

Advent & Christmas

Devotional

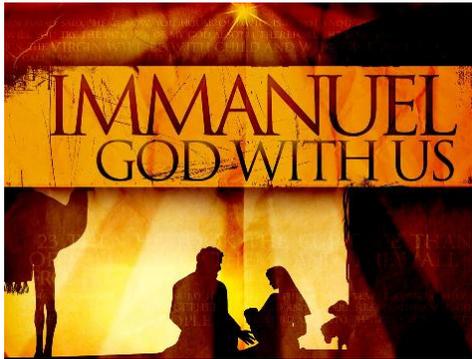
~ 2020 ~



Prepared by Members & Friends of

First Presbyterian Church

Carlisle, PA



Dear Members & Friends,

Advent and Christmas this year will be unlike any that we have experienced. For many of us, old traditions will need to be modified or skipped altogether. We might not be able to see one another in person and instead visit through computer and telephone screens. For many people it will be a difficult season.

But we can hold onto the truth that the “light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome the light” (John 1:5). Before Jesus’ birth some 2,000 years ago, God’s people were in a difficult season, yet they did not lose hope. They trusted that God had a plan and that He was with them.

In the coming weeks I invite you to sit down with this book and your Bible each day and take some time to read and reflect on the stories, poems, carols, and prayers that have been so lovingly and thoughtfully composed by the members and friends of First Presbyterian Church. In the midst of your stress and busyness allow their words and God’s Word to remind you that God is with us, Emmanuel, the Word made flesh: Jesus Christ.

With Hope,

Pastor Tony

**NOTE:** Some of the entries in this devotional appeared in editions from previous years. The authors are still part of our church family, though a few have gone on to join the Church Triumphant. We give thanks that their words still speak to us today.

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*The staff of First Presbyterian Church wishes Christmas blessings upon you  
as you use this daily devotional guide.*



Sunday, November 29, 2020

Scripture: Luke 2:22-40

<sup>22</sup> “When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, <sup>35</sup> so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

<sup>38</sup> Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”

In this passage, Luke describes what happened when Mary and Joseph took their child to the temple for the purification rites as required by Moses. While completing the rites, first Simeon and then Anna approach them and then prophesize as noted. My study Bible discusses how this passage is known as the “Presentation” and has callbacks to Psalm 119 and Isaiah and fulfillment of prophesy. And while all of this is amazing, the verse that struck me is 33: *The child’s mother and father marveled at what was said about him.*

Mary and Joseph have had all the signs and portents that this kid is something special (Gabriel, wise men, and so on), yet they still are able to marvel at the things said about their then 8-day old son. Imagine God saying here you go; I am going to let you raise my Son and he is going to do all this amazing stuff. When I read the word “marvel” in my 21<sup>st</sup> century mind, it seems to me that Mary and Joseph might have been feeling a little nervous and scared. Maybe they thought, how are the two of us going to handle this responsibility and not screw it up? Maybe we could leave this kid here with Simeon and Anna and shirk the responsibility. But then maybe they remembered Jonah and thought, yeah, that probably won’t work out so well for us. God sent his Son to be raised by us, so we probably have the tools to make this work. Maybe they didn’t think that way and I am inferring my own fears about the raising of my own children.

In the end, I think this speaks to the fact that God does have a plan and that we have the strength through Him to rise to the challenge of the task placed upon us. God chose Mary and Joseph to raise His Son, Savior of the world. I must have the faith that whatever God places on me, that the tools are there through Him for me to figure things out.

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord, Thank You for sending Your Son to save us and the World. Thank You for the fulfillment of prophesy. Let my faith in You be greater than my fears and doubts of my abilities to handle the challenges of life. Amen.

Ryan Crim

**Monday, November 30, 2020**

**Scripture: Micah 4:1-5**

**“... we will walk in the name of the Lord our god forever and ever.”**

If you've ever delivered a presentation or told a story, you've likely heard of the Three "Tell 'Em's":

- tell 'em what you will tell 'em....
- tell 'em....
- tell 'em what you told 'em.

This advice on how to structure an effective presentation/story is attributed to many, from Aristotle to Dale Carnegie.

As I sat with my thoughts on the meaning of this season of Advent, it came to my mind that the Bible, if viewed in a very simplistic way, is presented using the Three "Tell Em's" structure:

- 1--the Old Testament is filled with at least 300 prophecies of the event mankind waits for, the coming of the Savior of the World (what WILL happen!);
- 2--Jesus' birth occurs, under the most magnificent circumstances (it DOES happen!);
- 3--the New Testament restates the prophecies by recounting the real life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (in summary, He IS the promised Savior!).

During Advent, we wait, we are immersed in what we are told WILL happen. You got our attention. But, in these times of 8-second attention spans, we want to move on quickly to fulfillment; we seek instant gratification; we want all ten episodes now, in one sitting. But beyond the miracle of Jesus' birth, we can BE the summary, the big wrap-up -- by doing the real work we've been instructed to do: reading, studying, digesting, and pondering the teachings of Jesus, how He lived, and how He expects us to live.

As we read the Old Testament/Psalms/New Testament scriptures suggested in this devotional, let's determine that we will "tell 'em what we told 'em" - by BEING the story, through the living of our lives.

**PRAYER: Dear Lord, we are blessed that you told us what to expect; we are grateful that you delivered on your promise; and we now seek your guidance as we try to live more Godly lives. Amen.**

Avis Allen

**Tuesday, December 1, 2020**

**Scripture: Micah 4:6-13**

The heading in my Bible for the verses Micah 4:6-13 is “The Lord’s Plan.” We read and are comforted, and given the picture of hope for Israel’s restoration (Mount Zion, Daughter Zion & Daughter Jerusalem). Israel was in agony, in exile, and with enemies gathered against them. But God planned to rescue and redeem them, giving them the strength as they turn back to Him. More evidence of God’s power and judgment we find in Psalm 79 and Revelation 15:1-10, helping us acknowledge how mighty is our Lord God.

Surely during these days of unrest and uncertainty, we look to God for His saving power to restore, rescue, and redeem us.

**PRAYER: Dear Lord, our hope is in you as we look to you and trust in you. You, indeed, are our strength and our redeemer. Amen.**

Jean Kretzing

**Wednesday, December 2, 2020**

**Scripture: Micah 5:1-5a**

**“And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.” (vss. 4-5a)**

The prophet Micah spoke to God’s people through a series of warnings and rebukes for their indifference to God’s Word. But, here in chapter 5 of Micah, God offers hope. He speaks of a coming king unlike any they had experienced and certainly different than they desired. God sent his son to “feed his flock in the strength of the LORD”, but his strength was not based on military might but on truth, love, and justice.

Jesus did indeed provide peace to God’s people, but it did not come through secure borders or the absence of war. True peace came through Jesus’ birth, death, and Resurrection, enabling God’s people to be in right relationship with their Heavenly Father.

Many of God’s people failed to recognize this new King. We have the choice daily to accept and follow Jesus even if His ways are beyond our understanding. God does not ask us to understand all that He does. He does ask us to trust and obey Him in the midst of our questions and to rest in the truth that Jesus is our peace.

**PRAYER: Lord, today I choose to acknowledge Your lordship in my life and trust that Your ways are better than mine even when I do not understand them.  
In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Bill and Rita Beck

Thursday, December 3, 2020

Scripture: Malachi 3:1-4

Hymn: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

Christmas hymns and songs are among our earliest memories from childhood. Yet I did not hear my favorite Christmas hymn until my senior year at Carleton College. On the last Sunday night before Christmas break, the college choir performed a Christmas concert in the college chapel. Most students attended, including me.

The night was dark (as nights are wont to be) and cold (as Minnesota winters are). The chapel, built in the style of an elegant Gothic cathedral, was dimly lit, mostly by candles along the three aisles, similar to our church on Christmas Eve.

As with the college's Sunday services, this evening concert opened with an introit. The hymn selected for this Advent season was "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." The stately majesty of that inspiring hymn resounded throughout the chapel. As the choir proceeded from the narthex, down the central aisle, to the loft behind the pulpit, they sang of ransoming "Captive Israel;" of "the Rod of Jesse" freeing "thine own from Satan's tyranny;" of the "Dayspring from on High" putting "death's dark shadow to flight;" of the "Key of David" opening wide "our Heavenly home;" of the "Lord of Might" who "in ancient times didst give the law;" of the "Wisdom from on High" ordering "all things far and nigh;" and of the "Desire of Nations" filling "the whole world with Heaven's peace." The music was moving; the setting was stirring. It evoked images of medieval monks in a monastery, chanting in Latin, as they went to vespers.

Only later did I learn that, while the tune dates from the late Middle Ages, the hymn itself was composed centuries afterwards. Historian though I am, that bit of history I respectfully leave to musicologists.

For me, this introit was not a subject for study but a sublimity of the spirit. The music of that moment marked my memory and stirred my soul. It calls on us to "rejoice, rejoice" but not in a happy, laughing, playful way like King David first frolicking through the streets of Jerusalem. Rather, the majesty of the music manifests spiritual, reverential rejoicing, awestruck at the wonder of God and comforted by the coming of Christ.

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord, in this Advent season and in all seasons, help us reverentially to rejoice that "Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel." Amen.

Dr. Richard Sommers (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

Friday, December 4, 2020

**Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4-10**

**“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (v.5)**

Ann Swindell challenges us to reflect on these two questions:

- 1 - “Have you ever known God was calling you to do something, but you felt unequipped or worried you didn’t have it in you to accomplish the task?”
- 2 - “Have you ever responded to Him out of fear when He has asked you to step out in faith?”

The prophet Jeremiah had the same experience but, according to this Scripture God had planned Jeremiah’s purpose before he was even born! When Jeremiah protested his calling to speak for God to all the nations, God responded by saying, “You shall go to all to whom I send you, do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you.”

God’s call to Jeremiah is Christ’s call to every believer: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (*Matthew 28:19-20*)

**PRAYER:** Lord, I confess I often feel unequipped to do the good works you have prepared in advance for me to do. Help me to believe that there is nothing about me you that You did not intimately plan and prepare -- my personality, my gifts, my desires, my call. Help me to walk in faith and peace today as I follow You and proclaim the gospel to all I meet. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Bill and Rita Beck

**Saturday, December 5, 2020**

**Scripture: Acts 11:19-26**

**“And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.” (v. 26)**

Advent is a time for pausing and waiting. A time to light candles. The above passage refers to the moment when the disciples were first called Christians. Sometimes when I hear this word - *Christian* - I think of evangelism. And not the happy “spread the joy of Christ” evangelism either. More like the “hit you over the head” type. Perhaps that is one of the hang-ups my generation has with church-goers. We are tired of the “preach one thing and live another” type of evangelism. Why don’t we live a joyful, quiet example of God’s love? I think that Advent is the perfect time of year to invite a friend to church. Let them feel the Peace and Joy and the anticipation as it builds. Let it be a quiet sharing of the word.

I remember being a teenager and going to my friend’s church during Advent. I was a typical teenager and questioning everything, especially my church. This was a great opportunity to see what else was out there.

I joined the bell choir with my friend. Each Sunday we practiced for the big event - the Christmas pageant. I remember lots of joy and beauty in that time. My questions had a time to rest and I could just focus on the joy and anticipation of the season. Maybe that’s what we all need.

**PRAYER: Lord, help us make Advent a time for lighting the candles,  
not fanning the flames.**

Megan Crum (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

**Sunday, December 6, 2020**

**Scripture: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13**

**“Mercy and truth are met together;  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” (v. 10)**

**Peace Out!\* (and Peace In!)**

Several years ago, the Lutheran Pastor at an Indianapolis church where Molly and I attended and were married made a distinction during a sermon between “having to” do things and “getting to” do things. One of my take-home messages from this was a sense of discernment about when to become involved and when to recognize that I am not the best person for the task, or that I need help.

As I have become older and more settled into professional and family life, I increasingly appreciate my limited talents and numerous limitations as one fleeting child in God’s Kingdom. Some of my most profoundly joyful and peaceful moments occur when I can use my gifts directly, obviously, and in harmony with my daily activities. For me, these activities mostly center around teaching and helping to maintain a healthy workplace for my colleagues. I believe that when I have a sense of inward peace that this resonates outward. It also helps me to recognize the talents of others and to take immense pleasure in a genuine sense of *esprit de corps*. I try to remember that doing the right thing and doing the peaceful thing are two sides of the same coin and that acting out of a sense of burden and obligation often leads to frustration and exhaustion.

**PRAYER: Eternal and abiding Lord, grant each of us peace so that we may seek truth and righteousness and act mercifully. Amen.**

\* If you are like me, you can see the generation gap widen on an almost weekly basis. “Peace out!” was a fairly common salutation many years ago.

Joe Shane (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

**Monday, December 7, 2020**

**Scripture: Psalm 147:15**

**“He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly.”**

I remember when I was a small child, sitting next to my mother in a little Presbyterian Church in northern New York. Every Sunday I listened to and gradually learned to recite along with her the following words: “As it was in the Beginning, it is now and Ever Shall Be. World without End. Amen.”

As I was saying these words over and over, I remember feeling a warmth and happiness because God promised the world would not ever end. I still feel the same way whenever I say it aloud.

As life goes on, words read, heard, spoken and sung in church bring Light into my relationship with and understanding of God. This gift from God that answers to our needs - from giving comfort to a small child to constant assurance to the aging adult - is everywhere in “words.” Our choice is the source we use.

Listen for God’s word in all you see and hear and feel!

**PRAYER: May God bless you and keep you all the days of your life. Amen.**

Ellen Darr (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

**Tuesday, December 8, 2020**

**Scripture: Luke 1: 5-17**

**“But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.’” (vss. 13-15)**

The story of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who had prayed for children for many years, reminds us that our prayer requests are on God’s timeline and on His terms. When we ask things of God, are we turning our requests over to Him, to be answered in His way? Or do we always expect them to be fulfilled as requested? It takes a great amount of faith to live the phrase we say in worship each Sunday: “Thy will be done.”

The latter part of the chapter (Luke 1) refers to the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist. Zechariah was most likely simply praying for a child to love and be loved by him and Elizabeth. But his prayer was answered not with a son whom he might have expected to be his successor, but with a child who was selected by God to go out and prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah. Probably not exactly what Zechariah had prayed for.

**PRAYER: Lord, you answer our prayers in many ways.  
Help me to accept your answers, even when they are unexpected. Amen.**

Anita Ashbaugh (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Scriptures: Isaiah 35:3-7; Psalm 126; Luke 7:18-30

Hymn: "Of the Father's Love Begotten"

The expectation of Christ's birth was foretold in the Old Testament as we read in the passage from Isaiah 35. The good news was that God would come into the world and change it forever. His coming would be a cause for great joy and celebration. This gift of God's love for his people is also the joyful theme found in Psalm 126. God would rescue his exiled people and do amazing things for them. These predictions of God's coming into the world were fulfilled in the New Testament by the coming of Christ. In the Luke 7 passage, we read of the role that John the Baptist played in the ministry of Jesus. John clarifies that he was the messenger as described in the Scriptures. He was the one sent to prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah.

The divine mystery of the coming of Christ into the world and his humble but miraculous birth are topics that have long evoked thought and meditation. The hymn "Of the Father's Love Begotten" expresses in words and melody this "Divinum Mysterium," the name of the plainsong to which the text is sung. The 4<sup>th</sup> Century text by Prudentius and the haunting 16<sup>th</sup> Century tune evoke for me the timelessness of God's love. It is a reminder of how the mystery and awe of Christ's coming into the world have been pondered for centuries. Christ was the personification of God's love that existed before the world began and shall continue "evermore and evermore" into eternity.

**PRAYER:** Help me to remember always the great gift that you gave to all mankind for all time. Thank you for your love for me and for sending Jesus to save me from my mortal sin. May I respond to your love in joyful gratitude and in service and love for others. Amen.

Richard Tritt (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

Thursday, December 10, 2020

**Scripture: Habakkuk 2:1-5**

**“For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.”  
(v.3)**

Poor Habakkuk! Life was not a bowl of cherries! Israel, because of her unfaithfulness to God, is being attacked by the Chaldeans. Surely he thought God would not use such an unrighteous nation to correct his people. In chapter 1, Habakkuk lays out his complaint to God. Here, in chapter 2, we see Habakkuk taking position on a watchtower to await God’s answer to his complaint.

God’s answer is not long in coming but it was not what Habakkuk expected. God said, “Wait for it; it will surely come.” Habakkuk never saw the fulfillment of the vision, but we have - the Messiah’s birth, the Savior’s death, Christ’s Resurrection have all occurred. We, like Habakkuk, are awaiting Christ’s Second Coming. Meanwhile, what if we replaced the habit of rehearsing our problems with the practice of reading God’s Word? Watching and waiting for an answer that lingers is a sure test of our faithfulness to God. To see the end from God’s perspective is to have confidence for the present.

**PRAYER: Remind us, Lord, that it is not the size of the problem we face but the size of the God in whom we believe. Help us to wait with patience and faith knowing you are bigger than any problem we have.  
In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Bill and Rita Beck

Friday, December 11, 2020

**Scripture: Psalm 126**

**“May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.” (v. 6)**

In 1861, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was mired in a deep depression following his wife’s tragic death in a fire, and the outbreak of the Civil War. While listening to the December church bells ring out, Longfellow recognized that God is still a part of our lives and that right will prevail as long as there is Christmas and its promise of new life.

**“Christmas Bells”**

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

I thought as now this day had come, the belfries of all Christendom  
Had rung so long the unbroken song of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

And in despair I bowed my head, “There is no peace on earth,” I said,  
“For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to men.”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: “God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;”  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on earth, goodwill to men.

As we wait during this Advent season, struggling with the daily complexities of life and additional responsibilities of the holiday season, help us to remember that we too will reap with shouts of joy following the birth of God’s son, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

**PRAYER: Dear Lord, be with us through this time of waiting.  
Teach us to always recognize your presence in our lives, no matter how  
great our load may seem. Help us to always remember that through the  
coming of our Lord, we too will reap with shouts of joy. Amen.**

Art Thompson (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

**Saturday, December 12, 2020**

**Scripture: Amos 9:11-15**

**Hymn: “I Wonder as I Wander”**

Eight days after a boy is born to Jewish parents, he is brought to the temple to be circumcised and given his name. This was an especially joyful occasion because Elizabeth and Zacharias had grown old and had had no offspring to continue the family line. Imagine the surprise when Elizabeth said that the baby was to be named John instead of Zacharias, after his father. The people turned to the boy’s father to set Elizabeth straight. Now, Zacharias had been made deaf and dumb by the angel Gabriel when he doubted God would give him a son at his age. Unable to hear what Elizabeth had said, he took a piece of paper and scratched out J-O-H-N, and immediately he was able to speak. Of course, the people wondered at what had happened. They had no way of knowing that this child would wander all over Israel telling of the wonders that they would soon see when Jesus came.

John Jacob Niels was born in Kentucky in 1892. He was considered the “Dean of American Balladeers”, influencing folk artists Joan Baez and Pete Seeger, among others. Niles wandered all over the eastern U.S. In 1933, he found himself in Murphy, North Carolina, where a revivalist family named Morgan was about to be thrown out of town for being “public nuisances.” At their last revival meeting their daughter sang the first three lines of an Appalachian carol called, “I Wonder as I Wander.” Even with much prodding from Niles, she could not remember any other verses, so he added two more verses. The carol, sung by soloists and choral groups all over the world since that day in 1933, was born.

The middle verse of the carol says, “When Mary birthed Jesus ‘twas in a cow’s stall, with wise men and farmers and shepherds and all. But high from God’s heaven a star’s light did fall, and the promise of ages it then did recall.”

**PRAYER: Lord, as we wander through each day, let us always wonder and also rejoice at the miracle of Christmas and the peace and joy it brings us. Amen.**

Ron Richcreek (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

Sunday, December 13, 2020

**Scriptures: Isaiah 61:1-4 and Luke 4:16-21**

**“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion - to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.”**

Do you remember the mid-1980s television series called *The A-Team*? The series followed four former members of a fictitious Army Special Forces Unit who escaped from military prison and worked as soldiers of fortune. Their leader, John “Hannibal” Smith, at some moment in every episode, would utter the words “I love it when a plan comes together.”

In today’s passage from Isaiah 61, God announces His plan for saving humankind. But Isaiah, who delivered God’s message, never saw the fulfillment of his prophecy. Hundreds of years later, as recorded in Luke chapter 4, Jesus, while worshipping in the synagogue in Nazareth, read aloud from this prophecy in Isaiah and announced “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus - our Prophet, Priest, King, Evangelist, Physician, Messiah and Savior - proclaimed the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. God’s beautiful plan to rescue a broken world came to fruition.

We love it when a plan comes together, especially when it is God’s plan. Don’t you?

**PRAYER: Father, I thank you that you have a plan to save humankind. I am grateful that you have included me in that plan. As we prepare to celebrate your Son’s birth, remind us often of His purpose in coming to earth - “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.” (John 3:17) Amen.**

Bill and Rita Beck

**Monday, December 14, 2020**

**Scripture: Luke 1**

**“And he (Gabriel) came to her (Mary) and said, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you...Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.’”  
(vss. 28-29)**

The Bible records the birth of several babies to old women. We hear nothing of their reactions to the unbelievable news because the announcements were made to the prospective fathers.

Things were different for Mary, possibly the youngest Mother whose story is told to us. Mary herself heard the angelic message. We know how she reacted to the astonishing news. She didn't say, “Why pick on me, Gabriel?” or “How can I handle a baby at my age?” or “Joseph won't like this!” She simply asked, “How can this be?” And when she heard the astounding answer, she humbly and promptly responded with one of the most beautiful and moving acceptance speeches of all time.

I believe that she was a good Mother. I believe that God knew that she would be His good Mother. I believe that God endowed her with the strength and devotion she would need. When He was in danger, she fled with Him to Egypt. She took Him to the temple. When the time was right, she encouraged His ministry. Finally, she followed Him to the cross where she endured one of the hardest of all deaths, that of her child.

Would we be willing enough and trusting enough to respond to such a challenge with confidence and faith?

**PRAYER: Lord, may our hearts and minds be always open to your call. May we be responsive to that call, and may the living of our lives be a joy for You. Amen.**

Sue Hammann (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

**Scripture: Acts 3:17-4:4**

“Help us to behave like Christians!”

In Acts, Chapter 3, the crowd is amazed by the miracle performed by disciples Peter and John, even though the prophets had foretold the coming of the Messiah and many of them had actually seen Jesus with their own eyes. Still, they had to be reminded to “repent...and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.”

Modern Christians did not get to see Jesus in the flesh, but we have the knowledge and wisdom of God’s Word and 2000 years of history since the first coming of the Messiah. Yet, we also still need to be reminded constantly to repent and turn to God and away from sin.

As Christians, we know that our acceptance of God through faith in his Son will bring forgiveness of sin and eternal life. But God still admonishes us to act our faith by turning away from unclean thoughts, words, and deeds. In my mind, it is easier to avoid sinful deeds than it is unclean thoughts and words. I struggle with this every day.

How often I catch myself thinking something unkind about someone who disagrees with me. How often I pass judgment on someone because of the way they look. How often I compare myself with someone else. Do I sing as well as she does? Is my house as nice as his? Does my appearance measure up?

As Christians, we must strive to not only *do* the right thing, but to *say* and *think* the right thing. No one is perfect, and God understands that and loves us anyway. But that does not mean we should not be diligent in trying to make ourselves as righteous as possible. How do we do that? We pray and read God’s word daily, we seek to know God’s will for us, and we fellowship with other Christians as often as we can, barring a pandemic! And remember to “repent...and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.”

**PRAYER: Dear Heavenly Father: Strengthen us as Christians so that our thoughts, words and deeds reflect the Godlike life that you expect of us. And forgive us when we do not measure up, but help us to keep trying. Amen.**

Deb Ryerson

Wednesday, December 16, 2020

Scripture: Acts 28:23-31

**Hymn: “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”**

The Apostle Paul is in Rome at the end of his ministry and life. Each day he continues to preach to the Jewish and Gentile people of Christ’s saving grace for all. Paul is the great teacher and uses the word “convince” to show the depths of his passion for spreading the Gospel.

Paul’s words to convince the people of Jesus’ mission and ministry are most profoundly reflected in the second verse of “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence.” The music and melody of this hymn alone can move me to tears. It is haunting and inspiring, especially with a harp accompaniment. I imagine this to be one of the angels’ tunes, where we mere mortals can only listen in silence and awe. And in our wonderment at the magnificence of the music, the angels tell the beauty of the story, “King of Kings, yet born of Mary, As of old on earth He stood, Lord of Lords, in human vesture, In the body and the blood, he will give to all the faithful His own self for heavenly food.”

During Communion, I often hear this hymn playing in my mind and imagine Christ giving Himself as heavenly food. The Incarnation is real and palpable. The baby whose birth we now await, became the Savior we were promised “in the body and the blood.”

**PRAYER:** Gracious God, grant to each one of us this Advent and Christmas season a moment which is full of wonder and worship; inspirational and incarnational. Amen.

Debby Madden (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

Thursday, December 17, 2020

**Scripture: Psalm 125**

**“As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people,  
from this time on and forevermore.” (v. 2)**

In these times of persistent news and commentary on current events, it often seems impossible to ignore the apparent wickedness of the world. Despite all the good in the world, we may sometimes feel overcome by evil from abroad and in our own neighborhoods. How often do we find ourselves feeling depressed, or frightened, or angry, or defeated by the malevolence we witness?

Without God’s grace and steadfast love, we might feel alone and adrift in an evil world. But those who believe in the Lord and have faith as “unmovable as Mount Zion” know they are surrounded by God’s eternal love. Trust in God, and God alone, so that even when our possessions and very persons seem threatened, nothing can separate us from God.

I am reassured that God wants peace for his children, and that peace is promised for those faithful who believe in Him.

**PRAYER: Lord, remind us that we are never alone in the world.  
Help us to remember to trust you in all things, because by your  
power alone can we be saved. Amen.**

Bruce Ashbaugh (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

**Friday, December 18, 2020**

**Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-4**

**“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.” (vss. 1-2)**

This passage from Hebrews is a reminder of some of the most fundamental things that we, as Christians, believe. Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to His people again and again through prophets. He was steadfast in communicating His message, even though the people could be slow to listen or downright resistant to His word. Yet He continued to communicate with His people, and His message culminated in Jesus, His Son. This passage is also a reminder that Jesus embodied God’s word, that he was and continues to be the purest and most direct connection to God, and the name that he inherited is “more excellent” than the angels and everyone and anything else.

How often do we continue to be slow to listen to God’s word? How often do we forget that God spoke to His people throughout the ages and continues to do so? It is easy to become swept up in daily life, to neglect to take time to seek guidance we need. Let this passage be our reminder that God continues to speak to us. May we listen carefully!

**PRAYER: Lord, thank you for this reminder of the gift that you gave to us in Jesus, your only Son. Give us the peace of mind and the patience to sit in quiet moments to seek and accept your guidance. Grant us the wisdom to find time in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives to pray and simply listen. Amen.**

Michael Gogoj (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

Saturday, December 19, 2020

**Scripture: Judges 13:2-24**

**“But the angel of the Lord said to him, “Why do you ask my name?  
It is too wonderful.’” (v. 18)**

Babies and names always go together. One of the first questions asked of expecting or new parents is, “What’s the baby’s name?” The parents might be only so happy to tell you the child will be named after a grandfather or a dear sister. More likely in today’s culture, the family will be sharing the child’s gender, but you will not learn the name until the child is born.

But the name request in *this* story is not for the child, but for the messenger telling of the impending birth, and I love the answer - my name is too wonderful for you to understand. Like God’s love, grace and mercy - it is all too wonderful to understand!

**PRAYER: Wonderful God, as we prepare for your son’s birth and to worship his holy name, let us pray for all the children born in this world. May we remember each as a gift from you to be loved and cherished. Amen.**

Debby Madden (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

Sunday, December 20, 2020

**Scripture: Micah 5:2-5a**

**“But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.” (v. 2)**

Many of you know I grew up in a small town. There was one traffic light, one restaurant, one store, one gas station, and three churches. It was a nice, quiet place to live.

I always imagine the small town of Bethlehem was a nice, quiet place to live too. Most scholars think there were fewer than 500 people living in Bethlehem when the Roman Emperor Augustus ordered everyone to return to their ancestral home to be registered for tax purposes. Several centuries earlier, the prophet Micah wrote these words naming little old Bethlehem as the birthplace of the long hoped-for Messiah. When the emperor’s decree went out, Joseph and Mary traveled to his family home and while they were there Mary gave birth to a baby they named Jesus.

On the night Jesus was born, Bethlehem was anything but quiet. The stars were shining and the angels were singing and the shepherds were praising. Mary and Joseph realized the world would never be the same because of what happened in that one small town.

Sometimes all it takes is something small to change the world. The birth of a little baby in a small town HAS changed the world and continues to transform the lives of faithful men and women today. This Christmas season let us be transformed, not by the stress of the holidays, but by the love and peace of a little baby.

**PRAYER: Eternal God, you chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. As your Son was born in a small town and then changed the world, help us to see that small actions done in love can also change the world this day. Amen.**

Pastor Tony Lorenz (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

**Monday, December 21, 2020**

**Scripture: Micah 4:6-8 (New Revised Standard Version)**

**“In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted. The lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore. And you, O tower of the flock, hill of daughter Zion, to you it shall come the former dominion shall come, the sovereignty of daughter Jerusalem.”**

Micah was one of the prophets - a contemporary of Isaiah - who preached to both Israel and Judah in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. He denounced all injustice and lifted up a vision of a great day of peace and salvation - the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we draw nearer to the time we celebrate the remembrance of the birth of Jesus, may we be ever mindful of the injustice and evil that still exist in the world, and use our resources and all effort toward achieving that vision for all of mankind.

**Scripture: Micah 4:6-8 (The Living Bible)**

**“In that coming day, the Lord says that he will bring back his promised people - sick and lame and dispossessed - and make them strong again in their own land, a mighty nation, and the Lord himself shall be their King from Mount Zion forever. O Jerusalem - the Watchtower of God’s people - your royal might and power will come back to you again, just as before.”**

**PRAYER: May God’s mercy and justice be found on earth  
This holiday season and forever. Amen.**

Roberta Graff (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

**Tuesday, December 22, 2020**

**Scripture: Psalm 148**

**“Praise the Lord, O heaven! Praise Him from the skies. Praise Him, sun and moon and all you twinkling stars. His glory is far greater than all of earth and heaven.”**

**Hymn: “The First Nowell”**

“The First Nowell” is an English carol which uses the Old English “Nowell” rather than the French “Noel.” Nowell means birth or birthday. Hence, the first birthday. The words of this hymn are very descriptive and tell the beautiful story of Jesus’ birth. The angels, in verse one, described the shepherds as they were keeping their sheep on a cold winter’s night. In verse two, they looked up and saw a star shining in the east. That star gave a great light to the earth, and by that light three wise men came from a far country. To seek a King was their intent, and they would follow the star wherever it went. This star drew near over Bethlehem and took its rest. There it did stay, right over the place where Jesus lay. The wise men then entered reverently and offered their gold, myrrh, and frankincense.

How wonderful it would be if we could celebrate Christ in much the same way that the angels, shepherds and wise men did. It would be so much more meaningful to exclude the commercial blitz which begins at Thanksgiving, and then we could simply and sincerely celebrate the birth of Jesus.

**PRAYER: May our Christmas celebration be quite simple. Help us to remember the simplicity, but profoundness, of that first night when Jesus our Savior was born. Amen.**

Nancy Tritt (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

**Wednesday, December 23, 2020**

**Scripture: I Samuel 2:1-10**

**“A Foundational Rock”**

The thing I take most from the Old Testament is the constant reassertion of the power of the Lord. The power about which I am talking is not God’s ability to manifest the seas, sky, or sand, although that too is great. The power is God’s ability to allow humans to be certain that their actions are based upon something, that the order to the world is not arbitrary and cruel, no matter how it may appear.

I Samuel 2:1-10 makes clear God has the power to do whatever he may choose, yet he does not act in such a way. The Scripture makes clear that, “the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.” The Lord could certainly allow us to wander aimlessly, wantonly acting as if we were the ones who were Gods of knowledge about what is True and righteous. However, when we pursue this path, “bows of the mighty men are broken.”

God’s knowledge allows him to complete great acts seemingly incomprehensible to us. When we disregard his knowledge we are led astray, then blame the world for its apparent cruelty. If we act in accordance with Him, his knowledge guides us, “lifteth up the beggar” and allows us to become strong. By starting with the Lord as the foundation for knowledge and guidance, rather than our personal beliefs or misconceptions, we can achieve the great things He wants us to. Often in my college classes I try to remember this, that knowledge has a source, is not baseless, founded on the greatest rock of all, and can guide us to the righteous path.

**PRAYER: Lord, we pray for the ability to know Your way, to defer to your supreme knowledge, and be led into the kingdom of Heaven. Amen.**

Duncan Crim

**Thursday, December 24, 2020**

**Scripture: Luke 1: 46b-55**

**Hymn: "Away in a Manger"**

**Away in a manger, no crib for His bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head. (v. 1)**

**I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,  
And stay by my side until morning is nigh. (v. 2)**

**Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever and love me, I pray. (v. 3)**

This is usually the children's carol, yet its beauty and power is loved equally by people of all ages. All of us can pray, "I love you Lord Jesus! Stay close to me tonight."

The beauty of this carol is the beauty of Christmas. It is simple. Christmas is not the gold or glitter, the wrappings of presents. It is the story of God humbling Himself to become a baby, born in crude circumstances to a young woman in ancient Palestine.

Sing this carol softly. It is what Christmas is all about.

**PRAYER: May God bless you with a simple Christmas. Amen.**

Jenneane Light (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

**Friday, December 25, 2020**

**Scripture: Titus 3:4**

**“The goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared.”**

There are a number of stories in the Old Testament of God appearing or making himself known to the patriarchs and prophets and ordinary people. God speaks to Moses in the Burning Bush and to Sarah by the voice of angels. God calls to Samuel in the night and Elijah hears God in the “still small voice.”

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestor in many and various ways by the prophets,” writes the author of Hebrews. “But in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). Today we celebrate the birth of God’s Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Word made flesh, come to dwell among us.

But God’s first and greatest Christmas gift does more than dwell among us. As Paul writes to Titus, “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.” God took on human flesh, He became one of us in order to save and redeem us. That is how much God loves the world.

And God did all this, not because we deserved it, or because of our own righteous good deeds, but because of His great mercy and love. God’s greatest gift is given without the expectation that we could ever repay it.

As we celebrate Christ’s birth today, perhaps not as we normally would because 2020 has been anything but a normal year, let us take time to remember God’s gift. Remember and give thanks for the gift of life and love, the gift of self-sacrificial love in God’s only begotten Son, the greatest gift ever given.

**PRAYER: Let us Pray -- O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of Thy only Son Jesus Christ; grant that as we joyfully receive Him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold Him when He shall come to be our Judge; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.**  
(from The Book of Common Order, Church of Scotland)

Pastor Tony Lorenz

**Saturday, December 26, 2020**

**Scripture: Psalm 147:12-20**

**Hymn: “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear”**

I have always loved singing the sacred Christmas carols, telling the story of Christ’s birth. I feel the comfort and reassurance of God’s presence in my life through the celebration of the birth of His Son. That is especially true with the carol “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear,” when the angels sing of “Peace on earth, good will to men.” It goes on to tell us that through dark times, the heavenly choir continues to sing of God’s promise to us. And though we are oppressed, downtrodden, burdened, despondent, weak, or in pain, we can pause and listen for the angels’ song of hope. And continue to heed the message, until we are restored to the ‘age of glory” and join the heavenly choir.

**PRAYER: In the unrest, distrust, resentment, discontent and anger of this world, may we hear the song of angels hovering near the earth, praising God by singing of “Peace on earth, good will to men,” and carry the hope of God’s message in our hearts. Amen.**

Trudy Bailey (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

**Sunday, December 27, 2020**

**Scripture: Psalm 148:12-13**

**“Both young men, and maidens; old men and children:  
Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name above is excellent;  
his glory is above the earth and heaven.”**

The shepherds in the field were sent by the Angel to go into Bethlehem to search out the baby who was to be the Savior. After seeing the child, they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Today is the second day after Christmas. The gifts have been opened and admired; the paper and ribbons cleared away; the meal has been eaten. It is now time to consider the reason for the celebration just concluded. Like the shepherds we should glorify and praise the name of the Lord; for it is the birth of the baby Jesus that we celebrate. All the gifts of food and good cheer are simply reminders of God’s wonderful gift to us.

**PRAYER: Dear God, help us to remember the real reason  
for our Christmas celebrations. We offer praise to your name. Amen.**

Nancy Augustine (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

**Monday, December 28, 2020**

**Scriptures: Isaiah 54:1-13; Revelations 21:1-7**

**Hymn: “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”**

For the Thompson family, our thoughts go to the closing scene of “It’s a Wonderful Life” - which is why we chose this devotional page. It was interesting to read the verses also assigned to this devotional and realize the appropriate message to George Bailey...and to all of us, for that matter.

We all have seen the movie and know the story: a man reaches his final breaking point, the shame of scandal and jail are inevitable. He is frustrated by how his whole life has worked out, as he has always chosen the “right thing to do” and sacrificed his dreams for others. Yet he finds himself at his lowest point, all alone. He concludes that the world would be a better place if he had never been born.

Isaiah 54:1-13 is a message of joy and redemption. Regardless of the shame or sadness, God will have age-enduring love, compassion and mercy for us. (v. 8)

Revelation 21:1-7 is a message of how we will fellowship with God in Heaven - that if you are in a difficult season of your life, there will come a day that that trouble will go away. God will see to it.

So, back to the movie. God gives George a glimpse of life if he had never been born. George sees the impact that his life has had on so many and realizes he has had a wonderful life. At his lowest and darkest point, George receives salvation! He runs back to his life, with all its messes and hardships, because they have been washed away with love, joy and grace.

Our hope for you all is that no matter your life events - that when you hear or sing “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” you feel the love and salvation of God, and that you sing it as loudly and happily as George when he finally realizes God has never gone away from him but rather has blessed him with A WONDERFUL LIFE.

**PRAYER: May God grant you the awareness of your wonderful life! Amen.**

Heather, Rebert & Camryn Thompson  
(from Advent Devotional, 2015)

**Tuesday, December 29, 2020**

**Scripture: 2 Peter 3:8-9**

**“Dear Friends, don’t forget that for the Lord one day is the same as a thousand years, and a thousand years is the same as one day. The Lord isn’t slow about keeping his promises, or some people think he is. In fact, God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost.”**

God is patient with us. God’s will is for everyone to turn from sin. But our faith grows very slowly. We are easily distracted by things that don’t really matter. The good news is that God doesn’t give up on us or leave us behind. God patiently waits for us.

Because God is patient, we must try to be patient. We are in a hurry to see God’s promises come true. We can’t wait until the world is full of peace and justice, and everyone is filled with the love of God. We don’t know God’s schedule, and we often feel impatient. But we can trust God to keep these promises.

**PRAYER: God, thank you for being patient with us. Give us the strength to wait for your promises to come true. In Christ’s name, Amen.**

Peggy McKeen (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

Wednesday, December 30, 2020

THE GATE OF THE YEAR

'God Knows'

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

“Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.”

And he replied:

“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

*So heart be still:*

*What need our little life*

*Our human life to know,*

*If God hath comprehension?*

*In all the dizzy strife*

*Of things both high and low,*

*God hideth His intention.*

*God knows. His will*

*Is best. The stretch of years*

*Which wind ahead, so dim*

*To our imperfect vision,*

*Are clear to God. Our fears*

*Are premature; In Him,*

*All time hath full provision.*

*Then rest: until*

*God moves to lift the veil*

*From our impatient eyes,*

*When, as the sweeter features*

*Of Life's stern face we hail,*

*Fair beyond all surmise*

*God's thought around His creatures*

*Our mind shall fill.*

Minnie Louise Haskins (1875-1957)

Submitted by Pastor Tony Lorenz

**Thursday, December 31, 2020**

**Scripture: Psalm 147-12-20**

Indeed, “Who can stand before his cold?” the psalmist asks in this passage, exhorting his people to praise the strength and blessings that God bestows. The images of melting ice and flowing waters seem appropriate as we enter the new year and some long, cold days.

As New Year’s Eve is one of many days devoted to both reflection and anticipation, I decided to search for an excerpt from one of my Grandfather’s sermons. The Reverend Wallace G. McGeoch was ordained in 1929 and delivered this invocation on Sunday, December 26, 1971:

**PRAYER: Eternal God, Our Father in Heaven, we thank you for your gift of love in the person of Jesus the Christ whose birthday we have just celebrated. We are grateful for your presence with us all along the pathway of 1971. As we come to its close this week, we thank you for every opportunity of worship, including this last Sabbath of the year. With a renewed vision of service, and the undergirding of the Holy Spirit, we confidently look forward to your hand of guidance as we approach and enter the New Year 1972. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.**

Joe Shane (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

Friday, January 1, 2021

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Lyrics

"To everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)  
There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)  
And a time to every purpose, under Heaven.  
A time to gain, a time to lose  
A time to rend, a time to sew  
A time for love, a time for hate  
A time for peace, I swear it's not too late."

Can you imagine how cool these song lyrics were to a pretty hip 15 year old in 1967? Weren't The Byrds smart to record the song "Turn, Turn, Turn"? How appropriate it was for the turmoil of the mid-60's. I wondered who was the "hep cat" that wrote these moving lyrics. Little did I dream that they were based on a text from the Bible, specifically from the Book of Ecclesiastes? These words were probably written in Palestine around 180-175 B.C. by Ben Sira, a scribe well-versed in Jewish law and custom.

Fast forward 50+ years and a much less hip but hopefully wiser man still finds great meaning in the words of Ecclesiastes 3:1-13. As we turn from 2020 to 2021, it seems like an appropriate time to examine ourselves and determine what is the current time and season of our lives. More importantly, it is also the time to reflect and pray to discern what time and season God is calling us to. Through meditation, study and prayer we can find "a time to every purpose, under Heaven."

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord, as we enter a new year, we thank you for the opportunities and blessings that will come our way in the next year. Help us to remember that even though your plans may not be our plans, you will guide us through to do your will. In your name we pray. Amen.

Art Thompson

**Saturday, January 2, 2021**

**Scripture: Proverbs 22:1-9**

**“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches...” (v. 1)**

**“The reward for humility and fear of the lord is riches and honor and life.” (v. 4)**

**Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse;**

**he who guards himself will keep far from them.” (v. 5)**

**“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old,  
he will not depart from it.” (v. 6)**

Every chapter and verse of Proverbs speak to the human condition in God’s world. Yet beyond these particular verses, all 31 chapters of the Book of Proverbs abound with insights and wisdom, encapsulated in engaging epigrams that encourage enterprise of the mind. Often we pick a passage randomly and then let it lead us where it will. Getting swept up in its elegant language is a great joy. Opening our minds to its profound wisdom is stimulating. Then heeding its timeless lessons well repays the effort.

Truly may it be said that the wisdom of Proverbs is proverbial.

**PRAYER: Dear Lord, in this New Year and in every year,  
help us to open our minds and hearts to the wisdom that  
You share with us through the Book of Proverbs. Amen.**

Dick & Tracy Sommers (from Advent Devotional, 2014)

**Sunday, January 3, 2021**

**Scriptures: Isaiah 6:1-5; Psalm 72; Acts 7:44-53**

Have you ever wondered what it was like for the wise men? Their knowledge of the stars led them to leave their home for a foreign land. Although they knew the country, they didn't have an exact address, or even the exact town. All that they knew was they needed to go. They needed to pay homage to the new king. As it was a long and dangerous journey, I know that they must have made careful preparations. Would they be able to find Him? Would they, and their gifts, be accepted?

My thought is that their journey so long ago is much like our journey through life. They left, following the light of a star, and found their king. We follow the Light of God and find our home.

**PRAYER: Thank you, God, for being the Light on our journey. Amen.**

Samantha & Dan Gilbert (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

Monday, January 4, 2021

Scripture: Proverbs 3:1-12

“Whom Can I Trust?”

Do you recall your first experience on a rollercoaster or similar ride? For me, it evoked various emotions, including anticipation and excitement mixed with an equal measure of anxiety. I had to trust the safety devices to keep me secure and the personnel who maintained and inspected the equipment and track to prevent a malfunction.

Trust is essential, but, these days, it seems more and more difficult to trust. Whom or what can we trust? We can't even trust that stores will be fully stocked for all the items on our shopping list - something we used to take for granted.

Today's scripture reminds us that we can - and should - always place our trust in God. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”* These words are especially reassuring and offer hope during these times when everything else seems so uncertain. Relying on ourselves or others alone for understanding and guidance is not sufficient. We must place our full trust in God, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. If we will faithfully trust and acknowledge Him in all we do, the passage affirms as a certainty that God will (not *maybe* or *might*) set us and keep us on the right path. Although, at times, we may feel like we're on an out-of-control rollercoaster and have no idea what direction we're heading or why, we can trust that He is in the lead, guiding us safely through all the twists and turns of this year and beyond.

**PRAYER:** Lord, Help me to faithfully place my trust in you each day,  
and to know that you are always guiding my footsteps  
in the right direction. Amen.

Marsha V. Krotseng

Tuesday, January 5, 2020

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-2

Hymn: “We Three Kings of Orient Are”

The approach of Advent each year brings back memories of preparing for the annual Christmas pageant at my church when I was young. It was a small congregation, so the adults also had to participate. Every year the same person, the same portrayal. It saved money on costumes. My Dad was Melchior, one of the three kings, each and every year. We would practice for weeks leading up to the big night, with Daddy and his two baritone companions singing “We Three Kings” as they walked down the center aisle to worship the baby in the manger.

Now, each year, I was the Angel. This costume did not have wings, so I had to hold out my arms to make the appearance of wings. Through the entire pageant, I stood looking over the manger, arms always outstretched. This was no a speaking part, so I had a lot of time to listen and come up with a ton of questions. They developed over the years. *Why* three kings? *What* is this star they followed? *Why* these gifts? My poor father had a tone of patience.

After one long session of questions, he simply told me, “Meg, you are missing the point.” He went on to explain that to him the importance of the story was before they presented their gifts, they knelt in worship. Before they gave their presents of worldly treasures, they opened their own hearts. That was what the whole journey was to him - they opened their hearts and followed that star. They worshipped out of that opening of their hearts. They gave freely because of the overflow in their hearts.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines worship as, “the act of showing respect and love for a god, especially with other people who believe in the same god.” During this time of preparation, let us remember to open our hearts and let the worship out.

**PRAYER:** As the Advent and Christmas season comes to a close,  
may we continue to worship our God and be like the wise men  
following the star wherever it leads. Amen.

Megan Crum (from Advent Devotional, 2015)

**Wednesday, January 6, 2020**

**Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12**

**“And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.” (v. 12)**

In today's scripture read, the Magi are unwittingly recruited to serve as King Herod's spies to help him locate Jesus, who Herod perceived as a threat to his rule. But after they pay their tributes to the Prince of Peace, they receive a warning in a dream.

We all have to take a different route sometimes in our lives, whether we want to or not. At this time of year, haven't we all at some point made New Year's resolutions that will put us on a different path, hopefully aimed at helping us to become a better, fitter, smarter, nicer version of ourselves? Sometimes the trials of life - the death of a love one, a job loss, maybe a fire or flood - put us on different paths that we never wanted to seek out.

It is a new year, and a time for new things. It is a great opportunity for myself, for you, and for everyone we know to try to usher in a period of personal reawakening, revitalization and positive personal growth.

As comfortable as we may be in the paths we've always walked before, let's not take as an article of faith that everything in our hearts and minds, or in our community, is as good as it can be. In going that different route, let's see if we can - with God's spirit guiding us - make something in our lives or our community better in the coming year than it is today.

We may not always have instant success. But, if we commit ourselves to the effort, the journey will be well worth it.

**PRAYER: Lord, make us courageous on our new route. Amen.**

Charlie Thompson (from Advent Devotional, 2015)