



*Anderson First United Methodist  
2011  
Advent Devotional*



We have come again to that most beloved season of the Christian year – Advent and Christmas. In it, Christians confess and proclaim that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 14.1) This is the powerful message we name the *Incarnation* – that Jesus was born into human history in the fullness of time for the salvation of the world. This is what we celebrate and announce to all who will hear each December.

The Christmas season really does have a wondrous power. Yes, it’s true, some of us have seen a lot of Christmases. Yes, it’s true, Christmas can be one of the busiest times of the year and can pretty well wear you out. Yes, it’s true, even religious leaders preaching “don’t lose the reason for the season” get a bit tiring. But even with all it has going against it, and as cynical as I might get, one time or another during the Advent/Christmas season, something reaches out and grabs me, and the wonder of the holiday breaks anew. It might be a lingering, well remembered phrase from Handel’s *Messiah*; the simplicity, yet amazing power of even a plywood manger scene; the glow of the candles in a Christmas Eve service; or the glance of a daughter. And suddenly, there it is, overcoming all resistance. That is what is so great about our sturdy traditions. They can pierce through all obstacles, take us right back to our childhood, and make new the story of Jesus’ birth.

Maybe, one of these Advent devotionals will speak especially to you.

What a great idea: an Advent devotional book with each day’s meditation written by someone in our own congregation.

A true gift.



Rev. Jeff Taylor

November 27

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

*Romans 13:11-14*



As I received the diagnosis of ovarian cancer, stage IV this spring, my life changed. Death, which is a part of all life became more imminent for me. My life was challenged with how to live in the presence of death. I tried to process what was happening to me and found I was growing closer and closer to God. God's love for me became clearer and the fear of death dissipated. I discovered meaning to the words in today's Scripture, "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ." God's presence strengthened me and gave me new direction. The desire for worldly goods and for living a life independent of God grew less and less. I began to find more joy as my life became more positive. I became more grateful for God's goodness. To live each moment of life to the fullest and to make death a meaningful part of living became my focus. God was blessing me and enabling me to bless others. There was an "armor of light" in my life. I was experiencing God's kingdom here and now as I accepted Jesus' teachings. I did not have to wait for death for salvation. I can and will choose to make God's love a part of my everyday living. Salvation is within all of our reach. God is ready to save us each day. The time for salvation is now!

Joann Burand

***Prayer:*** Dear God, help us to feel your presence in our lives that we may deepen our faith and realize salvation is a gift for us today. Amen

November 28

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

*1 Corinthians 1:3-9*



... I give thanks... because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus.

WOW! What a gift! If I had to summarize the entire biblical story in one word, it would be grace.

Grace can be defined as unwarranted favor or blessing given to someone undeserving. For me, it is simply the kindness God has shown humankind since the creation. Even in times of trial, God's grace is always there to restore the person and their relationship with Him.

Each of us has been given spiritual gifts or "little spirits." God's plan is for us to use our gifts to bless others so that all persons can experience grace. Gifts vary by individual, but when all the gifts of our congregation are enjoined, we are not lacking in any spiritual gift.

This Advent we experience anew God's grace in the gift of His Son, Christ Jesus. God chose to become completely human to demonstrate His divine plan for humankind. Jesus' life of obedience to and dependence upon the Father was a fulfilled life. God wants the same for us!

Joe Snyder

***Prayer:*** *Lord God, thank you for loving us so much that you sent your only son to teach us about You. I pray that during this Advent season we will experience your grace in new and profound ways. Amen*

November 29

and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that no one dared to ask him any question.

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, ‘How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared,

“The Lord said to my Lord,

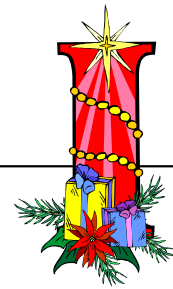
‘Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet.’ ”

David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?’

And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.

*Mark 13: 33-37*



No one knows when Christ will come again; only our heavenly Father knows that exact day or hour. As Christians, we must be prepared for that end time. We need to be on guard by staying spiritually awake. First, we need to read the Bible in order to arm ourselves with faith, love and hope. Secondly, we need to continue to pray for guidance and protection. Next, we need to surround ourselves with a community of believers lifting one another up but also holding each other accountable. Finally, we need to be aware of evils of this world by guarding ourselves against temptations by setting priorities that keep us on the right path.

Be ready; be prepared. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no man has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.”

I Corinthians 2:9

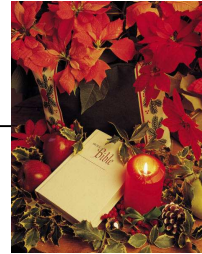
Tim & Nina Kline

***Prayer:*** *Our heavenly Father, Guard our hearts and minds as we prepare for your coming. Amen*

### November 30

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

*John 1: 1-5*



The concept of boundaries or limitations is a human one. We make sense of the world around us by categorizing, labeling, and comparing. Without assigning a beginning and end, a better or worse, a before then an after, to help us sort everything out, we would be lost in the chaos of our narrow minds. Try as we may it is impossible for us to understand everything, especially God. As Christians, we don't have to. As Christians we just have to accept the gift that God offers us, the gift of free will. We simply have to choose to believe. To believe not in *what*, but to believe in **WHO**. In Who was before there was a before. To believe that God is the one true God. He was, is and will always be. Simple as that. Just Believe. God is God. No limits, no boundaries, no definitions. God is everything. Not one thing has been or will be created without the hand of God. God made us and He loves us. He loves us so much that He provided a living reason to believe. A reason so real that there could be no doubt. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." (John 3:16) God became human so that we could and would know Him, learn from Him and begin to grasp His love for us. God did all this simply so that we might believe. God, through Jesus, even tells us the only thing He wants from us: "Believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:29 NLT) Simple as that, just believe.

Clint & Jennifer Kline

***Prayer:** Lord, Heavenly Father, thank You for your presence in our lives. Thank you for the gift of your son Jesus Christ. Help us to live a life that bears witness of our belief in You. Forgive us for the times we are too weak to believe. In your holy name we lift our praise and prayers. Amen.*

## December 1

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

*John 1:6-9*



The story of John the Baptist probably brings up many memories. All the way from when he leaped in the womb of Elizabeth at the sound of Mary the mother of Jesus, to standing against evil, to his own demise. Probably the most famous is that he ate locusts and honey. Suffice it to say he did not “go with the flow” of the day. Could it be he knew something even before he was born? Something that gave him a burning passion to tell everyone who would listen about this man who would be the “light of the world”? To tell everyone to repent and make straight the way of the Lord? And what about the statement “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”? I think the evidence indicates he knew something most others didn’t. Nevertheless, this scripture summarizes his purpose...”to testify to the light.”

So, what are we to do with this? In our journeys we sometime listen to testimonies about the light, and sometimes we *are* the testimony to the light. What do we know that others need to know?

Dave Peter

***Prayer:*** Heavenly Father, in this Advent season let us both listen to what the spirit is speaking and to speak about the light we have been shown.  
*Amen*

December 2

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'

*Jeremiah 33: 14-16*

Jeremiah has been called the "weeping prophet". He was commissioned by God to spread a message that became extremely unpopular and he was rejected by his countrymen. He was ultimately persecuted as a traitor for doing the job that God had directed him to do – urge the people of Judah to surrender to the Babylonians. He was deeply hurt by the ridicule and hostility he constantly faced and became isolated as a lone spokesman for God. Thus God was the only one he had to turn to share his feelings. He did question why he was given such indignation to endure, **but his faith in God overrode his pain.** In turn he was given the privilege of trumpeting the **Good News** of God's promise to one day make a "New Covenant" with his people.

As I studied about Jeremiah, it came to me that Jeremiah's plight is poignant to my life presently. Our son Jeremiah, coincidentally, has become extremely concerned that the destruction of **our** world as we know it is near, based on the interpretation of certain Scripture. He is trying to prepare for that "time" and is compelled to convince others to have the same fears and concerns. I draw parallels to Jeremiah the Prophet in that he struggled to convince his people of God's message. But, he had faith and believed that God knew what he was doing. Each time our son discusses his plight with me, I direct him to Scripture that assures us that God **will** take care of us. **The New Covenant that Jeremiah the Prophet heralded so many years ago came true, and never grows old!**

Heather Barrett

**Prayer:** This well known prayer echoes in my mind. *God, give me the strength to change the things I can, the courage to accept the things I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

*Amen*

December 3

The sun shall no longer be  
your light by day,  
nor for brightness shall the moon  
give light to you by night;  
but the Lord will be your everlasting light,  
and your God will be your glory.  
Your sun shall no more go down,  
or your moon withdraw itself;  
for the Lord will be your everlasting light,  
and your days of mourning shall be ended.  
Your people shall all be righteous;  
they shall possess the land for ever.  
They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands,  
so that I might be glorified.  
The least of them shall become a clan,  
and the smallest one a mighty nation;  
I am the Lord;  
in its time I will accomplish it quickly.  
*Isaiah 60: 19-22*

When the Lord comes again we will not need or care about the worldly things such as Light and Darkness from the Heavens but from the LORD in the Heavens. Those of us who think we are too small to matter will rise and link with each other to be powerful through the strength of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are conditions to be with God for the rest of time. We need to have a Relationship with God. He is always there for us but are we always there for him? It's like the Neighbor you know by sight but don't really have a relationship with. You don't want God to come and say, 'well I know you but we never had a relationship.' We want to be there in the Splendor so get to know God spend time with him every day. Have conversations with him. He is your Friend.

Janine Spurgeon

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for continuing to pursue a relationship with us. Help us to continue to get to know you better. Amen*



December 4

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

‘Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,  
and sing praises to your name’;

and again he says,

‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people’;

and again,

‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,  
and let all the peoples praise him’;

and again Isaiah says,

‘The root of Jesse shall come,  
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;  
in him the Gentiles shall hope.’

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Romans 15: 4-13*

As I prepare my heart and mind to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, a phrase from a song keeps running through my head, "...my hope is in you, Lord."

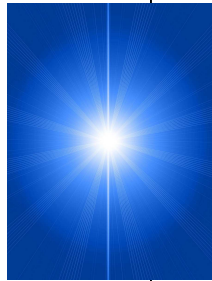
Romans 15:13 reads: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus became like us, so we could become like him. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, Christ walks with us. He leads and empowers us to resist temptations and to do good. He gives us the grace we need to obey his commandments and to grow into his likeness more and more each day, in spite of the sin that continues to dwell within our hearts. His grace empowers us to live the life we were created to live. There is no Savior, no hope, no peace, no eternal life, no mighty power, or no wise counsel for those who do not know Jesus Christ. Our hope is in you, Lord.

Vicky Snyder

***Prayer:** Thank you Father for your precious gift of love. May we always have room in our hearts for Jesus. May we never stop seeking him, and may your gift of love continue in and through us. Amen.*





December 5

O send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling.

Then I will go to the altar of God,  
to God my exceeding joy;  
and I will praise you with the harp,  
O God, my God.

Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

*Psalm 43: 3-6*

In times of trouble or unrest, we look for rays of hope to lead us back to a place of harmony with our Creator. The finding is in the looking, and no joy is more complete than the peace we find in our Savior's arms. When we are lost and catch sight of the Kingdom, we run to it like an anxious child to his mother's embrace, and we celebrate in the comfort, security, and reassurance we find there. Elation bursts forth in song, in choruses of praise rising on the wings of the harp and the lyre.

My harp and my lyre is my guitar, and the most authentic worship I can offer is to lay music at the foot of the cross. I glimpse rays of His light in hearts and voices lifted in praise and thanksgiving, which is for me an angelic chorus calling me back to rightness with my Lord.

Jim Strock

***Prayer:** O God, lead us back to You. When we find our path obscured by the trappings of this world, let the rays of your love meet us at the edge of our perceived darkness. We long to praise you in word, music, prayer and deed. Bless and multiply the gifts we return to you, may they add to the brightness of Your light for those yet in twilight. In Christ's precious name we pray, Amen.*

December 6

The Lord is my light  
and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my  
life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?  
When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh—  
my adversaries and foes—  
they shall stumble and fall.  
Though an army encamp against  
me,  
my heart shall not fear;

though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.  
One thing I asked of the Lord,  
that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to inquire in his temple.

*Psalm 27: 1-4*



Psalm 27 is a prayer of praise.

Verses 1 and 4 have special meaning for me: “He is my light and my salvation...He protects me from danger...I’ll never be afraid...I ask only to always live in His house and I will always ask for His guidance.”

As I ponder my life I can see how He has protected me all those times my Naval officer husband was at sea. Out of 35 years of marriage, we had only slightly half that time together!

How did I get through the separations? It was always the hope that he would be returning! It was not an easy life raising three children and moving about 22 times. But with the opportunity to learn two foreign languages and live in three foreign countries plus Hawaii, how can I not be grateful for God’s love and care during the difficult times as well as the good ones? I will continue to praise God in the good and difficult times as long as I live, and especially in song, and the ones He gave to me.

Steve-Anna Bird

***Prayer:*** Heavenly Father, help us to remember You are our protector, and we can always trust you are with us.

*Amen*

December 7

Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path.  
I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,  
to observe your righteous ordinances.

*Psalm 119: 105-106*



Light. I did a search of the Bible and found 263 references to the light. How appropriate that we read the above from the Psalms as we move into the season of light—Advent. How many times have we walked a path that we were unsure? By putting our faith in the light of God we could see the right path to follow. If we believe and follow the laws of God that light will be with us always, we will stay on that right path. As we prepare ourselves for the birth of Jesus, God's shining light on Earth, let us reaffirm our oath to follow the laws of God.

Brian Jones

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, as we celebrate the coming birth of your Son Jesus continue to shine your light so that we may stay on the right path. Amen*

December 8

Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

*John 12: 35-36*



In Psalm 36 we hear the writer saying of God “In your light we see light.”: This same motif is found in John where Jesus urges us to walk in that same light while it is available to us. Too often we try to navigate in either dim light or total darkness, and the result can be stumbling or falling.

Remember the total darkness you experienced in Mammoth Cave when the lights were extinguished? You lost all your orientation to what was around you. A short feeling of panic resulted, allayed when the light returned.

We are constantly sensing the darkness of sin in our daily walk. So many great leaders stumble on their daily journey because they fail to walk in God’s grace-filled gift of light.

Rev. Bill Mathys

***Prayer:** In this holy season of light, let us seek for and follow the Light of the World, and walk faithfully in the light of our Lord, Jesus. Amen*

## December 9

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be associated with them. For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,  
'Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.'

*Ephesians 5:6-14*



Verses six and seven tell the reader not to be tricked by lies and deceit, because God gets mad when that happens. Verses eight and nine basically say we are all lost in the darkness until we find God. Then we are in the light, and we can produce the fruit of the light. Verses ten through twelve instruct us to do our best to please the Lord, and to shun evil works and expose them. Verses thirteen and fourteen state once one awakes from the darkness, Christ can enter their life and work in it. Altogether this passage means this: “Don’t be tricked by the darkness, lest you incur the wrath of God. Instead, stay in the light and work to please God by exposing the darkness so that Christ’s light can shine on it.”

To me, this means we as humans need to work hard to not be reeled in by the bad things in the world around us, such as lust of money or material possessions, power that is used to hurt, or prejudice against those less fortunate. Instead, we should work to find those things in our lives and work to rid ourselves of them, so that God can fill the space where they were before.

Bailey Strock

***Prayer:*** *Lord, please help me to rid myself of the dark things in my life. Fill me up and cleanse me of all the unfruitful things in me so that I can better spread your love to the world.*

December 10

like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:

‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious;  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those  
who do not believe,

‘The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the very head of the corner’,  
and

‘A stone that makes them stumble,  
and a rock that makes them fall.’

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

*1 Peter 2:5-9*



We are like living stones being built into God's house. It is made up of all of us. Each of us is very important to God. If you don't believe in God, you are like a stone that causes people to stumble and fall. If we believe, we are called out of the darkness and into his light. We are all one of his.

Mason Barnett

***Prayer:*** *Dear God, please help us to become a living stone that is a part of your holy framework. Help us to be good people and help others to believe and become living stones according to your word and teaching. Amen*

December 11

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

*Isaiah 60:1-3*



William Henley, in his powerful poem, “Invictus” describes his world as “Dark as a pit from pole to pole.” All of us, at some time, have felt that our lives were engulfed in total darkness.

Isaiah teaches us that when we turn to God, His glory will bring light into our dark world enabling us to see the love and blessings that surround us, then “the glory of the Lord is risen upon you... and you become radiant.” We are not only the recipient of God’s light but are the reflector of it.

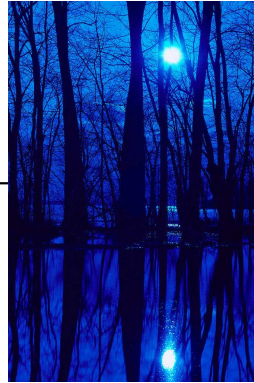
Pam King

***Prayer:*** Thank you, God, for being with us in our times of greatest darkness to lead us by your everlasting light. May our faith and our lives always reflect your glory. Amen

December 12

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

*2 Corinthians 4:3-6*



Reading this scripture reminds me of a song I was taught as a child, "Let it shine, Let it shine." Let us not be blinded by the minds of the unbelievers but see the light of the glory of Christ. Let the light shine out of darkness in our hearts to give light to the glory of God.

God said, "Let Light shine out of the darkness." This special season with each light may we be reminded of the knowledge of the glory of God in face of Jesus Christ.

Janet McDaniel

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the birth of Jesus. Let us rejoice in the significance of this season. Amen.*

December 13

We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

*1 John 1:4-7*



On October 4th, I received a letter asking me to write an advent devotional. This day was the third anniversary of my bicycle accident. I was asked to use the above scripture as inspiration. All that talk about light and dark reminded me of the darkness I experienced at that time. For weeks sleep was impossible due to pain and the device I was supposed to sleep with. It was the time of year when the hours of darkness were longer than the hours of light. At first, I would get out of bed and just sit in the darkness. Then one night the hymn, “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” came to mind. “Precious Lord take my hand, lead me on, help me stand, I am tired, I am worn; through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.” I only remembered the first line, so I turned on the light to look it up in my old Methodist hymnal. It wasn’t there so that verse became my prayer. I realized how much I needed this time in prayer with God, and the hymn, “I Need Thee Every Hour” came to mind. Again it was on with the light; this hymn was in my trusty old hymnal. Verses 1 and 3 were the ones that I remembered. I added them to my hymn prayer. Then no need to turn on the light for the words to the next addition to my hymn prayer. I have know the words to “How Great Thou Art” for years. It was my father-in-law’s favorite and has become mine. These three hymns were my light in that darkness. They helped me to walk into the light as I began to heal.

Francie Seybert

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, This advent season as hours of darkness are long, I hope I can walk in the light, as He is in the light, and find joy. Amen.*

December 14

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

*John 3:16-21*



When we read John 3:16-21, we understand how much God loves us.

He gave us His only Son, so that we could have eternal life and be saved rather than condemned. All we have to do is believe in and accept Jesus.

When I read these scriptures they remind me of my mother, who was a devoted Christian. The mother of twelve, ten of them were boys. She tried very hard to instill the love of Jesus in each one of us boys, and the two girls. It was accepted in varying degrees in each one of us.

Forty six years ago, my brother Ivan was accidentally shot in the head. He lived for sixty days after the accident. Without our mother's efforts to teach us about Jesus, Ivan would have been a lost soul.

Ivan, even though he was a vegetable, completely brain dead, he witnessed to us during his ordeal. Then days before he died, Ivan sat up in bed and said, "Yes, Jesus, I see you."

Thanks to God for sending Jesus and thanks to our mother for teaching us about Jesus. Thanks to Ivan for his loving witness.

Kenny Hall

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son, who died so we might have eternal life. Also, thank you for loving parents and family who continually witness of your love to us. Amen*

December 15

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the  
Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:  
'In the wilderness prepare the way  
of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a high-  
way for our God.  
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.  
Then the glory of the Lord shall  
be revealed,  
and all people shall see it to-  
gether,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spo-  
ken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out!'  
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'  
All people are grass,

their constancy is like the flower  
of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the Lord  
blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.  
The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will  
stand for ever.

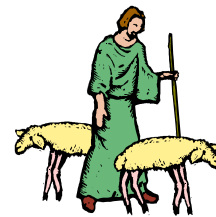
Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good tidings;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good tid-  
ings,

lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
'Here is your God!'  
See, the Lord God comes with  
might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

He will feed his flock like a shep-  
herd;

he will gather the lambs in  
his arms,  
and carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead the mother  
sheep.

*Isaiah 40:1-11*



This scripture reading is one that is associated with the beginning of Advent and the promised coming of the Lord. Isaiah is speaking to the people of Israel who have lived in the midst of a very difficult time. The prophet begins this reading with a statement that is at the heart of his mission: “Comfort, comfort my people.” The difficulty of receiving such a message is that it flies in the face of the reality of their lives. Understanding such a message from God was at least as difficult for them as it is today. How, for example, do we see the challenges of building peace among all people and dealing with the plight of the poor?

The call for us today is both one of comfort and challenge, as it was for the people of Israel. Comfort in the assurance that God is a loving God who “will care for his flock like a shepherd.” Challenges clearly come in the form of facing the hills and valleys in making a highway for our God. People committed to establishing peace in this world who have served in areas of deeply seeded conflicts often find themselves set apart from others who fail to understand or see the possibilities that lie ahead. Surveys of persons who have served in places like Somalia, Northern Uganda, Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, have very different perspectives than their peers who have remained unengaged at home. Likewise the same is true with those who have been in the forefront of the endeavors to relieve the suffering of the poor here and around the world.

This passage in Isaiah seems to be telling us to be involved in confronting the hills and valleys within our communities and the broader world in making the way of the Lord. It also assures us of the presence of our God who is with us as a ruler and also a gentle comforter along the way. May we in Advent not only seek to understand more fully the presence of our God with us but also to be actively engaged in building the highway for our Lord.

Doug Nelson

***Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help us feel your presence and comfort as we strive to help others in our community and world this Advent season.*

*Amen*

December 16

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.

*John 9:1-7*



My husband likes to wrap gifts in very unusual ways. One year my gift was wrapped to look like the local savings and loan company. Another year a life sized cardboard bass violin stood in our room near the Christmas tree. Another year, large alphabet blocks in red and white graced our living room. Sometimes the wrapping gave a hint as to what was inside, but often it did not.

One thing he never used was spit and dirt.

The blind man in the Book of John probably had received few gifts in his lifetime. Certainly he would never have expected a gift wrapped in spit and dirt. However, the gift contained the gift of sight. Unbelievable! Unspeakable! Wonderful! Worthy of praise! The works of God were most certainly revealed in this wonderful gift in humble wrappings. How have the works of God been revealed to you in humble wrappings?

Janet Casterline

*Prayer: Lord, today, help us to see the eternal in the humble. Amen*

December 17

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” ’

*Luke 3:1-6*



This passage represents John the Baptist’s message of repentance and the wonder of God’s work. Two main themes come from this. One is that all will see salvation from God. He has command over all things and will give us his saving grace. The second, and most important is that John preaches the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins.

For some of us, we don’t remember our baptism, but this passage tells us it is a way to salvation. I believe that when we ask for forgiveness, it brings us back to the time we were baptized.

Chris Taylor

***Prayer:** Lord, you have made us, nurtured us, and kept us. We were born in to sin, but you give us the chance to ask for forgiveness and we know that we are forgiven through your grace. Amen.*

December 18

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;  
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.  
On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;  
the nations shall inquire of him,  
and his dwelling shall be glorious.

*Isaiah 11: 1-10*

As the election approaches, all I see everywhere are “political signs” which tell me what the “newly elected” promises to do for me. As I observe all this, I remember what Isaiah tells me about the Messiah. Isaiah foretold of Jesus’ coming and the new creation He will bring. I cannot *elect* this ruler because He is mine for the asking. I only have to *choose* for Him to rule my life.

I look forward to God’s rule on earth as Jesus returns. Everything and everyone will live harmoniously. There will be no illness, poverty, want or death. This is a promise that is freely and honestly given to me. All I have to do to obtain all this is to believe.

Jane McVey

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, thank you for your promise of a new creation when Your Son returns to rule the earth. Help me to live now as I await that promise. Amen*

December 19

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;  
shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all  
your heart,  
O daughter Jerusalem!  
The Lord has taken away the  
judgements against you,  
he has turned away your  
enemies.  
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in  
your midst;  
you shall fear disaster no more.  
On that day it shall be said to

Jerusalem:  
Do not fear, O Zion;  
do not let your hands grow  
weak.  
The Lord, your God, is with you,  
He is mighty to save;  
he will rejoice over you with  
gladness,  
he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with  
loud singing  
*Zephaniah 3:14-16*

When I hear the words, “he is mighty to save” I am reminded of a Great Banquet (similar to Emmaus Walk) weekend when I was serving on the team. **The Lord is Mighty to Save** was the theme song for the weekend. One of the gals at our table was a single mother of a 16 year old son. She had a minimum wage job and lived in a cramped upstairs apartment with her son. She struggled with decisions she had made in her life. She wanted to believe God loved her and wanted to save her, but yet, she had a fear Christ had not really died to **save her**. She couldn’t believe God could possibly be interested in her—not with all the rotten things she had done in her life, not with all the messy decisions she had made, not with all the horrible things she had said to her son.

As the weekend and the talks progressed, she slowly broke down the wall she had built around herself and began to believe that Christ really had died for her too, and He truly was interested in saving her! I remember singing **The Lord is Mighty to Save** and seeing the look of pure joy on her face as she sang. She was looking off in the distance and I could imagine she was really seeing the face of her savior as she sang. *“Everyone needs compassion, a love that’s never failing. Let mercy fall on me. Everyone needs forgiveness, the kindness of a savior, the hope of nations. . . . Take me as you find me, all my fears and failures, fill my life again.”* \*\*

Karen Ambler

*Prayer: Dear God, during this beautiful season of Advent, remind us daily of the gift of your Son and his willingness to save us. Help us to share the message-- You are mighty to save. Amen*

**\*\*Hillsong United**

## December 20

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel',

which means, 'God is with us.' When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

*Matthew 1:18-25*



Although we are Christian, it is sometimes difficult to keep our faith and to trust in the Lord in all things. This is especially true when we are faced with difficult situations. In the scripture, Joseph was faced with the fact that his fiancée, Mary, was pregnant. Knowing that he could not be the father of the child, he could only imagine that she had been unfaithful to him. This is a problem encountered by many young couples in today's world and is usually resolved by the couple breaking off the engagement. Because Joseph was a kind man and did not want to cause Mary any further grief, he decided to use this same technique and quietly send her on her way.

Having made this decision, Joseph fell asleep, and in his dream the Lord spoke to him, reassuring him that Mary had not been unfaithful, but she was bearing a son conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph had a strong and enduring faith and complete trust in the Lord. Since he trusted the Lord so completely, he went ahead with his marriage to Mary and became a father to her son, who they named Jesus.

Without faith, when we are faced with situations such as a financial crisis, a broken relationship, or health issues, we tend to try to take care of the problem by ourselves, forgetting God is always with us and is always willing to help. We need only ask and pray for his guidance and relief. The resolution to our problem may not be just what we want or think it should be, but, like Joseph, we must trust that God has a plan for us and the end result will be a part of that plan.

Gail Brant

***Prayer:*** *I pray that you will strengthen my faith, and build my trust in You, that I might rely on You always to guide me through the problems that I face in my life. Amen*

## December 21

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



Ever felt unimportant—like you simply didn't matter?

The shepherds living out in the fields tending their flocks had good reason to feel undervalued, forgotten by their world. They were not rich, not famous, and were certainly easy to overlook. They were invisible to the world, individuals with whom each of us could, at times, identify.

And yet it is to these seemingly invisible and unimportant shepherds that God chose to reveal the birth of his Son, our Savior, who came to earth not just for a select few, but for each of us, no matter our standing in society.

What a wonderful and loving God—to value each of us and to present us with a gift of such magnitude and importance. This gift should make each of us feel valued.

Bill Brown

**Prayer:** *Lord, we praise you for the wonderful gift of our Savior, Jesus. Your love for each of us fills us with joy. Amen*

December 22

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the lake, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

‘Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,

on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
the people who sat in darkness

have seen a great light,  
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
light has dawned.’

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’

Matthew uses Isaiah to describe the time in which Jesus lived. It was a time of “darkness”, despair, helplessness. Then all of a sudden a great light appeared. Jesus came preaching a new time, called the Kingdom of God.

I have often wondered about Jesus’ voice. Did he have a singing voice? It must have been melodious and strong in order to project over waves of the sea and the multitudes of people.

We know it was filled with hope. It was filled with compassion and love. It was filled with the joy of a new day—the “kingdom of God is at hand.”

I heard a song recently that reflects this longing:

Do you hear the people sing  
Lost in the valley of the night  
It is the music of the people  
Who are climbing to the light.  
For the wretched of the earth.  
There is a flame that never dies  
Even the darkest night will end  
And the sun will rise.

They will live again in freedom  
In the garden of the Lord  
They will walk behind plough-share  
They will put away the sword  
The chain will be broken  
And all will have their reward!  
Will you join in our crusade?  
Who will be strong  
and stand with me?

Rev. Dr. Bob Jackson

**Prayer:** *“Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free,  
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.” Amen*

December 23

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.  
Many peoples shall come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.

O house of Jacob,  
come, let us walk  
in the light of the Lord!

*Isaiah 2:1-5*



Everyday at work we interact with many people. I had one person who I didn't get along with well and he would know just how to push the right (wrong) button. One day in a meeting with my boss present, my adversary and I got into it like we always did. On the way back to our desks my boss said, "You don't get along with him very well, do you?" When we got to her office, she said, "Come on in, and shut the door behind you." She then got out her bible and we discussed bible verses. "Love thy neighbor as thyself," (who is thy neighbor?), Matthew 22:39. "Just as I have loved you, you should love each other," John 13:34. "As you treat the least of these my brothers and sisters, so you treat me," Matthew 25:40.

In this Advent season we should be anticipating the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and concentrating on the Love and Grace of God. Change our old ways into new. We don't have swords and spears to destroy and remake into peaceful tools, but we do have a hurtful weapon in our tongue. We need to control that mighty weapon and to learn and teach others the way to obey God's word and to follow and walk in his light, to our Savior's birth, this glorious season.

Cliff Ambler

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us the ability to hear and read your word and to be able to equate the lessons of old into the new of our lives. Please use the Holy Spirit to guide us in this Advent Season to be a more loving and kind people. We ask all of this in the name of your precious son Jesus. Amen.*

**Do everything you do in the Glory of the One who made you, He made You – Steven Curtis Chapman**

December 24

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

*Luke 2:25-33*



Simeon had been waiting a long time to see the Messiah. God had promised Simeon he would see the Messiah before he died. We all know what it is like to look forward to seeing or getting something special. Sometimes our excitement is disappointed when the real thing happens, but not Simeon. He knew exactly who he held in his arms, and thanked God for the privilege he had. God exceeded his expectations.

And what about Mary and Joseph. This was the first time someone besides themselves or Mary's Aunt Elizabeth confirmed who their child was—God's son! We bet their hearts exploded with joy.

Grammy & Grandpa Peter  
Danielle, Aidrey & Carly Hunt

***Prayer:*** Heavenly Father, thank you for always exceeding our expectations with your gifts. Thank you most of all for the greatest gift, Your Son.  
*Amen*

December 25

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.

You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.  
For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onwards and for evermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

*Isaiah 9:2-7*



In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,  
'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

*Luke 2:1-20*

## December 25—Christmas Day

Christmas Day is here! The waiting and preparation are over—Jesus is born! As we once more read the familiar words of Isaiah and Luke about the coming of Jesus, our hearts are filled with gratitude and praise. As you celebrate this day with family and friends, remember how much God loves you. Enjoy both the gifts you give and the gifts you receive today, and celebrate the gift of God’s Son. Share the wonderful gifts of God’s love and grace with others.

Rev. Donna Goings

***Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for Jesus’ birth. Thank you for your love shown to us through Jesus. We pray for our world that needs to experience your presence and peace. Help us to share the gift of Jesus and His message of love and grace with our world. Amen.*





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