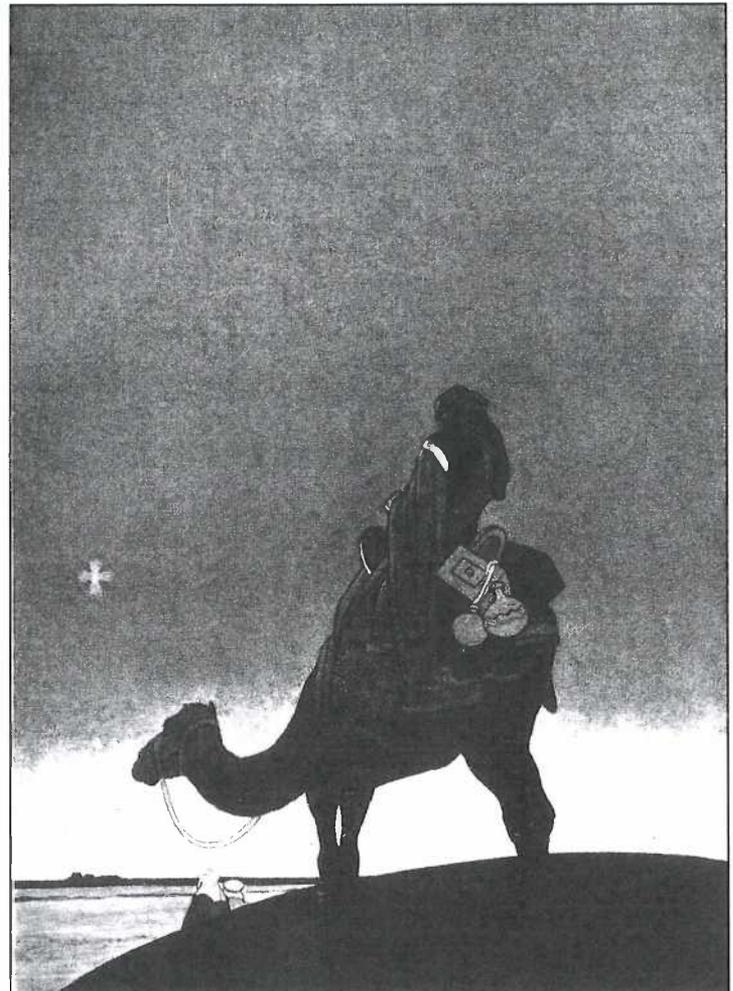
“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, ¹⁶ the oracle of him who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered:

¹⁷ I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth.”

Reflection:

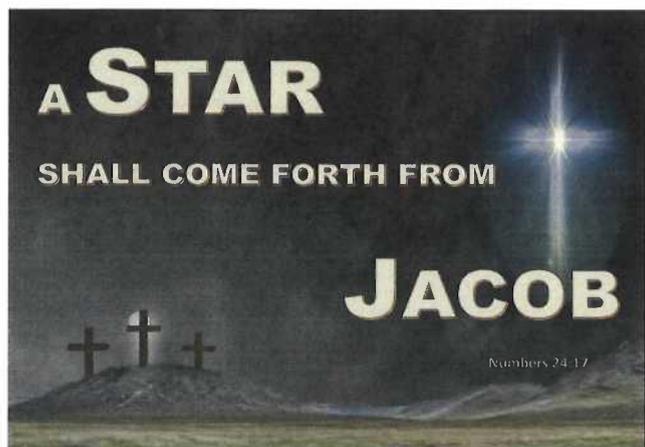
In Genesis, Jacob blesses his son Judah before he dies, saying that *"the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his."* This prophecy is about the future kingship out of Judah, and it points ahead to Jesus. The scepter symbolizes authority and governance, and the phrase *"until he to whom it belongs shall come"* indicates a divine appointment of leadership, which is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. The imagery of abundance (wine, milk), and the cleansing by his blood are seen as foreshadowing Jesus' reign and atoning sacrifice.

In Numbers, the prophet Balaam builds on Jacob's prophecy, as he foretells to Balak (the king of Moab) the rise of a



Zachary Rowe - Magi & Shepherds, 2024

future significant figure from Jacob, known as a “star” or “scepter”, who will bring great power and defeat the enemies of Israel, like Moab, which is seen in the victories of Christ over sin, death, and other adversaries.



Response:

Both scriptures were messianic prophecies concerning a future ruler from Israel, with Numbers expanding on the imagery and meaning established in Genesis. They are linked by the shared imagery of a scepter representing royal authority, and Numbers adds the image of a star, which is also a kingly symbol. While written around 200 years apart,

both prophesied the coming of a King from the line of Jacob – Jesus Christ.

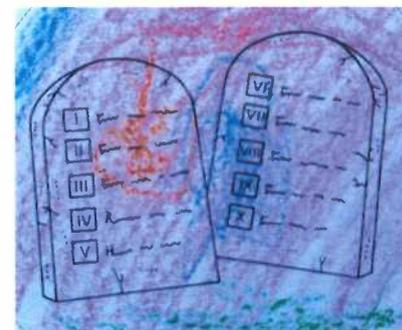
Prayer:

Dear Jesus, you are the King of Kings. All power and authority have been given to You. We adore and worship You. Thank You for Your victory over sin and death. In Your precious name, Amen. - Kathy Persons



DECEMBER 7

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen...

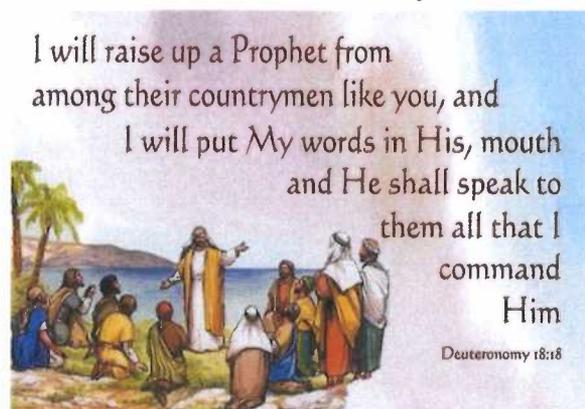


Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-18

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—¹⁶ just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’¹⁷ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken.’¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Reflection:

The Book of Deuteronomy was written by the prophet Moses who led the Israelites during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness for disobeying God's word. During this period Moses prepares the sons and daughters of the above faithless generation eventually to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Tragically their parents had lacked faith, thus wandering all those years before dying in the wilderness. This next generation, however, stressed to God in verse 16 "*don't let us hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore or see the blazing fire for we will die.*" They were now



I will raise up a Prophet from
among their countrymen like you, and
I will put My words in His, mouth
and He shall speak to
them all that I
command
Him

Deuteronomy 18:18

ready to change and enter the Promised Land.

Nearly 1400 years later, Stephen, the outstanding leader, teacher and first martyr for the Gospel, in Acts 7:37, refers back to Deuteronomy 18:15 to support his claim that Jesus Christ is God's son, the Messiah. This shows that God always keeps His promises in the time frame that He determines.

Response:

As you read your way through these four weeks of Advent devotions, work hard to keep your focus on the ultimate arrival of the baby Jesus on Christmas Day and what He offers to every human in the world. Don't let the ever-growing secular world distract you from this most Holy Event. Never forget that sin fills the vacuum left when God's truth no longer impacts society.

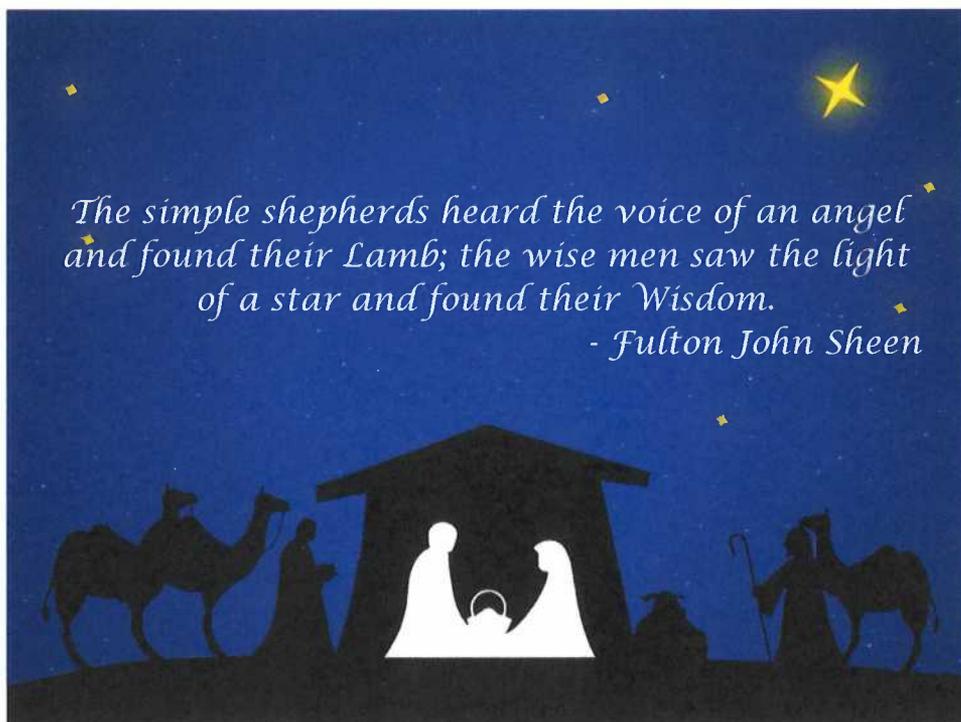
We can live for ourselves or in service to God (see John 5:24).

Prayer:

Dear Lord, Thank You for Christmas and what it means to believers: Love, forgiveness, peace, light and everlasting life. Lord, You are our cornerstone, and You are always with us. Help us, Dear Lord, to have the courage and faith to share all of the above blessings with unbelievers.

To You be all Glory, Honor and Praise.

- Larry Stockert



*The simple shepherds heard the voice of an angel
and found their Lamb; the wise men saw the light
of a star and found their Wisdom.*

- Fulton John Sheen

DECEMBER 8

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ...



Text: II Samuel 7:8-17

⁸ 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, that you should 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. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.’ ” ¹⁷ In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Reflection:

God ALWAYS has a plan... and it's always bigger and better and more glorious than we can imagine.

David, who always had a demonstrable love of God through writing psalms, winning battles, playing the harp, and dancing before the Ark, wants to honor God with an earthly temple. David feels guilty that he gets to live in an immovable structure, a palace, whereas The Ark of the Covenant, God's presence among his people is housed in the tabernacle, a tent, something that has moved with God's people for hundreds of years. David's plan is to build a permanent house for the Ark. David runs this idea by Nathan the prophet, God's messenger, and initially Nathan agrees that this is a good plan. God has another plan.

God instructs Nathan to reveal to David a bigger plan, the Lord's plan. He will make David's name great, among the greatest of all time. He will also provide a

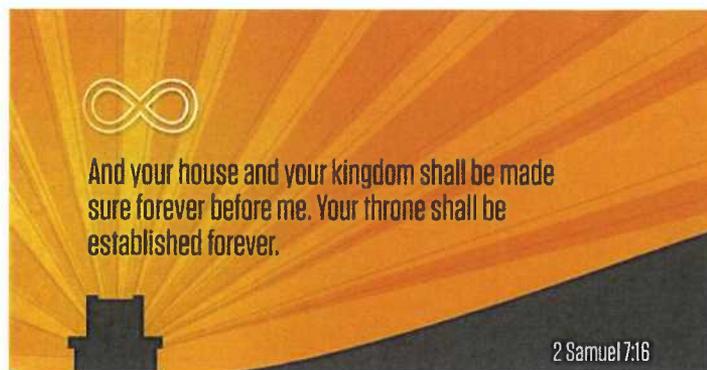
permanent home for the people of Israel and will keep them safe and give them rest. Finally, the Lord will establish a house, a legacy. Through David's line will come an eternal kingdom with God's only Son, Jesus, at the head. Through Jesus, the Christ, the Redeemer of the world, David's throne will be forever. This is known as the Davidic Covenant, one of five key covenants in the Bible. In the Noahic Covenant God promised never to destroy his people again with a flood. In the Abrahamic Covenant God promised Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars. In the Mosaic Covenant God promised that the Israelites were His chosen people and gave them the 10 Commandments which would set Israel apart. Now He has established the Davidic Covenant which foreshadows the coming of Christ through David. In the New Testament God gives the New Covenant, that through the redeeming work of Jesus ALL would be saved who believe, fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies.



**Gerard van Honthorst -
David (1622)**

Response:

As we approach the celebration of the birth of our savior, the challenge for us is to trust in God's plan whose timing we may not see in our lifetimes. We are but a blip in salvation history, and yet we are all part of His plan, and it is our role to be faithful followers. God has set the groundwork for an eternal temple through his beloved Son Jesus. While on earth David never met Jesus, but he had a crucial role in his presence



on earth. We all have a crucial role to play as well, which is different for all of us, and we may not see it while we walk the earth. For those of us who believe, obedience is our job, and we trust He has the perfect plan.

Prayer:

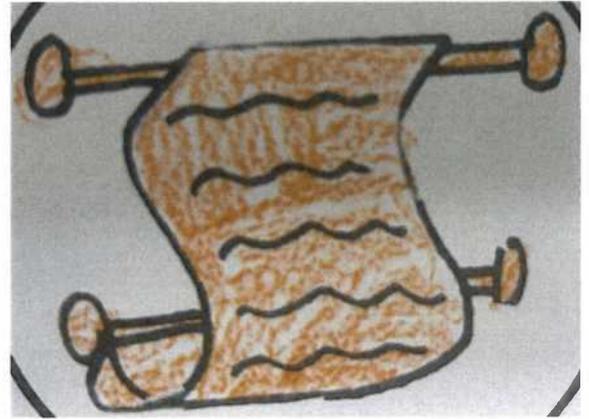
Holy Father, You are eternal. You have a plan - bigger, better and more glorious than we mere mortals can fathom. Help me to trust that though You have a plan for all humanity, You also have a plan for me, for good and not for harm, especially when I am mired in frustration when things don't go my way. As I celebrate the birth of Your Son, help me to remember that You sent him that I might spend eternity with You. In the name of Your precious Son, Jesus. Amen.

- Kathy Croughan

DECEMBER 9

And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor...

Text: Isaiah 9:2-7



The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

³ You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. ⁴ For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult & every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Reflection:

In this prophecy, a child and son will be given to God's people. He will be the ruler, the governor of a new kingdom. The names given to the child are loaded, and we will recognize him by these four names.

First, Wonderful Counselor doesn't mean an amazing therapist. Counselor here is more akin to a political/war strategist, someone who makes plans. And Wonderful comes from a miracle or a supernatural act that only God can perform. So, the child will be someone who plans with divine wisdom. In verse 7 we see what these plans are and that no human can stop them, as "*the zeal of the LORD of host will do this*". His plans, what he will set out to do is certain.

Second, Mighty God clearly equates the child's nature to God's nature. The name El only refers to YHWH. Mighty here means a warrior, a hero, a champion in the context of war. Jews believe this term applies to the one sending the child and not to the child himself, otherwise they would have to accept the promised child as God. But we believe this name applies to the child in question. In verse 7, "*on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it,*" we see the child has the power to sustain the kingdom in a way all other human kings couldn't.

Third, Everlasting Father means the source, owner, origin or possessor of eternity, the one whose reign never ends. The word Father here is not referring to God the Father, but to a king that has a father role for his people. So, this king is the source, the owner of enduring, eternal rule. In verse 7, *“of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,”* we are told this child will be the ruler, the king of this new kingdom and his peace will be permanent. Never again will sin break the relationship between him and his people.

And last, Prince of Peace refers to one who rules, administers, governs in a way that brings, not only the absence of war, but the one who brings true justice, final reconciliation of all relationships, a society that is in real and permanent order. This kingdom sounds like Eden, this child will bring us back to the right relationship with God, the way it was before the fall. Again, in verse 7, the wonder of this name is confirmed: *“of the increase of his government and his Shalom there will be no end.”*

These names are the job description of the one promised king of the line of David who would make all things right. The prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the one we celebrate in this season of Advent.

Response:

Respond to these heavy, glorious names with praise and adoration. Tell Him constantly, whenever you remember, about who He is, what He has accomplished, what promises He has made. He deserves all of the praise you can muster. Worship Him with your thoughts, words, prayers, singing, relationships.

When you join the congregation of the saints in church, express to Him all these things with joy. When you are at work or at school or at home, continue giving Him glory, honor and the exaltation due to His name.

Prayer:

Thank You Father for giving us this child, for sending us Your Son. You fulfilled this promise because that is who You are. You are good towards us. You didn't let us perish in our sins. Even though the only thing we deserved was condemnation and the just penalty for our sins, it pleased You instead to give us something none of us deserved, Your mercy and grace. We can't wait to see with our physical eyes Your glorious kingdom here on earth. For now, we put all our trust in You with our spiritual eyes. Amen.



- Samuel Dueñas

DECEMBER 10

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse...

Text: Isaiah 11:1-10



There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. ² And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, ⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Reflection:

The human heart ever longs for peace on earth. God has sent signals of a coming peace throughout history. A multitude of angels announced peace on earth when they appeared to terrified shepherds at the advent of Jesus' birth. Seven hundred years before Jesus' incarnation, the prophet Isaiah wrote words of hope to his fellow beleaguered Jews who had been battered by brutal invaders. First Isaiah predicts the ruin and captivity of Judah. This devastation, ordained by God for his people's sinful idolatry, would come to pass in 586BC. But then God quickly follows this dire prophecy with the promise of a coming deliverer. Isaiah uses the striking image of a shoot growing out of the stump of their nation's ruin. This shoot, labeled the Branch, will be a person upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests. Isaiah identifies His lineage as Davidic since the stump is called Jesse's stump, the name of King David's father. The Branch will bear much fruit. God prophesied that this coming ruler would delight

in reverent worship of the Lord, and would be endowed with wisdom, understanding, counsel, and power.

This promise of a God-anointed redeemer—the Messiah—would take root in the hearts of God’s chosen people. Many centuries later in 4BC faithful watchers for God’s Messiah Mary, Joseph, Anna, and Simeon, were privileged actors in His arrival. After Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple for consecration, with faithful Anna nearby, elderly Simeon took Him up in his arms and praised God with these words:

*“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared
in the sight of all people,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.”*

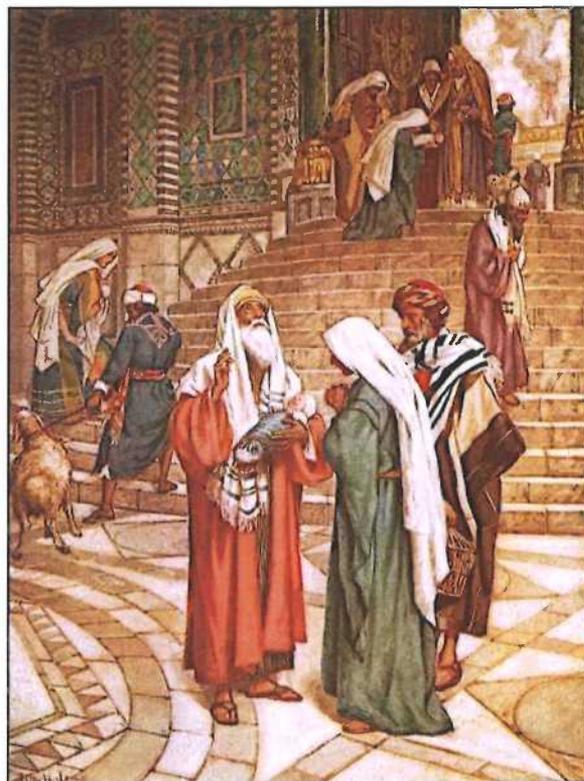
Response:

During Advent we not only celebrate The Prince of Peace’s entrance into our world, we also look forward to His Second Coming when He will return to judge and make all things new. Isaiah’s final peaceful image of predatory beasts & their prey led by a little child symbolizes this fully restored Creation.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Jesus as Your agent of peace on earth. I praise You that the sacrifice Jesus provided brought the way for all who believe to be at peace with You. Lord, we long for the Day when You will make all things new. Amen.

- Debbie Barackman



William Brassy Hole, The Child Jesus Presented in the Temple, 1905



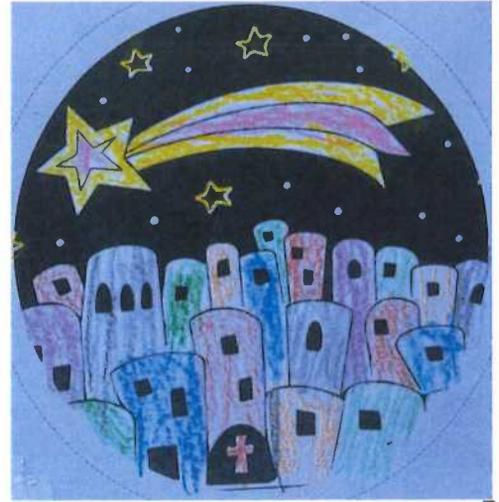
*To travel the road to Bethlehem is to keep a rendezvous with wonder,
to answer the call of wisdom, and to bow the knee in worship.*

- John A. Knight

DECEMBER 11

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel...

Text: Micah 5:2-4



“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

Reflection:

Here is the prophecy from Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, about Bethlehem. God told him that this little forgettable town would be the birthplace of a new ruler for God’s people. Bethlehem means “house of bread,” and Ephrathah, referring to the district of Judah where Bethlehem was located, is believed to mean “fruitful.” It is perhaps because of Bethlehem’s insignificance that this new king, whose arrival would happen in continuity with God’s plans and purposes from the beginning, would be born there. Such a small town was less susceptible to the polluting corruption found in the halls of power in nearby Jerusalem.

Micah’s word was one of great hope for his people suffering under faithless leaders, foreign threats and widespread idolatry. This new ruler would be a good and true shepherd, Micah declares, looking after his people and bringing them lasting peace and security rather than using them for his own selfish ends. He would do this by God’s strength and for God’s glory.

Many in Israel heard this prophecy as Messianic, pointing to the One who would come one day and put things right, once and for all, for God’s struggling people. Certainly this is how the Jerusalem priests and scribes interpreted Micah’s prediction for King Herod according to Matthew’s story of Jesus’ birth (Matthew 2:1-12). Herod went on to send the Wise Men to Bethlehem to see if some sort of Messiah-King had arrived there as predicted, and when they failed to report back to him he arranged to have all the little boys killed.

Now we look back at Christmas time and routinely marvel at the “beyond time” reality of God’s presence and superintending power in His world. God could, and did, reveal the future to His prophet Micah. Then through a series of events Mary and Joseph had to make the arduous trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for the emperor’s census. And there in Bethlehem, in the humblest of surroundings in the humblest of towns, Jesus the Messiah was born.

Such fascination with God’s greatness and goodness—our God who can and does intervene and communicate for the good of His people—is good, but I think we are wise also to consider the place of Micah’s prophecy in the story of Jesus birth. At a deeper level we might ask how the religious people and the political people, in “real time,” used his insights from God. And then we do well to consider how Micah’s words about Bethlehem do more than simply fascinate us but stimulate us to believe in Jesus and to take action for Him with greater courage and passion.

It is pretty clear that nobody was writing “O Little Town of Bethlehem” songs in Herod’s day. Micah’s prophecy was all but forgotten. God’s gracious communication about future rescue had faded into the mists of ancient religious trivia. They had to go ask the religious experts where the Messiah was supposed to be born.

And those religious experts had the info, gave it to Herod who passed it on to the Wise Men from the East, and then went back to whatever they were doing. Not one of them made any effort to go for themselves to Bethlehem to see if the words of Micah, their prophet, had come true. They were too busy, it seems, being the acknowledged experts on their faith to allow that faith any place of real importance in their own lives.

And Herod, of course, was only interested in Micah’s prophecy as some kind of



Hannah Hull – Bethlehem, 2024

asset in his first-century spy games. Herod was at the center of his world, so when the real Center of the Universe showed up He was nothing but a threat to be eliminated. So, for Herod, Micah's "O Bethlehem Ephrathah" moved him to murder. This was not why God had given such supernatural insight to His prophet.

So why has God given Micah's amazing words to us? To add to our list of ancient Christmas trivia? To remember for a moment at Christmas and then quickly forget what it tells us of God's grace and goodness accomplished for us through the One born in Bethlehem?

May our good "beyond time" fascination lead us to better "real time" faith in action.

Response:

What does it mean to you that Jesus' place of birth was known to God and revealed to Micah some 700 years before the event? What insight does this offer as you think about your own life and time? Why do you think the religious people of Herod's day did not respond personally to the arrival of the Wise Men and their provocative questions?

Prayer:

Dear Lord, help me to hear the good news Micah brought, the Good News of Messiah Jesus, with open ears and a fresh spirit of faithful discovery. Then, Lord, help me to respond to this revelation of Your transcendent presence and sovereign goodness in faithful and joyful service to You and Your coming Kingdom. Amen.

- Jay Hull

*And girls in slacks remember Dad,
And oafish louts remember Mum,
And sleepless children's hearts are glad,
And Christmas morning bells say
'Come!'*

*Even to shining ones who dwell
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.*

*And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in the stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall?*

*- from Christmas by Sir John Betjeman
(1906-1984)*



DECEMBER 12

In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD...

Text: Isaiah 40:1-8



Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Reflection:

This passage of Scripture is not about the desert; that's just incidental. It's truly about a comforting and "inspiring" word from God, and it's about both the First and the Second Advents, and it's a reiteration of the surety of God's Word.

Primarily, but not immediately evident, it's about the Glory of God to be fully revealed at the Second Coming of Christ; the Second Advent. The birth of Jesus into this world (the First Advent) was only a waypoint in God's great overarching plan of Creation. As in Paul Harvey's radio stories, we eagerly await "the rest of the story".

The voice that says, "*Comfort, comfort my people*" is the same still small voice that came to Elijah after a wind, an earthquake and a fire (1st Kings 20:11-13). If we are willing to listen we can hear that voice now. God has no need to shout. It's right at hand, in His written Word.

The next three verses may actually be about the Second Coming; specifically, a call to be ready for that event in which the Glory of the Lord will be fully revealed, and with a reminder that everyone all at once will see it. When God speaks there is no question Who it is!

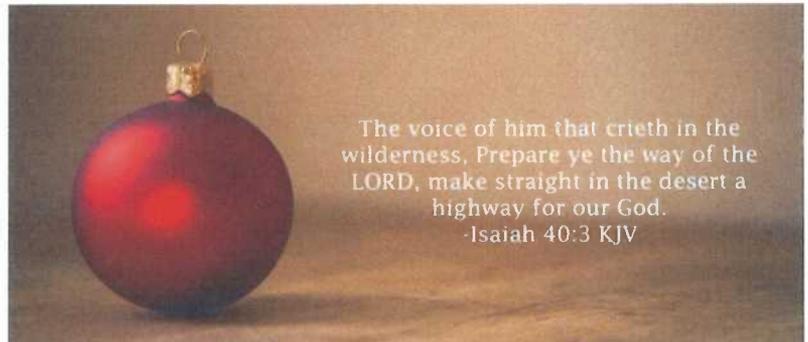
Next is an almost redundant statement about the Word of God. Jesus, Himself is the Word of God, a very incarnation of God's communication to us. By way of emphasis, Scripture says the Word of God stands forever. In contrast with transient things, His Word is for all time. Out in the desert of Sinai, at the foot of Mt. Horeb,

some of our distant ancestors complained to Moses that they were terrified at hearing from God directly, and demanded that Moses intercede for them so they would not have to hear the very voice of God lest they die. That plea was answered in Jesus' First Advent, when as a man, just as human as the rest of us, Jesus spoke a lifetime ministry of Words of Comfort that we can listen to without confronting the full and overwhelming Glory of God. We can heed the words of Jesus (the voice of God) without dying at the sound of it.

Then in vs. 7-8 are truly Words of Comfort repeated, in a prophetic voice or maybe a voice of the Holy Spirit, saying, "*The grass withers and flowers fade, but the Word of God stands forever.*" It's comforting to know God's Word is not transient.

Response:

Give God thanks and praise that He has spoken His love and truth to us, especially in Jesus Christ, and that His Word is eternal. Try to think about your earthly triumphs and transient tragedies in the context of God's everlasting Word of life. And try to work in this Christmas Season more for God's purposes, things that last, and less for the things that will fade and die.



Prayer:

Father God, God the Holy Spirit, and Lord Jesus: Thank You for being a Trinity of Holiness; Holy, Holy, and Holy.

Thank You for being omnipresent even when I do not take notice of it. Thank You for taking hold of my soul even when I was not consciously looking for You.

By way of petition, please somehow keep me safely within the scope of Your mercy and providence. And please guide all of us through whatever personal deserts we are in, figuratively like the fearful vicinity of Mt. Horeb, as when we don't know where the next life-saving water source is to be found.

May there be something like a well-paved highway before us hastening God's Second Advent, open and evident to everyone all together in a full revealing of the whole Glory of God.

Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

- David MacDonald



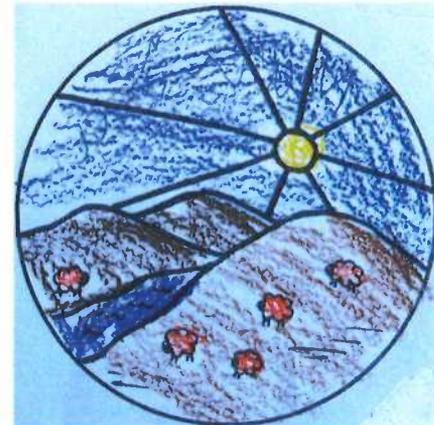
The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.

- C. S. Lewis

DECEMBER 13

Behold, the Lord God comes with might...

Text: Isaiah 40:9-11



Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Reflection:

Can you imagine during Denell's final leading of our All-Church "Hallelujah Chorus" on Easter, someone from one of the back rows hollers out - "Hey, can you tone it down a bit? My baby's sound asleep on my shoulder!!" Is this a "both-and" or "either-or" situation? After reading today's Scripture, I'd love to hear how you would describe these three verses.

The notes in my ESV Study Bible for the previous several verses say this - "The glory is revealed as God leads His people.... (not privately, but out in front of the whole world). From this promise of God's presence flow all of God's gracious promises, and from this divine purpose flows the whole of history." (mic drop!!)

Verse 9 directs us to "*Go up on a high mountain.... lift up your voice... and declare "Behold your(our/my) God!"* It speaks of a "Hallelujah Chorus" experience which we can't help but share with the world!!! " *...And He shall reign for ever and ever.* "

Imagine you've just shown this to someone on your phone, and as the last notes echo into the distance, your friend responds - "Yeah.....WOW!. my heart was pounding and I had to catch my breath..... OK, thanks - I'll see you later." "Uhh, ummm, but wait you say - I didn't get to tell you about the Shepherd." Huh? Shepherd? What are you talking about man?

Well, as necessary and amazing as mountaintop experiences are, we don't live on mountaintops, right? We live down here where all those promises play out every day.

Q. Schirmer, Ontario No. 10027

Hallelujah
From the oratorio "Messiah"
For Three-Part Chorus of Mixed Voices
with Piano Accompaniment

Der. H. 0. 31: 15; 14; 10

George Frideric Handel
Arranged by Carl Dede

Allegro maestoso 3/8

Piano

FRONTLAND
Hail - lu - jah! Hal - lu - jah!

AVO
Hail - lu - jah! Hal - lu - jah!

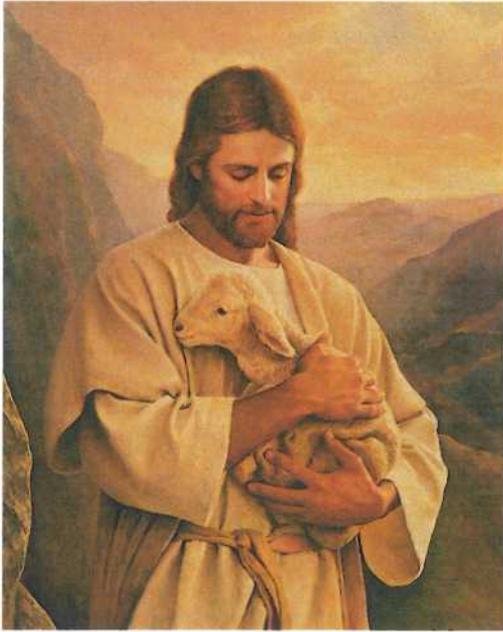
FRANTOZE
Hail - lu - jah! Hal - lu - jah!

FRANTOZE
Hail - lu - jah! Hal - lu - jah!

FRANTOZE
Hail - lu - jah! Hal - lu - jah!

FRANTOZE
Hail - lu - jah! Hal - lu - jah!

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Picture this - the mom or dad are walking through the park or mall, or leaning back on the couch, or are even in Church and their 6-month-old child is draped across their shoulder, sound asleep, deeply content and surrendered/assured that they are/will be completely taken care of and protected. Well that same God, who warrants our singing of the Hallelujah Chorus is also the God who is there for us in the same manner as the child on/in his mother's arms - there to love, care for, teach, direct, and encourage us "in all His ways."

Response:

God's design and perfect Plan is here for us now, but we have to choose to love and follow Him just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have lived in and experienced their own perfect Love for all of Eternity. In the creation of the Universe, we see and celebrate a God whose power is limitless and unending. In the image of a shepherd leaving the 99 to go look for and find the 1 who is lost, we can begin to understand that in His Son's death on a cross and His 3-days-later Resurrection, we see the unfathomable effort God will make to ensure our Salvation. Will you choose to follow Him today!?

Prayer:

Our Father, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit You know what we need. You know and show us Your power in order to instill confidence in You and all You say. You encourage us by Your examples of caring and love for all others to be Your shepherds and messengers to the ends of the earth! May I wake up each morning with JOY and this question in my mind and on my heart - What's Your Plan for my day Lord!? Hallelujah and Amen.

- Dan Carne

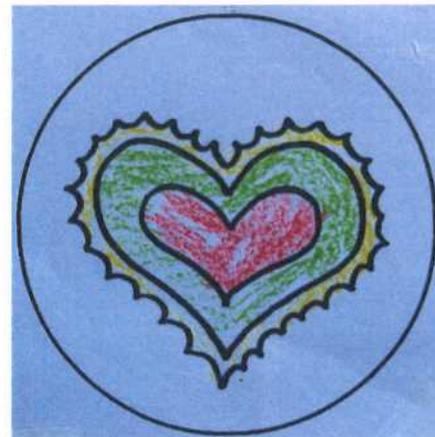


You can never truly enjoy Christmas until you can look up into the Father's face and tell Him you have received his Christmas gift.

- John R. Rice

DECEMBER 14

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me...
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor...*

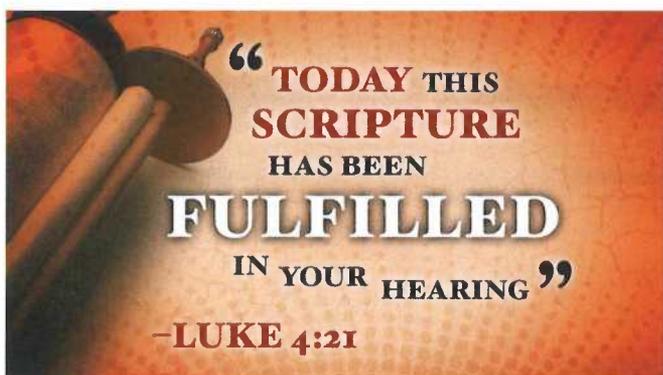


Text: Isaiah 61:1-3

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

Reflection

Luke 4:16-21 tells us that shortly after His Temptation, Jesus returned to His childhood home. On the Sabbath, He went to the synagogue and was asked to read.



Whether He picked this passage or it was given to him, He read Isaiah 61:1-2a. He then put down the scroll and declared that that prophecy was just fulfilled in their hearing.

Are there some parts of the Bible that amazed you when you first heard them? This was one of those for me. As a newer Christian this stood out to me because Jesus Himself ties Old Testament passages as prophecies to Himself. It was not someone after the fact, applying passages that sort of match Jesus's life and saying, "Hey look, here a prophecy." No, Jesus opened the door to this analysis, and, for me, lending credence to the multitude of other passages that predict or foreshadow the Messiah. By the way, this is not the only time. He also did this when He walked with the men on the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection. "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" [Luke 24:27 (ESV)] Jesus testifies that the Old Testament points us to Him.

So, what can we glean from this prophecy in Isaiah 61? For me: Hope, Confidence.

Clearly, the entire passage is referring to the same Person, but it is divided into two parts. Jesus stopped reading after "*to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" That part was fulfilled in the audience's hearing: to bring good news, i.e. the Gospel ("good

news”), to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

Did He do this? Let’s see!

Proclaim the “good news” to the poor - Jesus talked extensively about the good news of the kingdom of God. He was sent (translated “anointed” in Isaiah 61:1) do to this. *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”* [Luke 4:43 (ESV)] And here’s an extra nugget: who did He say the kingdom of God belongs to? That’s right: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* [Matt 5:3 (ESV)]. Just like it says in Isaiah 61:1 (Don’t you love the Bible!!!)

Bind up the brokenhearted - Jesus encouraged and healed those who were broken in the world. There are numerous examples (Zaccheus, Samaritan woman, woman who washes His feet). And He extends this invitation to all: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* [Matt 11:28 (NIV)]

To proclaim liberty to the captives and the bound - For me, Paul the Apostle expresses this best: *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”* [Rom 7:24-25 (NIV)] And Jesus Himself promised, *“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* [John 8:36 (NIV)]

To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor - Paul declares to us, *“I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.”* [2 Cor 6:2 (NIV)]

So, we can start to see that Jesus did fulfill the specifics in the first part of this passage! Doesn’t that inspire confidence!

So, what was not fulfilled and what are we looking forward to in its fulfillment? Again, let’s see:

The day of vengeance of our God - God’s vengeance has not come, but it will! The seven seals and trumpets in Revelation describe this in detail.

To comfort all who mourn - We have pain and sadness today, but it will end! *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain.”* [Rev 21:4 (NIV)]

To grant to those who mourn in Zion - We are aliens in this world, but we have a future home! *“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”* [Rev 21:2 (NIV)]



To give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes - Today we are humbled, but Paul explains this new headdress: *“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”* [2 Tim 4:8 (NIV)]

The oil of gladness instead of mourning - Again, today we mourn, but we will have joy!

The garment of praise instead of a faint spirit - Today we live in our weak bodies, but we will get a new garment! Again, Paul elucidates this future garment: *“Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ... For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”* [2 Cor 5:2-4 (NIV)]

That they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified - To be honest, I don't know how to interpret this verse. What I read in this is that we will be strong in righteousness, from God's effort (planting) rather than our own, to His Glory.

We celebrate Jesus' birth (Merry Christmas!). Our sins were paid for in His death, and the proof is in his Resurrection (Happy Easter, He is Risen Indeed!). But our ultimate hope is in His return. He fulfilled the first part of the prophecy hundreds of years after it was written. Because of that, we can have all the confidence He will fulfill the second part. And the fulfillment began with His Birth. That is our essential celebration of Christmas.

Response:

Let the amazing detail of the fulfilled portion of this passage strengthen your confidence in the foundation of our faith - Jesus Christ. And the hope and assurance that our real future, our real joy, our ultimate rest is rooted in that exact same confidence.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for Christmas, for coming to Earth to live a sinless life, to be crucified as the payment of my sin. But also I look to my resurrection, evidenced by Your resurrection. In the meantime, in today's world help me to find solace in and look forward to the ultimate future You have laid out for us. - Steve Patton



DECEMBER 15

With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man...

Text: Daniel 7:13-14

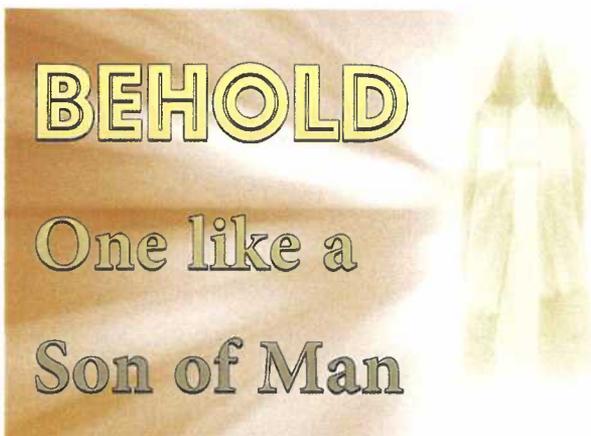
“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”



Reflection:

In the midst of Daniel’s terrifying visions of beasts and kingdoms rising and falling, God grants him a glimpse of something radically different — the coming of the *Son of Man*. Unlike the chaotic, power-hungry empires of the world, this figure comes not in violence, but “*with the clouds of heaven.*” He is given authority, glory, and a kingdom that spans every tribe, tongue, and nation. And unlike every other human kingdom, His reign is everlasting.

This prophetic vision points us directly to Jesus Christ. Jesus often referred to Himself as the *Son of Man*, directly linking His identity to this passage. At His trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:62), He quoted Daniel 7, declaring that He would come “*seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.*” This was not just a poetic flourish — it was a claim to divine kingship, one that the religious leaders understood and rejected. Yet, God’s plan was not thwarted. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus established a kingdom not of this world, but one that is invading every corner of the earth through the Gospel.



This kingdom is not built by military might, political manipulation, or economic dominance. It is established through grace, truth, and the power of the Spirit.

Response:

The kingdoms of this world are temporary, but Christ’s kingdom is eternal. Choose today to live as a citizen of the King who reigns forever.

Understand and rejoice in this: If you are in Christ, if you trust in Him as your Lord and Savior, you are already a citizen of His unshakable kingdom. That is your true identity. That is your eternal hope.

Embrace the glorious truth that in a world where the kingdoms of men rise and fall, and where it often feels like chaos reigns, Daniel 7 reminds us who truly sits on the throne. Jesus reigns now – and forever.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are the Son of Man, the King whose dominion is everlasting. When the world feels uncertain, help me to remember that Your kingdom cannot be shaken. Reign in my heart today. Use me to reflect the values of Your kingdom – truth, grace, justice, and love. Thank You for giving me a place in Your eternal family. I worship You, my King. Amen.

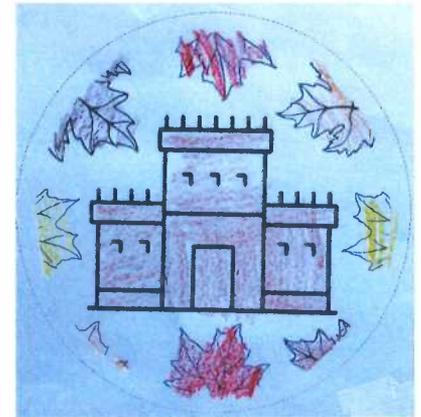
- Jeff Darling

PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS

DECEMBER 16

*Behold, I send my messenger, & he will prepare the way before me.
And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple...*

Text: Malachi 2:17-3:10



You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

³ “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ² But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

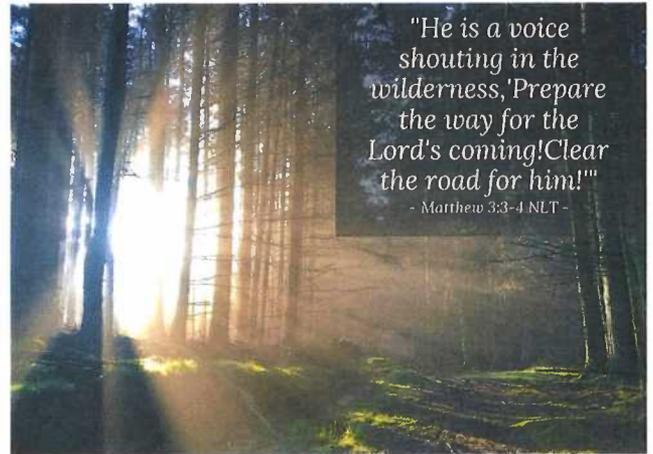
⁵ “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

⁶ “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ ⁸ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you

say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need..."

Reflection:

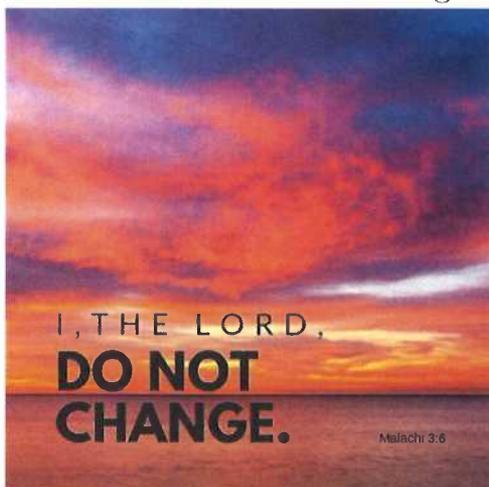
The people of Israel had grown weary of waiting. Generation after generation had come and gone, and still no Messiah. Their hearts were heavy with disappointment, and their questions were sharp: "*Where is the God of justice?*" (Mal. 2:17). They saw corruption in the world and hypocrisy among the priests. Their worship had become routine, their prayers mechanical. God's silence felt like absence.



Through the prophet Malachi, the Lord answered their complaint. His justice was not forgotten – it was on its way. "*Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple*" (3:1). Centuries later, these words echoed in the desert when John the Baptist cried out, "*Prepare the way of the Lord!*" (Matt. 3:3). The long-promised Messenger had come – and behind him came the very presence of God in human flesh.

Yet Malachi's message carried a surprising warning: when God comes, He comes not only to comfort but to confront. "*Who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap*" (3:2). The people wanted a Messiah who would judge their enemies. God promised a Savior who would first purify their hearts.

Advent reminds us that the coming of Christ is both gentle and fierce. The Child in the manger is also the Refiner who burns away our dross. His first coming exposed the sin that hides behind religion and revealed a righteousness born not of effort but of grace. His second coming will complete what the first began – a world cleansed of injustice, a people made pure for the glory of His name.



Notice how this prophecy ties Christmas to the Cross. The fire of purification would one day consume the Son Himself. Jesus bore our impurities on Calvary so that His refining could cleanse rather than destroy. In Him, justice and mercy meet. The Lord we awaited has come, and He is coming again.

Response

Like Israel, we sometimes grow impatient for God to act. We look at the brokenness of our world – wars, injustice, betrayal, greed – and we ask, “Where is the God of justice?” Advent speaks directly to that ache. It reminds us that God has acted once for all in the incarnation of His Son, and He will act again in final judgment and restoration. The waiting is not wasted. It is the space in which we are refined.

Malachi’s words also call the Church to self-examination. Before God judges the world, He purifies His people. “*He will purify the sons of Levi,*” the prophet said, “*and refine them like gold and silver*” (3:3). For Israel, that meant the priests. For us, it means the priesthood of all believers. The Refiner’s work begins right where His Spirit dwells – within us.

Advent is the season when we dare to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus.” But in saying that, we invite not only His comfort but also His correction. The same Jesus who came quietly to Bethlehem now seeks the temple of our hearts, overturning tables of pride, resentment, and fear. He calls us back to the covenant: “*Return to me, and I will return to you*” (3:7).

And yet, there is joy in this refining! The fire that purges is also the fire that warms. Christ does not leave us in our sin – He restores, renews, and rekindles our hope. His birth was the dawn of righteousness breaking into a dark world. His return will be the full sunrise when every shadow flees. Between those two advents, we live as a people being purified – shaped by His Word, sustained by His Spirit, and called to shine with His holiness.

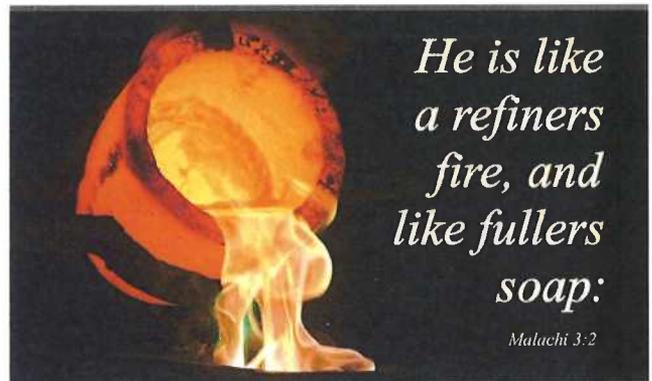
So this Christmas, as we light candles and sing of peace on earth, let us remember that peace begins in purified hearts. The same God who came once in humility will come again in glory. Until that day, we prepare Him room – not through outward display, but through inward devotion. The manger reminds us that God enters the lowly places; the refiner’s fire reminds us that He transforms what He touches.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as we remember Your first coming, prepare us for Your second. Purify our motives, cleanse our desires, and make us radiant with Your holiness. Let this Advent season awaken in us a more profound longing for Your presence – not only to comfort us, but to change us.

As You once entered the temple, enter now the temple of our hearts. Burn away the pride that dulls our worship. Wash us with the mercy that You purchased at the cross. May the light that shone in Bethlehem shine again in us, until the day we see You face to face and the refining is complete. Amen.

- Chris Schlatter

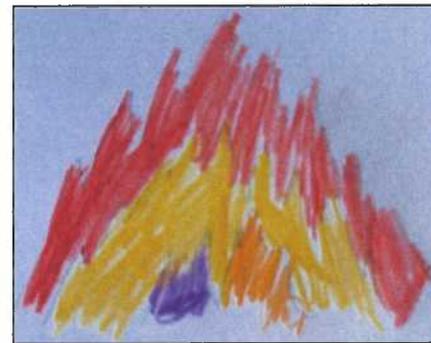


*He is like
a refiners
fire, and
like fullers
soap:*

Malachi 3:2

DECEMBER 17

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes...



Text: Malachi 4:1-6

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

⁴ “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Reflection: It can be discouraging to witness the apparent prosperity of the wicked, and some people in Malachi’s time even questioned the use of serving the Lord. Whether it’s the people of today or yesteryear, we as God’s people need to be reminded that the day is coming when there will be resolution of the wicked. Even though it can be tough, we must always remember God still has eternity to right all wrongs and reward all good.

Earlier in Malachi (2:2-3), God promised a fire for his people but here He promises a fire for the wicked. Thankfully, there is a big difference between the refining fire applied to God’s people and the burning fire against the ungodly.

All who do wickedly will be stubble, and the wicked will not be able to stand against God’s judgment. Stubble is the unusable part of the grain harvest that is left in the ground. Traditionally farmers would burn the stubble with the fire being intense but short lived. The technique is used to quickly and cheaply clear fields. God’s fire will leave the wicked without root or branch. In that coming day, the wicked will have no hope of shooting up again to life. The wicked will get their comeuppance because the judgment of eternity is final.

So much for the wicked, what about the righteous? God promised a judgment of fire for the *proud*, but God also said that those who fear My name will be saved.

The Sun of Righteousness shall arise: From the time of the early Church through to



today, Christians have regarded the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings as a reference to Jesus.

The wings of the sun are the rays or sunbeams it sends out. They bring healing, joy, and wholeness. When the Sun of Righteousness shines, we need no other light or warmth. When God's people see the final resolution of all things they will be so happy they will jump about like stall-fed calves set free from the pen. As they jump about with joy, the wicked are trampled beneath their feet.

To quote from Charles Spurgeon *“Understand the figure. The calf in the stall is shut up, tied up with a halter at night, but when the sun rises the calf goes forth to the pasture; the young bullock is set free. So the child of God may be in bondage. The recollection of past sins and present unbelief may halter him up and keep him in the stall, but when the Lord reveals himself he is set free.”*

Remember the Law of Moses: In these last few prophetic words of the Old Testament, Malachi warns Israel to remember the Law, because God's prophetic voice would be silent for some 400 years. We never need to despair when God seems silent, because what He has promised will come to pass - we need only to remember that God's perspective of time is different to that of our earthly existence.

God promised to send Elijah because he ministered in a time of crisis in Israel, when the nation was far from God, a time that immediately preceded a terrible judgment. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their parents. This promise, more than the reconciliation of families, has in mind turning to the God of their fathers, to the faith of the patriarchs.

The Old Testament ends with the threat of a curse, but also with the expectation of a new dawning of the Sun of Righteousness.

Response: I will send you Elijah the prophet: In this unique promise, God assured His people that He would send Elijah to Israel again before the great and dreadful day of the LORD. In anticipation of this, some Jewish homes set a place at the table for Elijah at Passover, just in case he might come on that night to announce the news that Messiah has come. They place an empty chair and fill a cup that is never drunk. Perhaps we too could adopt this custom at dinner on Christmas Day by setting an empty chair and a cup at the table in anticipation of the Second Coming?

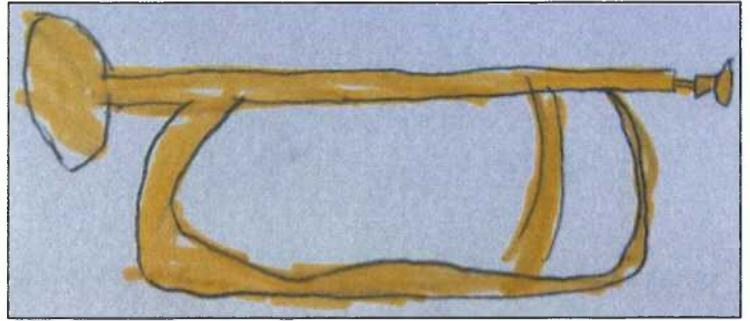
The last words of the Old Testament are a call back to the Law, because under the Old Covenant man related with God on the basis of Law. Advent reminds us that we live under the New Covenant - for the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for sending us Your Son Jesus Christ. May we gaze in wonder upon the risen Sun of Righteousness and receive the healing in His wings. Amen.

- Steve Marsh

DECEMBER 18

And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah...



Text: Luke 1:5-25

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” ¹⁹ And the angel answered him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.” ²¹ And the people were waiting for Zechariah, and they were wondering at his delay in the temple. ²² And when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them and remained mute. ²³ And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying, ²⁵ “Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.”

Reflection:

This passage tells us about a good man named Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth. They were both old and had no children. At that time, they felt shame because as a

married couple they could not have a baby. Zechariah is surprised when the angel tells him of the good news that they will have a son and name him John. The angel told him he would be a special man.

They did not know that this would be the birth of the prophet John the Baptist who would help prepare the way for the Messiah. He would help people turn back to God and get ready for the Lord. Zechariah could not believe the angel because he and Elizabeth were so old. The angel, whose name was Gabriel, told Zechariah that because he did not believe, he would not be able to speak until the baby was born. When Zechariah came out of the Temple, he could not talk. The people saw that something special had happened. Later, Elizabeth became pregnant, and she was very happy. She thanked God for his kindness and help.



William Blake – The Angel Appearing to Zacharias (1800)

During this Advent Season, we anticipate the celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We remember the long wait through the Old Testament for the prophecies to be fulfilled for the one who would be born and show us the way, the truth and the life. We celebrate and give praise for a gift so great that the only requirement to receive it is that we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Let us pray for those that wait with an empty anticipation of material gifts which they will soon tire of and cast aside—the material things that will not fill the soul with the fulfillment of peace. Let us celebrate and rejoice in Jesus' Birth and in His Resurrection, as we too wait for a time that will come when our troubles will be done and we will live eternally with God, Our Heavenly Father. All thanks and praise we give Him for all the gifts He bestows on us now and forever after.

This passage shows us that God listens to our prayers and keeps His promises, even when we have to wait a long time. God cares about us and gives us good gifts at the right time. God hears the prayers of His people, even when His answers come after long seasons of waiting. God is able to do what seems impossible to us—He gives life and keeps His promises. God prepares the way for salvation in precise and purposeful ways, as seen in John the Baptist's role. Doubt does not cancel God's faithfulness, but it can lead to discipline meant to grow our trust. God's grace restores and brings joy—Zechariah was silenced, but his voice would return in praise. God's timing is not our timing, but it is always right and good.

Response:

This is a good passage to reflect upon and so here are a few questions to think about. And if you are so inclined you may want to write out or journal your response to the following...

Have you ever prayed for something for a long time? How did you feel while waiting?

Why do you think God sometimes makes us wait for good things?

How do you respond when God's promises feel delayed or hard to believe?

How does this passage help you trust God's faithfulness more deeply?

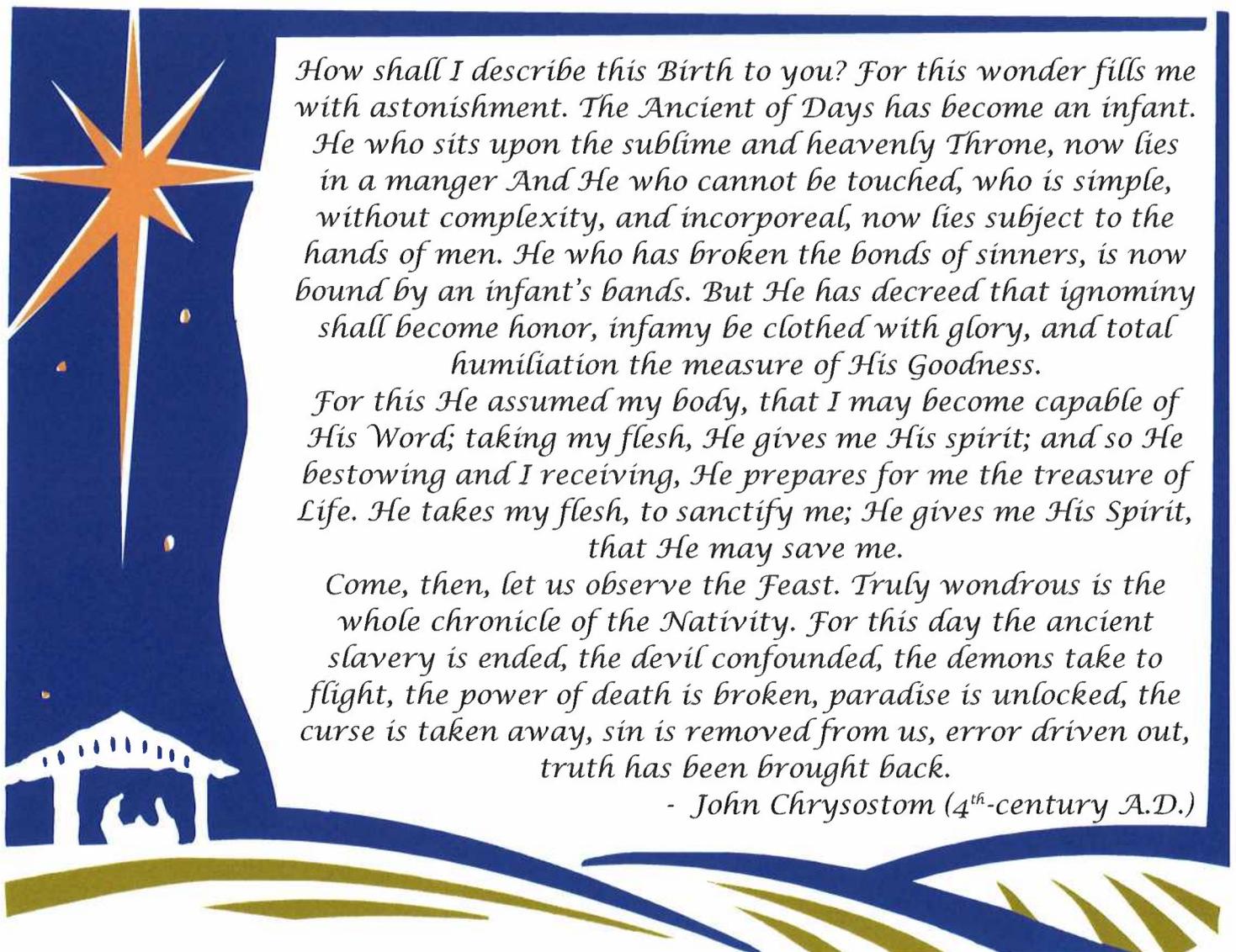
Give praise for a time that God answered your prayer after waiting.

Prayer:

Dear Father, thank You for listening to our prayers and showing us Your mercy, even when we doubt. Help us to trust You even when we must wait. Help us to trust Your promises and wait with hope, knowing that You are always faithful. Fill our hearts with joy like Elizabeth's and prepare us to share Your good news with others.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

- Marlene Hansen



How shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of Days has become an infant. He who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger And He who cannot be touched, who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infant's bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit, that He may save me.

Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back.

- John Chrysostom (4th-century A.D.)

DECEMBER 19

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" ...

Text: Luke 1:26-38



In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary.

²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. ³⁶ And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

Reflection:

The angel Gabriel in the 6th month of Elisabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist visits her relative, maybe cousin, Mary. Mary being a young virgin from a small village is surprised when Gabriel greets her here uniquely, "*Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!*" then in a way that is seen across Luke, "*Do not be afraid.*" Gabriel must have been quite the sight as he then tells Mary she'll bear a son and not just any son but the Son of God. Mary being a human being is of course shocked and, not entirely unlike Thomas the apostle, is doubtful. This doubt is entirely dismissed by Gabriel in so much as he doesn't bother to address it. He being the messenger and not the actor informs Mary the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the Christ will be born and will be holy and called the Son of God. Gabriel then points Mary to Elizabeth, as previously barren but now pregnant by the will of the Lord, as a sound encouragement

for Mary's own faith. Mary being filled with faith is fully on board with the Lord's plan for her and submits herself to God's divine will.



Joos van Cleve, The Annunciation (1525)

Response:

If there is one passage in the New Testament that is to set and finally fulfill the prophecies of Israel it's here. With the arrival of Jesus Christ the law of the Old Testament will be fulfilled, and the next 33 years are set into motion, precisely according to the Lord's plan. I personally find a tremendous comfort here in Verse 34 with Mary's doubt. Even when presented with the angel Gabriel, in her humanness she still isn't quite sure. Her faith is well founded, though, and she calls herself in the Greek "doule" of the Lord. This word specifically refers to a non-free woman

servant or slave. Mary is blessed in this way and understands exactly what her life is to be. This Advent, I'm going to follow Mary's example and renew my own commitment to being a "doulos" of the Lord.

Prayer:

Lord, this Advent time of year, where people embrace conspicuous consumption, please bless those less fortunate. Please grip us tightly and keep Your saints. And as we gather as a Church; both here at Covenant Presbyterian, and also across the world, as well as with our families, like Mary and Elisabeth, help us hear and believe Your promise that where two or three are gathered together in Your name You are there among us. During this season, Lord, please bless us. Please continue to guide us in Your divine will, to Your glorious ends. Amen.

- Alex Manger



*"I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it
all the year". - Ebenezer Scrooge*

(Charles Dickens - A Christmas Carol)

DECEMBER 20

And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?...

Text: Luke 1:39-45



In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, ⁴⁰and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴²and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! ⁴³And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

Reflection

“But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” That is the question Elizabeth asked of Mary, and what had been previously prophesied was unfolding -- that John (Elizabeth’s child) would prepare the way for the Messiah. And here the Lord is being announced.

John was foretold in Malachi 4:5-6 speaking of the prophet Elijah who would come before the dreadful day of the Lord. Jesus Himself confirmed that John was Malachi’s “Elijah” who was to come (see Matthew 11).

It’s hard to wrap my brain around the plan of salvation which God is beginning to reveal here through these two women... We see the very special way in which Christ came into the world, the most vulnerable way possible. Nothing is more dependent and needing to be taken care of than a baby, and even more vulnerable than a tiny infant is a baby in the womb. Yet upon the sight of Mary, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and the child in her womb reacts. The Holy Spirit ushers Elizabeth into truth and all that Mary had been told by the angel is confirmed. Maybe that is why Mary went to see Elizabeth—to confirm what the angel had told her.

The reflection that comes to mind for me, is that Jesus comes to us and the Holy Spirit confirms that it is Jesus. At my own point of salvation, there was no doubt in my mind that it was indeed Jesus who was standing at the door. There is always clarity with God. He is not a God of confusion. The Bible says that every word of God is confirmed and that confirmation comes through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit testifies of Jesus. And Jesus testifies of the Father.

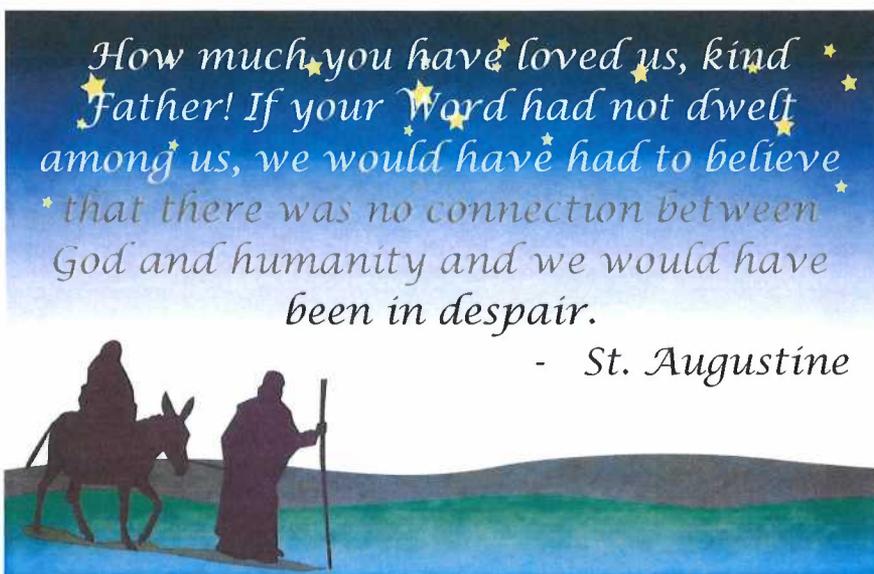
I remember experiencing an awe in finding and knowing that God really was who He said He was, that Jesus is the Messiah and just as involved in humanity in 2004 as He was back then. I was seeking, but had no idea what I was seeking. I wasn't waiting on the promise as Mary and Elizabeth were.

God had been silent for so long as Israel waited on the promise of salvation. These women were pregnant with belief. And they were pregnant with babies. We all know how we tend to get at the coming of new life in our families, don't we? Have you seen the joy shared by two women waiting on babies as they greet each other? That same kind of joy is what we can experience at the realization of what God has done, is doing and will continue to do. We can find real joy in realizing His saving work is not because of us or anything special about us. It is because of what is special about Jesus. What makes us, ultimately and eternally, so special is Jesus. Jesus in you and Jesus in me and the hope of Jesus is the hope and joy of all who will believe in Him.

Response: Reflection upon the miracle of Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit hopefully wells up joy in us—a joy that is so amazing it brings us to our knees. There is no greater gift in life. Faith is a gift, and the faith to believe and accept this gift is powered and confirmed by the Spirit of God. As the story unfolds during Advent, let us not lose the incredible wonder of it all.



**Philippe de Champaigne,
The Visitation (1643)**



Prayer: Lord Jesus, may others, like unbelieving family members, friends, coworkers and others, be able to see Jesus in us and note that something is different. We ask that the Holy Spirit would come into their lives and testify to Jesus. Holy Spirit testify in them and testify in us to this amazing reality: *Christ in us, the hope of glory* (Colossians 1:27). Amen.

- Cindy Duncan

DECEMBER 21

My soul magnifies the Lord...

Text: Luke 1:46-56

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

⁵⁶ And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.



Reflection:

Jews in Jesus' day were looking for a Messiah. Rabbis in synagogues talked about the prophecies and prayed earnestly for them to be fulfilled. They were looking for deliverance from Rome and the hope of prosperity. Jewish women were honored for the number of sons they had, and dreamed of being the most honored one ever—the mother of the Messiah. It was expected that this honor would be for royalty, the wife of the high priest, or at least someone with great wealth. It was also expected that the father of the Messiah would be human. Can you imagine what must have gone through Mary's mind when Gabriel said *she* was the one God had chosen? “What!? I'm too young. I'm not married. How can this work? My family is not wealthy, famous or powerful. How can this be?”

It is exciting to find out you are pregnant. It may be exhilarating or perhaps devastating, but it is always exciting (even if it's the 12th time). Mary's hymn of praise reflects that exhilaration. She is overjoyed and filled with enthusiastic praise. God has blessed, exalted, and done great things for her, even though she is from humble circumstances.

It is also exciting to have an encounter with the Holy Spirit. Mary got to see life from God's point of view, where wealth, power and fame didn't matter at all, and where things never dreamed of actually happened. She never even mentions the inevitable difficulties (Joseph, her parents, shame, punishment)—God could take care of them

too. Mary, mother of the Messiah and the most honored woman in history, would never be the same.

Response: We are once again waiting for the Messiah, this time for His return. Now, we know His name, His history, His teachings, character, and prophecies, but we pray and long for His presence. In every generation things happen that seem to fulfill prophecies and get people excited, thinking His return is imminent. But like Gabriel appearing to Mary, Jesus says His return will be a surprise.

Mary was chosen to be Jesus' mother; we are chosen to be His bride. Getting married is exciting. Being chosen by someone you love leaves you walking on air. Jesus said He is planning a wedding and preparing a place for us to live with Him that will be beautiful beyond anything we can experience here on earth. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Clean us up, make us ready. Your bride eagerly awaits Your return in glory.

The promise of being Jesus' mother inspired Mary to compose an ecstatic psalm of praise. What does the promise of being Jesus' bride inspire in you?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for Mary's example, for her humility and courage. Thank You that power, fame and wealth don't matter to You, but faithful, loving hearts do. Thank You for Your promises and the joyous hope of being Your bride. All glory, praise and honor be to You. In Jesus' name, Amen. - Dianne Billharz

O Simplicitas
Madeleine L'Engle

*An angel
Came to me
And I was unprepared
To be what God was using.
A moment I despaired,
Thought briefly of refusing.
The angel knew I heard.
According to God's Word
I bowed to this strange choosing*

*A palace should have been
The birthplace of a king
(I had no way of knowing).
We went to Bethlehem;
It was so strange a thing.
The wind was cold, and blowing,
My cloak was old, and thin.
They turned us from the inn;
The town was overflowing.*

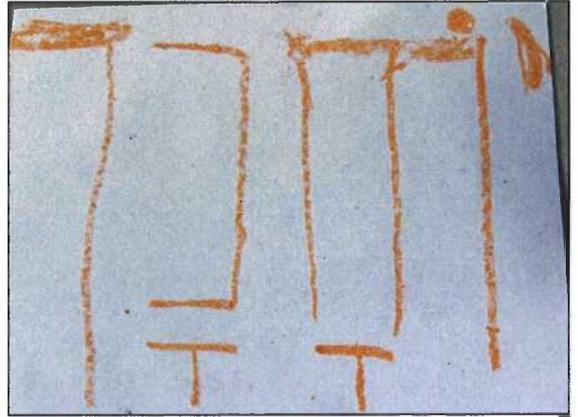
*God's Word, a child so small,
Who still must learn to speak,
Lay in humiliation.
Joseph stood, strong and tall.
The beasts were warm and meek
And moved with hesitation.
The Child born in a stall?
I understood it: all.
Kings came in adoration.*

*Perhaps it was absurd:
The stable set apart,
The sleepy cattle lowing;
And the incarnate Word
Resting against my heart.
My joy was overflowing.
The shepherds came, adored
The folly of the Lord,
Wiser than all men's knowing.*

DECEMBER 22

His name is John...

Text: Luke 1:57-80



Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. ⁵⁹ And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, ⁶⁰ but his mother answered, “No; he shall be called John.” ⁶¹ And they said to her, “None of your relatives is called by this name.” ⁶² And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. ⁶³ And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And they all wondered. ⁶⁴ And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. ⁶⁵ And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, ⁶⁶ and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, “What then will this child be?” For the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷ And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, ⁶⁸ “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ⁶⁹ and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ⁷⁰ as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, ⁷¹ that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; ⁷² to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, ⁷³ the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. ⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high ⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

Reflection:

Advent is the time we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus and *preparation* is one of the themes of this passage.

Earlier verses in Luke’s Gospel tell us that God, through his angelic messengers, prepared both Zechariah and Elizabeth for the unexpected events of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, John’s birth and his extraordinary calling. They were prepared to name their son “*John*,” as the angel instructed, rather than following tradition of giving him a

family name. Their obedience was used by God to heal Zechariah from the muteness he'd endured since his vision in the temple. The joy of John's birth, his unusual naming and Zechariah's healing were widely reported. Over time, speculation about John's role and purpose developed. As people observed John growing up, they could see that "*the Lord was with him.*" Zechariah and Elizabeth evidently prepared John well for his purpose in life. Both of John's parents had been prepared by an angelic visitor to assume their role in preparing their son for his mission. And the events that people "*laid up in their hearts*" about John's future in turn prepared the way for his ministry of preparing the way for Jesus.

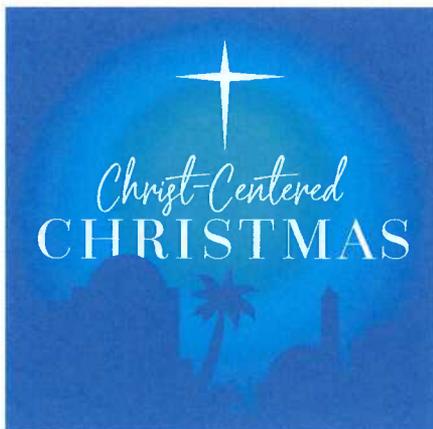
The prophetic song in today's passage is Zechariah's vision for his son. It was prompted by Zechariah's angelic encounter and is evidence of Zechariah's preparation as a temple priest. Zechariah knew the scriptures and recounted the Lord's promises in this song. Zechariah declares his son to be a prophet of God who will prepare the way for the Lord to fulfill His promises. Clearly, the parental vision was assumed by John who said of himself, "*I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.*" (John 1:23)

Zechariah's prophecy follows the pattern of similar songs found throughout the Bible. God is praised for his great works and for his promises of salvation, mercy, deliverance, and forgiveness. Hope for the future is expressed as light overcoming the darkness of death and peace prevailing for God's people. This is not only a compelling prophecy, but it is a good summation of Jesus's incarnate ministry and the Gospel - both of which John was sent to prepare the way for people to receive.

Response:

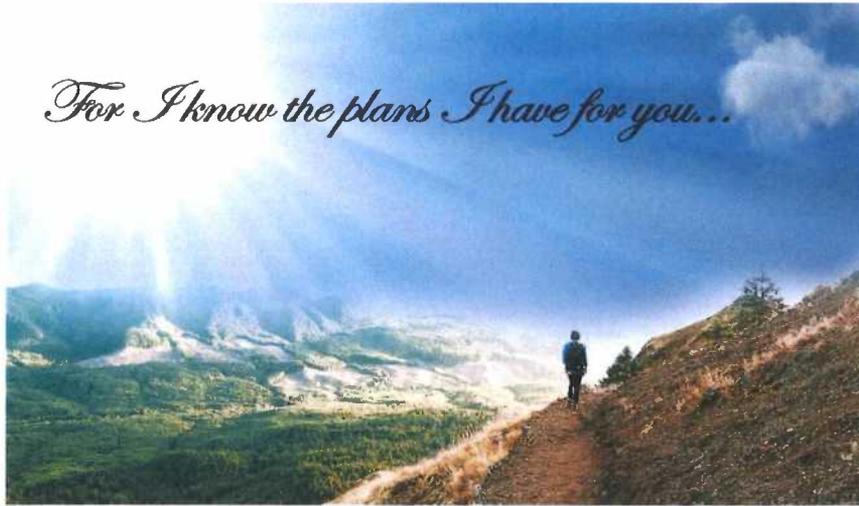
God prepared Zechariah and Elizabeth to prepare John for the ministry of preparing the way for Jesus. God prepares the way for all of us through Jesus' teaching and example. Ultimately, He prepares our way to everlasting life with Him through Jesus' death and resurrection. The path we walk is not random - but selected specifically for us. "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*" (Eph 2:10)

The scripture Covenant chose as our guiding verse for this season of transition in the life of our church comes to mind when reflecting on the theme of Preparation:



"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.¹³ You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." (Jer 29:11-13)

For us to be prepared to fulfill God's calling on our lives, or just to get through each day, is not something we do on



our own – God has gone before us. Not only does He prepare our path, He prepares us to stay on the path and walks with us as we read His word, receive His Son, obey His loving instruction, and receive His grace.

Prayer

Dear God of Creation, thank You for Your promises of mercy,

forgiveness and life that were fulfilled in Jesus. Thank You for the assurance that You have prepared not only the events we read about in scripture, but that You have prepared a path for each of us. Grant us to be empowered by Your Spirit to walk in the path You have prepared for us, to know the joy of Your presence and the assurance of Your promises fulfilled in our lives. Amen. - Janet Goodman

NOEL HALLELUJAH MERRY CHRISTMAS HAPPY NEW YEAR

DECEMBER 23

You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins...

Text: Matthew 1:18-25



Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name ‘Immanuel’” (which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Reflection:

In this passage we see that Jesus is to save “His people” from their sins. The question is who are His people. Conventional wisdom tells us it is the Jews, of course. To get a fuller understanding of who His people really are we should look at the beginning of this chapter and examine verses 1-17. These verses are a genealogy naming the ancestors of Jesus. The Jews valued the purity of lineage. For example, a priest had to show he had an unbroken history of blood purity going back to Aaron. If he married, his wife had to show purity in her family going back at least five generations.

Verses 1-17 present a problem. This genealogy contains four women, at least three of whom were gentiles and two of ill repute (as if the men were saints). They are listed because they play an important role in the history of God's people, the Jews. Looking at verse 21 we are told that Jesus will save His people from their sins. Although the immediate meaning is the salvation of Jews we can see from the genealogy that Jesus' people includes some surprising people, like you and me.

The name Jesus means The LORD (Yahweh) is salvation. His parents were given divine instructions to give Him this name. It is a statement of His purpose in coming to us. In Jesus' life we see the Father's plan of salvation for His people revealed. The Old Testament shows us the sinfulness of man and man's inability to save himself. Now with the coming of Jesus, people's lives can be changed in ways pleasing to our Creator.



Luca Giordano, The Dream of St. Joseph, c. 1700

Response:

When the Holy Spirit reveals our sins to us we receive a call to accept Jesus as our savior. When we do this we become one of Jesus' people. It is important that we live the life to which He calls us. As we go about our lives we should celebrate the real meaning of Jesus' birth daily and be a “*light unto the world.*” (Mathew 5:14). Our praise for Jesus should be without end. (Psalm 34:1)

Prayer:

Blessed Savior we humbly bow before You. We celebrate Your birth knowing that it is our rebirth as well. Lead us to do what is pleasing in Your sight. Be our strength and our shield. In Your name we commit our lives to you. Amen. - Chris Rhodes

DECEMBER 24

Glory to God in the highest...

Text: Luke 2:1-20



In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Reflection:

If you’ve been following along in this guide through our 2025 Advent season, you’ve been introduced to many promises, prophecies and people leading to today’s reading on the birth of Jesus. In fact, today’s passage may be the most recognized Scripture in all the world: it’s read whenever believers gather to celebrate Christ’s birth, it’s depicted in great art and even has a starring role in “A Charlie Brown Christmas”! It’s truly a gem of revelation illuminating the meaning and miracle of Jesus’ birth.

On a night that starts like any other, a baby is born in an obscure village. But He was no ordinary Person - the One lying in a manger was fully human and fully God,

the Second Person of the eternal Trinity, deity in human flesh and the hope of salvation for all mankind.

Though Luke was not an eyewitness to the events in today's reading, he was a careful historian. His narrative starts with details anchoring it in time and place. Following a journey of about 80 miles, a couple arrives in Bethlehem, the City of David, to be enrolled in a census at their ancestral home. While there, the woman gives birth. The language is almost sparse in detail although heavenly melodies and the glory of God will soon break into the account and leave us awestruck.



Zachary Rowe – Caesar, Mary & Joseph (2025)

a tool in God's hands, used to fulfill the prophecy in Micah 5:2 foretelling where the Christ was to be born. Not by fate nor by man's will is anything ultimately accomplished; God alone is sovereign. And so, Caesar eventually went the way of all previous earthly kings when he died in AD 14.

The second King left a heavenly throne. He was swaddled in simple cloths and laid to rest in a manger. He arrived as a tiny babe, emptied of His glory yet retaining His eternal deity. Paul tells us "*Though in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*" (Philippians 2:6-7) This was an act of humility and love none of us fully comprehend. John called Him the "Savior of the world"; Luke says His kingdom would have no end (1:33). His birth was the greatest Good News the world had ever heard!

In this passage, Jesus is given two titles, announced by angels and expanded on throughout His life: Savior and Christ ("Messiah"). Do you know Him?

- He was born to "*save His people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).
- He is the *King of Kings who will sit on David's throne forever.* (Rev. 19:16)

Luke's Three Kings

But first, let's focus on the three kings in Luke's story. Rome's Caesar Augustus was reigning emperor of the greatest power on earth. He chose the name Caesar and added the title "Augustus" which meant "supreme and sublime one." He even dared call himself "savior" and grand choirs often sang his praises. However ambitious he was for power and the inherited deity ascribed to his predecessor Julius Caesar, he was nevertheless

- He came to save us. As Paul said, “*Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (Romans 5:1.)
- And unlike Caesar or other kings, Jesus defeated death: “*He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.’*” (Luke 24:46)

Long ago, Martin Luther confessed, “When I am told God became man, I can follow the idea, but I just do not understand what it means. For what man... if He were God, would humble himself to lie in the feedbox of a donkey or to hang upon a cross? God laid upon Christ the iniquities of us all. This is the ineffable and infinite mercy of God which the slender capacity of man’s heart cannot comprehend and much less utter – that unfathomable depth and burning zeal of God’s love toward us... Who can sufficiently declare this exceeding great goodness of God?”

The third King discernable in these verses is the eternal Almighty Creator, the holy and omnipotent Lord God Who reigns forever and ever. He will one day judge each person according to the faith they have in His Son Jesus.

Glory!

“Even as the Babe was wrapped in cloths of humiliation, God is not satisfied that the circumstance of the Son’s birth be only humiliation. God desired that shame be balanced with glory and exaltation.” (RC Sproul, “Luke”)

Luke tells us that on the night Jesus was born, a group of shepherds were tending their flocks in nearby fields. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and they were “sore afraid” (and that is VERY afraid!).

Rather than announce this unprecedented birth in Caesar’s palace, news of the arrival of Heaven’s richest treasure was revealed to men of “low degree” (read Luke 1:51-53). How great must have been their wonder and joy! They were blessed by a glimpse into God’s plan for mankind – the “*good news of great joy*” that a Savior had come to rescue His people, “*all the people*”!

The angel gave them signs to find this remarkable baby (who outwardly looked like any other newborn.) Then, in a display that defies human language or even comprehension, multitudes (some vast “unnumbered number” in the Greek) of angels appeared and began singing songs of praise. We can’t begin to imagine the



Gavin M. Doyle – Angel & Shepherds (2025)

collision of brilliance and beauty as heaven broke forth with rejoicing at the birth of The Son of God:

**“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth,
peace among men with whom He is pleased.”**

As they rejoiced, did the angels grasp that true peace and lasting salvation had come to Adam’s sinful race? The advent of the King of Kings was the beginning of the fulfilment of God’s plan of redemption through His Son. And maybe they jubilantly anticipated the day when Christ’s saving work would result in countless people of faith joining them in heavenly, glorious songs of praise to the Savior King!

Response:

And so, when the angels departed, the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem - because they *believed*. Then they took it a step further - they *acted* on the truth they’d been given. They *ran* to meet Jesus. And then they *told others* about Him.

At this time of year when many are curious about the Christmas story, will you put aside what our culture calls “Christmas” (with all its superfluous, cluttered and even deceptive trappings), and share the Good News about Jesus? Marvel at the truths and miracles in this chapter in a fresh way and then share your insights with joy. Grab a hand and help people run to Jesus! And just imagine - one day you and those friends and family members may stand before God’s everlasting throne and experience



Thomas Cole - The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds, 1834

together the unfathomable bliss of being part of a heavenly choir praising and worshipping the Lord God!

Prayer

Dear Jesus, our Savior and King, because You came to us and saved us, it is our destiny

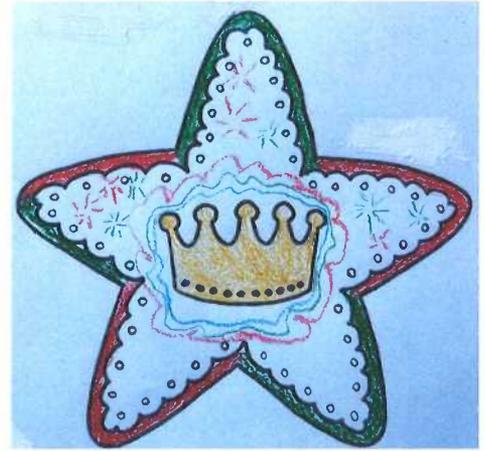
forever to exult in Your glory and honor, dominion and power and to praise You forever and ever! This Christmas and in the days to come, cause us to testify with truth and boldness to Your birth, the lessons of Your ministry, the cost of Your death, the glory and victory of Your resurrection - with all who do not yet know, obey, love and follow You. Amen and Hallelujah!

- Patti Hemsley

DECEMBER 25

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

Text: John 1:1-18



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

⁹The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

Reflection:

Why did John the Apostle write the book of John?

John believed with all his heart that Jesus is the Son of God and furthermore Jesus is God. John’s Gospel is a more spiritual account of the story of Jesus than Matthew, Mark or Luke. I think John wanted his fellow Jews and all who read his account also truly to believe that Jesus is the longed-for Messiah. John 1:1-3 is difficult for me to understand. It is so deep and simple at the same time. An interesting commentary I read made it more understandable for me by showing how the creation story in Genesis lines up with John 1:1-3. We can see:

- A. The Word is someone who can be referred to as “Him.”
- B. He was “with God.”
- C. He “was God.”



Guido Reni – Adoration of the Shepherds, 1640

Gospel to know that Jesus has always been the Word who was *with* God and *is* God along with the Holy Spirit from the beginning.

Response:

I am so grateful for John the disciple who knew he was loved by Jesus. He was more than a follower of Jesus and more than under His authority. He knew and loved Jesus on a deep and personal level and wanted that for the readers of his book. In one of our recent Women's Bible studies the point was made that we must not be merely followers of Christ and obedient to Christ. No, we must be in Christ, analogous to being in a plane. Wherever the plane goes we are in it and whatever happens to the plane happens to us. His obedience is our obedience. His victory becomes our victory. His eternal life becomes our eternal life. To have that close relationship with Jesus we have to know who He is. John's explanation of Jesus as the Word who was and is and ever

D. He existed "in the beginning."

E. Everything was "made through Him."

John 1:1 talks about "*in the beginning*." In Genesis 1, "God said." God created everything through Word." So E lines up.

Creation took place "*in the beginning*," so D lines up.

Genesis 1:26 says "Us," which means that whomever God is referring to is (1) also God; (2) with God; and (3) someone who can be referred to by a personal pronoun, hence A, B, C above. So, A, B, C, D, E above are consistent in both John's Gospel and the Genesis account of creation.

But what about the Holy Spirit? In John 1:32-33, John the Baptist told how he saw the Holy Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and remain on Jesus. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in Genesis 1:2 "*And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*."

So, John wanted the readers of his

shall be God the Creator inspires us to love Jesus with all our hearts souls, minds and strength.

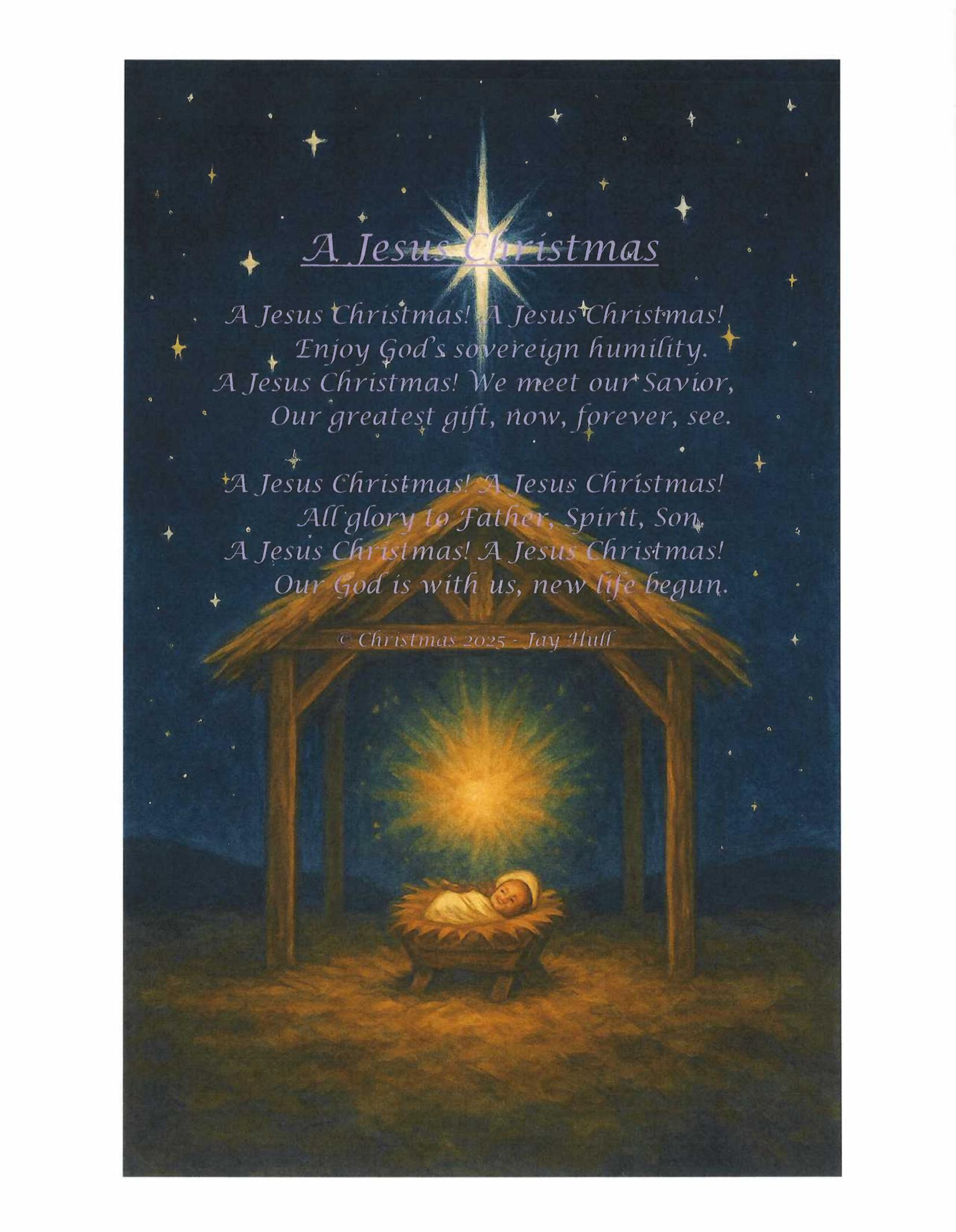
Prayer:

Dear Father, Son and Holy Spirit -
We give You thanks for Jesus, The Word who came to earth to save us from our sins. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Thank You for sending the light of the World to save us. Help us to love You and be light in this dark world. Amen.

- Kay Blakely



Patty Bender – The Star and The Manger (2024)



A Jesus Christmas

A Jesus Christmas! A Jesus Christmas!
Enjoy God's sovereign humility.
A Jesus Christmas! We meet our Savior,
Our greatest gift, now, forever, see.

A Jesus Christmas! A Jesus Christmas!
All glory to Father, Spirit, Son,
A Jesus Christmas! A Jesus Christmas!
Our God is with us, new life begun.

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