



# Community In Christ Advent Devotional 2020



Katherine & Caroline Wilkinson

# ADVENT

*Advent* is the English form of the Latin verb “to come.” The season of Advent marks the beginning of the church year and comprises the four weeks before Christmas. The church has observed a season of preparation before Christmas since the appearance of regulations on fasting issued by Bishop Perpetuus of Tours in 490 C.E.

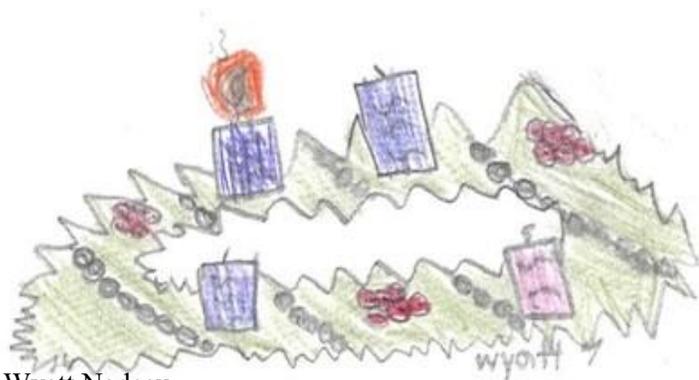
The First Sunday of Advent is regarded in the Western Church as the beginning of the liturgical year. Although this time precedes Christmas, it is not exclusively a time to get ready to celebrate the coming child at Bethlehem. Advent also focuses on what is popularly called “the second coming.” Thus Advent is the celebration of the promise that Christ will bring an end to all that is contrary to the ways of God; the resurrection of Jesus is the first sign of this destruction of the powers of death, the inauguration and anticipation of what is yet to come in fullness.



Katherine & Caroline Wilkinson

Please enjoy this Advent Devotional written by members of Community in Christ’s family of faith. Look up the Bible passages each day, use the daily reflections on your own or with a friend or family member, and then pray with the reflection in your mind and on your heart. Our prayer is that these pages will be a spiritually enriching resource for you as we journey toward Bethlehem during this season. A big thank you goes out to all of our reflection and illustration contributors. Names are found throughout the devotional. As we experience this season of Advent, may the ways of God around us show forth hope, love, joy, and peace each and every day.

*~Pastor Lisa and Pastor Michael*



Wyatt Nadeau

## 1st Week of Advent

# Hope

**Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup>**

**Scripture:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:4-18

**Reflection:** Reflecting on this passage reminds me that I need God's help to experience the true Joy of celebrating the birth of Jesus. There are many excellent traditions that we have to celebrate Advent and Christmas, such as spending time with extended family, attending Christmas parties, worshiping on Christmas Eve with singing and candle-light, going caroling, etc. All of these things are wonderful, but this year they may not be possible, or at least they won't be the same. This passage tells me that God's plan for us is to fill the space left by the absence of these traditions with more time and energy focused on Jesus, which will allow us to experience even greater Joy. The last verse of the passage is: *"<sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*

*Mark Myers*



My prayer is that this year, instead of focusing on what we may not get to experience, we will take this opportunity to focus on God's Love for us – a Love so great that he sent His only Son to earth to rescue us from our Sin and give us Eternal Life. I pray that we will be Joyful, that we will "be bold" and "transformed into His image with ever-increasing Glory" by the Holy Spirit. That God will lead us to find new and powerful ways of sharing His Message and His Love with the world during this "2020" Advent season. Amen.

**Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup>**

**Scripture:** Romans 5:1-6

**Reflection:** In these verses, Paul writes about hope not once, not twice, but three times! "Since we are justified by our faith," he writes, "we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God." Paul explained that even our suffering produces positive qualities in us, even hope. And again, hope and God's love have been poured "into us by the Holy Spirit." Hope is given to us abundantly!

*Mary Beth Ball*



This passage reminds me that when I am fearful during troubled times, times of seeing the suffering caused by Covid-19 and by civil unrest, I can embrace hope. When I am worried about my loved one's medical problems and my own future, I can pray with hope given me by God's grace. I can live in the hope that God keeps His promises that I find in scripture, ultimately fulfilled in the birth of our Savior, Jesus, His death, and Resurrection.

**Prayer:** Lord, help me look to you and your promises as the source of my hope. Thank you for reminding me by the Holy Spirit that you fulfill all your promises today and always. Amen.

**Tuesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>**

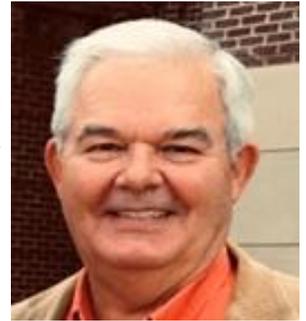
*Scott Wood*

**Scripture:** Romans 12:1-12

**Reflection:** Wow, what an opportune time for reflecting on this reading. I find that being in this time of national divisiveness, pandemic and economic uncertainty, and international problems reminds me of “Chicken Little” running around yelling, “The sky is falling! The sky is falling!” and I must admit that at times it feels like he is right. However, Advent brings a time to look forward to Christ.

These verses provide me with hope and comfort in that, as Christians, each with different gifts/talents provided through the Holy Spirit, we become a community to help others, our country, and God’s world. By truly loving others and hating evil, we are able to hold on to all that is good. We are humbly confident because of faith; and, when in difficult times, prayer provides guidance, peace, and hope. This Advent season be genuine, humble, and honest, delight in honoring others, and give God the Glory.

**Prayer:** Gracious Father, thank you for entering our hearts so that we experience hope, faith, and love. Help us to be humble and honest, guiding us in using our time, talent, and treasures to help others. In times of uncertainty and doubt bring us peace and hope. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



**Wednesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>**

*Katie Zager*

**Scripture:** 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13-18

**Reflection:** In this passage, Paul is writing to the Thessalonians to offer reassurance. Paul had told them that Jesus was coming soon, his arrival was imminent! Then....that didn’t happen. Meanwhile, people were dying, and it wasn’t clear yet, what was to happen with them. They were just, sort of, waiting it out.

Just like the Thessalonians, it seems at this time, we are told to just “wait it out,” among tremendous suffering and uncertainty. It seems as Christians, and especially during Advent, we do a lot of waiting.

This passage is a great reminder of what it is all for. That God has not forgotten us. That he will send Jesus back for us, both the living and the dead. That there is a place in God’s Kingdom for all who wait. To me, that is a source of great hope this season.

**Prayer:** Dear God, may you be present among all those who wait this year. Let us know that you are here with us, even when it seems like there is no end in sight. Grant us peace and reassurance that no one is forgotten. Amen.



**Thursday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>**

*Chris & Pam Spano*

**Scripture:** 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:6-11

**Reflection:** It’s in these uncertain and troubling times that many of us feel anxious and unsure of the future. By carrying our worries and daily struggles ourselves we show that we have not trusted God fully with our lives. In this passage, Peter reminds us that we should cast all of our anxieties on God because he cares for us. He tells us that we should humbly and steadfastly rely on God. It is in these times of weakness and anxiety that we need to be vigilant because we become especially vulnerable to Satan’s attacks. God wants us to keep our focus on Him as we humbly admit our needs. We must seek out other Christians for support, keep our eye on Christ, and resist the devil; trusting that our Heavenly Father is graciously empowering us for our good and His glory.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we know that there are many times, like these, when we believe we can do things ourselves. Please forgive us and help us instead, to fully place our hope and trust in You knowing that You are an omnipotent and loving God who cares deeply for us. We humbly submit to Your will and ask You to give us strength to overcome our doubts and fears, finding peace in the knowledge that you are in control. We praise and glorify You and it’s in Your Holy Name that we ask these things. Amen.



**Friday, December 4<sup>th</sup>**

*Heidi Rixman*

**Scripture:** Romans 5:1-11

**Reflection:** Romans 5:1-11 has a constant theme of *hope* running throughout the passage. We find hope because we have suffered and persevered through it. I am reminded every day that there is hope. Whether it is in our homes or work, people are looking for hope.

For many of us, this year did not turn out the way we expected it would. For some of us we looked forward to graduations, weddings, promotions, vacations, and so much more. But they all had to be cancelled or postponed. Even our church family, had expectations that had to change beginning with how we worshiped together. There were also hopes to celebrate the successes and comfort the losses together as one body. But even through these times, we continue to look forward to hoping for a brighter future when we can be together as a church.

During this season of Advent, we are reminded that the birth of Jesus is a time for renewed hope. We are filled with the hope that comes from God by the power of the Holy Spirit, and we are confident as we await the promised final coming.

**Prayer:** Heavenly father, I pray today that you give us the strength, hope and peace needed to heal our hearts and clear our heads. Continue to walk along side of us as we come through some of the darkest days and guide us to bring hope to those who need it. Wrap them in your steadfast love and assure them they are not alone. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.



**Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>**

*Steven C. Mortenson*

**Scripture:** John 12:12-15

**Reflection:** As Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, he was greeted by a great crowd. This crowd had just heard that Jesus had just performed a miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. The crowd hearing this was so excited they could not stop spreading the word of the miracle that Jesus had just performed. Their belief and hope were now that Jesus was their savior, the “King of Israel” that the prophet Zechariah had prophesied some five centuries earlier. Imagine the excitement that they were experiencing. For so many years, they had hoped that their savior was coming to save them and now He was here for them.

During this season of Advent, we as believers in Christ can also experience the same degree of hope and excitement as the crowd did as they greeted Jesus on Palm Sunday.

As we enter the Advent season, let us not only observe the birth of Christ but keep our focus on the hope of his return.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, as we rejoice the birth of your Son Jesus Christ, help us to keep our faith strong as we hope and wait for his return. Hosanna! Please save us, O blessed Lord. Amen.





## 2nd Week of Advent

# Love

**Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**

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

**Reflection:** I love advent and the celebration of Jesus' birth. I love the decorating, baking, and sending cards to family and friends. I loved singing in church and in choir. I loved the Christmas caroling to all our shut-ins. All these events set the stage for our holiday season. The gathering with family and friends and the phone calls help make each holiday special.

During this season, it is important that we give God the glory for sending us his son to be born and teach us to be humble servants. Our world is constantly changing, and this year has been different than any other. We have equality issues and the pandemic to deal with. This passage makes us think about humility and how we need to treat everyone equally no matter what their status.

God's words bring us hope for tomorrow and the peace we all long for. We need to give all our worries, anxieties, and concerns to God to bring us peace of mind.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending us your son, Jesus Christ. Bless us to be humble servants. Help us to treat everyone equally and remember grace and love to all. Amen.

*Sharon Kautz*



**Monday, December 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Scripture:** Luke 3:1-17

**Reflection:** Within this passage there are many aspects of God's love and compassion. It describes the coming of Jesus, which shows us that God truly cares about all people and that his love is for everyone. It also reminds us that our actions are what matter most. We are charged by God to pave the way for Jesus and make good choices in life.

John specifically calls out to those of power and wealth, that they should not take advantage of others. Even today we need to be conscious of our actions being careful to not take advantage and hurt others. We should willingly give what we have to those who have none. We are to live by example, love our neighbor, and in doing so share God's wealth and love with the world.

It is through empathy that we can show compassion for others just like our God shows compassion for us. Our actions can truly shape this world and let people know of God's will.

**Prayer:** We thank you, Lord, for your many blessings and for sending us Jesus. Help us to grow in our lives and to have empathy towards others. Guide us to heal this world and let your light shine through us so that others may know your love, joy, and promise of salvation.

*Jonathan Graef*



**Tuesday, December 8<sup>th</sup>**

*Beth Jaszewski*

**Scripture:** Luke 4:16-30

**Reflection:** For me, this story in scripture leaves no doubt how much God loves ALL mankind. Jesus has gone back to His hometown of Nazareth and delivers the news that He is the promised Messiah and is offering the good news of salvation to not just the Jews but to the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed. To all of God's people! This made the Jews angry because they knew Jesus as a human just like them and the crowd thought Jesus was mocking the prophets by proclaiming that He was the Messiah. Imagine what we would think if a childhood friend walked up to us with this proclamation.

This is all great news for us and continued proof of God's immense love for each and every one of us. God offers His love and promise of salvation to everyone! It doesn't make any difference if you live in India, if your skin color is white, if you only speak Russian, if you have sinned...go ahead, name whatever circumstance you want. There is nothing that can keep God from loving you. ... I'm not done yet. Can you wrap your mind around the fact that Jesus walked on this earth? That He was born as all humans are born, that he had a bedtime, that he had chores, probably stubbed his toe or cut his finger, laughed at friends' bad jokes. Why did he live on this earth as one of us? This for me is further proof of God's love for us. He sent his Son, our Savior to live with us in our human condition to be one with us.

During this 2020 Advent Season I will see God's love through strangers caring for and loving strangers.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, I pray my ears are always listening, my hands are always available and my eyes are wide open to offer your love to all. Amen.

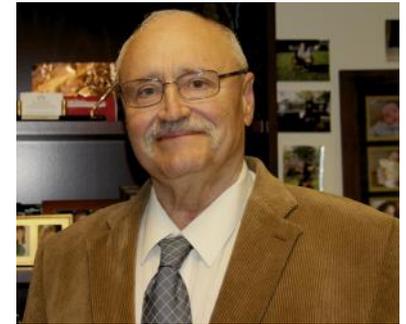


**Wednesday, December 9<sup>th</sup>**

*Dean Kruckeberg*

**Scripture:** Luke 13:10-17

**Reflection:** I have neither an ox nor a donkey, nor do I have the knowledge, skills and abilities to heal people's infirmities. Nevertheless, this Bible passage resonates with me, in part because it appears to exonerate me from oftentimes working on the Sabbath (albeit, most often only after church). The story begs several questions and suggests some conceptual inconsistencies, e.g., teaching (and apparently learning) is not considered to be work, although healing ostensibly is. Interestingly, the passage does not suggest that the woman had sought to be healed that day; rather, Jesus proactively called her forward to perform this healing. Nevertheless, the synagogue leader (perhaps fearful of directly confronting and chastising Jesus) admonishes the woman, directing his anger solely toward her. However, all of this is peripheral to the lesson of the story, i.e., for what reasons is it appropriate and morally justifiable to challenge institutional authority and the law? Morals are accepted standards of behavior about what is right and what is wrong, some of which are institutionalized as laws, i.e., formalized guidelines that have a structure for enforcement, including penalties for these laws' violation. Ancient Judaism was inflexibly rooted in doctrine that was considered universal in its applicability, and this doctrine was formalized into law in that theocratic state. In turn, ethics, which are decision-making tools that are designed to guide questions of human morality, are based solely on logic and reason. At least nine approaches can be used to address ethical issues, but the two that seem most relevant to this Biblical passage are absolutism and situationalism. The former sees moral questions as fixed, i.e., absolute, while the latter argues that circumstances should be a guide. In this scenario, the synagogue leader was an absolutist (and undoubtedly a deontologist acting on an inflexible set of beliefs, including the legalistic application of human-made laws); in contrast, Jesus was a situationalist. I'm sure those better schooled in philosophy than am I have deliberated comparisons of Jesus' teachings to the classical Greek philosophers who had preceded him, e.g., Aristotle (the "Golden Mean" of moderation) and to later ethicists, e.g., Kant (Categorical Imperative) as well as, of course, to the "Golden Rule" that exists in some form in most religions and cultures worldwide (making it, arguably, a universal principle) (e.g., Matthew 7:12). I'm not sure Jesus would subscribe to utilitarianism, i.e., Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill's pursuit of the greatest good for the greatest number, but I strongly suspect Jesus would appreciate the goals of communitarians in their advocacy of everyone's duties and responsibilities toward their fellow humankind; essentially, Jesus mandates these goals in his "new commandment": "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another: (John, 13:34).



**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord God, not only for our salvation, but also for the wisdom and the love that you have taught us through the teachings of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

**Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup>**

*Cheryl Miller (& Gus)*

**Scripture: Luke 18: 18-27**

**Reflection:** So many tenets of our Christian lives are hardwired with one belief being that if you are a good person, you will inherit eternal life. While parts of this reading can be a bit of a “head scratcher”, the primary message is crystal clear: “Things that are impossible with men are possible with God”. Many of us may want to believe that we need not do anything to obtain eternal life - that it is free of charge. Yet the second message is the importance of finding Jesus more precious and valuable than all of our possessions. As we begin the new church year, are we being called to examine our lives and identify something to give up that could be holding us back from walking closer to God? God loves us and wants us to pray



and talk to Him. Is this the path for us to see the impossible become possible? I see hope and love in this passage. We are commanded to love Jesus more than our possessions. We must abandon the trust we have in our own goodness because salvation by human goodness is impossible and can never be compared to God’s goodness. Clearly, we must trust God and not ourselves. Advent is a time of preparation, waiting and anticipation. As we await the celebration of the birth of Christ, we must also wait to see the possibilities that can only come from God. For so many of us, the holidays are bittersweet as we mourn the loss of loved ones. Yet this passage can fill us with love and hope. If we focus our hearts on God, we can more easily look at our lives and figure out how best to serve God above everything else...thus making all things possible. My “everything possible” is to be reunited with my husband who is the love of my life in our eternal heavenly home.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for showing us the hope, love, joy and peace of this Advent season. Help us to always be mindful that all things are possible with You. Help us to remember our responsibilities to take action to truly help the poor and the most vulnerable in our communities. May our trust in You grow as we learn to walk closer with You. Amen.

**Friday, December 11<sup>th</sup>**

*Troy Lowden*

**Passage: Luke 7:36-50**

**Reflection:** This reading passage shows how God’s love is never ceasing and there is no limit to His saving grace. In the reading, Simon is confused why Jesus would let a sinner anoint Him and wash His feet. Jesus tells us a parable of how two people owed money to a moneylender. One person owed a substantial amount, while the other owed very little. Neither person had enough money to pay back the moneylender, so the lender forgave both debts. Jesus asks who would be more thankful, in which Simon said the person with more debt. Jesus says he is correct.



In life, people are quick to judge. They point out others flaws without looking at their own flaws. Jesus teaches us that love is the ultimate commandment. We need to remind ourselves to treat others how we would want to be treated. God is the one who takes away the sins and forgives, not humans. We need to be accepting of all people, regardless if they have different views/opinions than us. During this season of Advent, it is important (now more than ever) to love our neighbor and show love and kindness to all.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for this day and for all the many blessings You have given us. Help us to love our neighbor as ourselves and to treat others how we would want to be treated. Give us the strength and capability to show kindness and compassion to everyone we interact with this Advent season. And it’s in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

**Saturday, December 12<sup>th</sup>**

*Sandy Mueller*

**Scripture:** Luke 19:1-10

**Reflection:** We can rejoice in God's Love for us, he sent his only son Jesus to find us when we are lost.

Being born a Lutheran, I have always felt God's love for me. When I was seven years old, the realization came to me that prayers can be answered, and not always in the ways we expect. Through life, when I was lost and didn't know which way to turn, prayer helped. I would ask God to guide me and help me find the way. Zacchaeus was looking to see Jesus, and Jesus came directly to him and said he must stay at his house that night. This was a great honor and, as we are all sinners, in seeking the Lord and changing our ways, we will be given salvation.

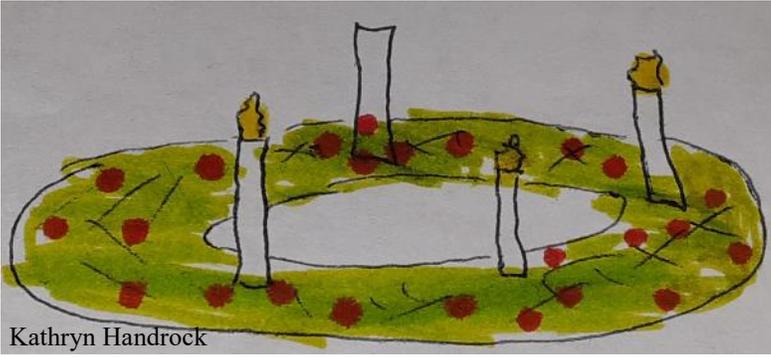
God so loved the world, he gave his only son Jesus Christ for us.

As we go through our busy lives, let us pray that all those who are lost and looking for the way, know that Jesus is also seeking us and wants us to look for his guidance and love.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we know that you are always with us. Help us to look to you for direction in all of our days. Amen.



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## 3rd Week of Advent

# Joy

**Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>**

**Scripture:** Luke 2:8-15

**Reflection:** So often when we look at a story in scripture, we immediately focus our thoughts on the traditional picture. In this instance the picture of the holy family that is exhausted, dirty, anxious, concerned, frightened and in a strange place. We envision them this way while we know the end of this glorious story, but they likely don't know the rest. So many ideas and themes for reflection here!

But I was drawn to the part of the story we seem to gloss over. The shepherds. Certainly not the rich and famous, not the influential. These are men and boys at the bottom of the social scale. Probably poor and ones who are hired to go out at night into the hills to watch over someone else's flock of sheep.

On this night though, something different occurs. Suddenly they are confronted with a strange being with an incredible story of the long-awaited Messiah. Not only that, but this being is surrounded by some incredible light and magnificent music from a celestial choir. As the scripture relates they were initially terrified. Their first reactions must have been to run screaming in the other direction. But, again we know the rest of the story. They, probably through the grace of God in His absolute love for these shepherds, somehow saw in the light the reflection of His love, they listened with awe and peace to this angel. They somehow believed that this announcement was really for them. Can you believe it? Then what happens? They **CHOSE**. They decide to go and see for themselves. They decided to step into the story and take their place on the path chosen by God for them. They, in their small way, became another reflection for those around them and for us of the **LIGHT OF THE WORLD**.

For us, we need to open our hearts to recognize the angel messages God places in our lives, even when the messages are not wrapped in light and music. We should then choose how to respond to Him who made us. Respond from where we have been placed and with the blessings He has given to us. We, too, are part of His plan and story. Advent is a time of new beginnings and the start of something. We are each called to repent which means not to be sorry, but to consider and re-align and re-point our lives to the path of JESUS. The earliest believers were called "followers of the Way". In this advent may we choose again to follow Him always. May we join the angels and saints in reflecting the light of His love by our lives and be filled with His joy.

**Prayer:** Whenever I have been asked to share my faith, I have for many years prayed this Psalm before I speak. Here I end with this prayer that I offer to you:

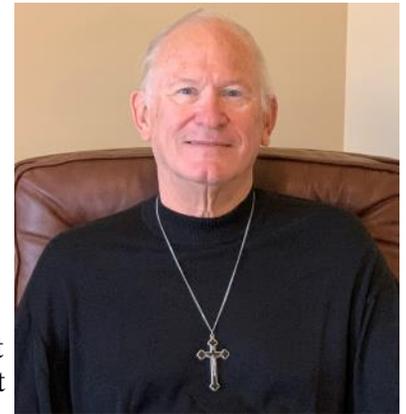
O Lord my God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my soul be pleasing in your sight and useful to these others as our pilgrim paths have crossed.

Amen (first, I believe in God),

Amen (second, acknowledging the other children of God I share my existence with)

Amen (lastly admitting that I am certainly an imperfect pilgrim, but proclaiming that I am a follower of Jesus, the Christ)

*Bill Rockwood*



**Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>**

*Judi LaBuda*

**Scripture:** Psalm 3:1-12

**Reflection:** As we look back on the experiences of our lives, I'm sure we can all recall times of sadness, darkness, and loss. We are blessed with the comfort of knowing, through our faith, that God is with us during our "dark" times and by the assurance that "joy will come in the morning" (verse 5). This verse has been special for me, personally, throughout the years. After hoping to start a family for years and going through some "dark" times with treatments and disappointments, my husband and I were blessed when God revealed His plan to form our family through adoption; and, no coincidence, both of our boys were born in the morning which, as you can imagine, brought GREAT JOY!



This year, like our lives have been for the last several months, Advent will be different than we have known it. This year, we are in the middle of a worldwide pandemic, with positivity rates of the coronavirus skyrocketing in our area and across the United States. While there have been restrictions on our daily lives, there have also been blessings in the opportunities God has put before us to help others (wearing masks, frequent hand washing, social distancing, and limited numbers at gatherings), as well as raising our awareness of those who are experiencing conditions much worse than our own (the homeless, those who have lost loved ones, employment and/or housing insecurity, racial inequality, and so much more).

As we go forward during this continued time of "darkness", let us be vigilant in prayerfully lifting up those in need, the well being of our health care workers and first responders, and in praising God with grateful hearts for the promise of His gift of grace.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help us to feel Your presence during our dark times and to trust Your mercy of joy that will follow them. Enable us with ways to show Your love to others. Amen.

**Tuesday, December 15<sup>th</sup>**

*Tim Nohr*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 10:27-32

**Reflection:** "Hang in there baby" The passage reminds me of the perseverance we Christians must have to follow God in a world with so much temptation. Being righteous and following the ways of the Lord is not necessarily easy (it is a 24/7 duty), but as Christians we do so gladly out of love and fear of God. But, I think we are all a little A.D.D. when it comes to doing God's will and we need each other to step up and remind us of the blessing we have and encourage each other to stay the course. As we prepare for Christ's arrival, we should keep our focus on God gifts - his promises and his everlasting love for each of us. It is infinitely better than what the world offers.



**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, give us the strength to keep our focus on your will, and the courage to act and proclaim your kingdom and bring it to earth. Amen.

**Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>**

*Diana Elsass*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 15:15-21

**Reflection:** I can certainly relate to Jeremiah as he cries out in anguish seeking God and angry about his plight in life. Life is in fact hard and unfair at times. I have felt overwhelmed the past year and 3 months with health challenges in our family, loss of our son last November, and isolation like everyone since March. We grieve, we cry out and know that we are not alone for even one moment. I have a savior Jesus and he is my daily, hourly companion and has not left me to despair. Through prayer, daily reading His word and other's reflections and poetry, I choose to be thankful for the many blessings in my life. I choose to be hopeful for today and the future. I choose to be joyful today and share that with all I come in contact with somehow. There I find peace for my weary soul.



**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I thank you for all my blessings today and I know tomorrow you will be there after keeping watch all night. Lord you never said this Christian walk would be perfect or easy. You did tell us you are always with us and that alone fills me with joy and perfect peace as we enter this season of light and love with the brush of an Angel's wing. Amen.

**Thursday, December 17<sup>th</sup>**

*Tony Chamra*

**Scripture:** John 15:7-11

**Reflection:** This passage includes the word love 5 times in 5 verses. If there is one thing I think of around Christmas more than any other time of the year, it's love. Love in giving, and love from receiving. The love we receive from family and friends and the love we were given in a stable under a star. The season makes me more aware of love around me through simple things; the bright lights on the front of a house, a gentle flickering candle in the window, the loud ringing of a bell at the Salvation Army donation spot, and the silence of that too infrequent North Carolina snowfall. I encourage you to look for it everywhere, I mean, why not? The world could always benefit from looking for the good instead of the bad, so during this pandemic, I'd like to think that, above all, love should be more contagious than anything else.



**Prayer:** Lord, when I wake up each morning, please help me remember to love. When I feel anger or frustration, let me react with love. When I see injustice or prejudice, let me combat it with love. Some days when it's hard to see love, please help me not to let that diminish my hope in love. Help me to see love in others, and let the love of others make me stronger and more confident in my belief in love. Amen.

**Friday, December 18<sup>th</sup>**

*Andrea Gulzow*

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:1-10

**Reflection:** After having been betrayed, persecuted, and crucified, Jesus died and then was buried. After such sadness and darkness this passage brings light. It has always brought to me a strong sense of jubilant joy. At the tomb Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were told by an angel "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said". Jesus has risen after being crucified on the cross and dying for our sins. He has risen! It is a celebratory joy and a fundamental unifying belief for all Christians. Advent is the beginning of that story and is a season of celebratory joy for Jesus is born. We are reminded every year of that profound gift and we celebrate in that joy.



**Prayer:** Gracious God, let us be filled with the joy of knowing what having Jesus in our lives truly means and let us share that joy with others. Amen.

**Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup>**

*Adam English*

**Scripture:** Philippians 4:4-7

**Reflection:** "Because I said so!" This is a phrase I heard many times as a child. Like most kids, despite our youth, I felt like I had most things figured out. The things that I hadn't could be easily worked through on the spot, drawing on my lifetime of experiences. When issued a command that seemed counter to my understanding, this could only be met with defiance and disagreement, or at least a firm demand to know "Why!?" There has to be a reason for this, after all, I know everything else. We can't move on from here until we are on the same level of understanding! Now, while some things can be reasoned through with an elementary schooler, there are many that just continue around in circles until one side just gives up or the discussion ends with that ever-famous phrase of parental finality. Lately, as an adult, I find myself on the other side of that conversation enough times to make me feel like I am looking at younger self in a mirror. It brings dreaded feeling of every young parent; I sound like my dad. After that shock washes off comes the dawning realization that they might have been right all along. The anxiety I caused myself, the anxiety I caused them because I didn't get it, I now realized was because I couldn't get it. It's almost funny, now. Paul's reminder in his letter to the Philippians, makes me realize that I'm still stuck in this loop and God is looking at me with that same feeling of amusement. He knows that, as hard as I try, I will never understand the peace that He bestows. While I will definitely never find myself on the other side of a relationship like mine with God, I at least can understand enough that, when it comes to God's wisdom, I can be at peace knowing He knows what He's talking about.



**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for understanding us better than we understand ourselves. Help us to remember that as much as we think we can know; we will still have no idea the extent of your love for us and the peace you give us. Lead us to set aside our anxieties and lift them up to you in prayer. Amen.



## 4th Week of Advent

# Peace

**Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup>**

*Deborah Lowe*

**Scripture:** 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 1:9-20

**Reflection:** Waiting is not a virtue that many of us have. We sit at our computers, hitting the enter key several times while the network takes its time to bring us to our desired website. Motorists switch lanes to get around a slow driver and get through the changing traffic light. The government asks us to wear masks and keep an appropriate social distance from those around us, but we are impatient and want to be with our loved ones putting everyone in jeopardy of possibly becoming ill. The season of Advent is known as a period of expectant waiting as we prepare for the birth of Jesus. But do we really wait? We gather, we shop, we busy ourselves until Christmas day.



In 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 1:9-20, we learn about Hannah, who teaches us about waiting and patience through the power of prayer. Hannah, a barren woman, is waiting for God to answer her prayer for a son. We learn from Hannah's story that waiting is a virtue. God promises that if we believe in Him, He will give us the desires of our hearts. After waiting, praying persistently, and being scorned by the other women for being barren, God answers her prayer, and a son is born. Hannah, having waited patiently, found God answers our prayers.

As we wait for the birth of Jesus this Advent season, we find we are also waiting for a vaccine to fight the coronavirus and for our nation to unify and heal. By waiting, we learn to understand that sometimes God has to put all things in order before He can answer our prayers and give us peace, grace, and joy. Therefore, as Hannah did, we must pray for our prayers to be answered as we wait during this Advent season.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we pray for the healing of this land from the coronavirus, for social justice, and the end of systematic racism. We wait as you bring peace to our land during these trying times. May we be filled with the spirit, patient with our hopes and desires, and constant with our prayers for a brighter day. Amen.

**Monday, December 21<sup>st</sup>**

*Chuck Hill*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9:1-7

**Reflection:** Isaiah gave the prophecy of the coming Lord and His joy. When the Messiah comes, He will set all captives free. True worship of the Lord sets everyone free. The light of the world is our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We as Christians are chosen to spread His light and peace.

**Prayer:** Dear God, show your eternal Light and Peace throughout your world. Amen.



**Tuesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>**

*Suzi Hinrichs*

**Scripture:** Zechariah 9:9-12

**Reflection:** There are so many reasons in my life for me to rejoice. Yes, this has been a difficult year for the masses. There has been illness, death, hunger, fear, job loss, loneliness, anger, and despair. Yet, when I take the time, I see the reasons to rejoice. Just as Zechariah tells the daughter of Zion to rejoice and the daughter of Jerusalem to shout aloud, I too rejoice because it is the time of year to celebrate the advent of our Lord. Zechariah tells me that, along with the coming of my king, there will be peace. Peace is something I certainly desire and anticipate with a joyful heart. When I reflect on all of the negatives of this year, I am sometimes overwhelmed by the uncertainty and inner turmoil, just waiting for the other shoe to drop. Then I turn my attention to the Lord, and I am promised that my king will come to comfort, not to do battle. He is the Prince of Peace. Zechariah states there will be no violence, no weapons, and no anger. There will be only kindness and mercy. There will be peace. The anticipation of the Advent Season is stronger for me this year than it has been for the past several years. I see this as a time for our world to find its way out of the darkness of 2020. There are reasons to feel more positive about our future. Although world peace might not materialize yet, I can count on inner peace. Since I am able to calm my worries and anxiety with music, I did a bit of research to see if there is music tied to this passage. I found several hymns and a portion of the Messiah written by Handel connected to Zechariah 9. I also discovered a very popular Christmas song and hymn associated with this passage, *Joy to the World*. It is actually the last hymn of Advent in our Worship and Hymnal. Verses three and four resonate the power of the words in today's passage. The ending words *wonders of his love* give me the most important reason to rejoice and feel peace. For without love, there is nothing.



**Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, thank you for sending us Jesus so we may have reason to rejoice. You have been with us throughout this difficult year reminding us along the way that your son is full of love and peacefulness. Through him and because of his love we can experience the promise of peace. Amen.

**Wednesday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>**

*Gregg Bottemiller*

**Scripture:** Luke 19:28-38

**Reflection:** After this turbulent year, we might be asking ourselves, 'How long must 2020 last?' We are so anticipating the other side of this year. And with such a "2020" year, we are likely to be anticipating this Christmas season like none other in recent years. We are looking forward to the promised joy and peace of the season as we anticipate the birth of our Lord; "for unto you is born a Savior." As we look at our Advent Scripture just days before the celebration of our Lord's birth, we already see how this child will mature into a man and follow His destined path which leads to our salvation. As the disciples were instructed to get a colt for the master's journey, they are asked why they need it, and the response is, "the Lord needs it." And that is all the explanation that is required. "The Lord needs it." So that makes me wonder as we are journeying up to our Lord's birthday, what He needs of us – in our turbulent times – in anticipation and preparation for His arrival. Where are our hearts entering our Christmas celebration? "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." As we celebrate in Christian Fellowship and with Family and Friends – all, as we can – and as we anticipate the gifts we receive, we need to look no further to the One who came down from Heaven for each and every one of us. "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in Heaven and glory in the highest!"



**Prayer:** Wonderful Heavenly Father, we thank you for the abundant blessings you have adorned us with. We pray that in and amongst these turbulent times that we continue to focus on the one true gift from Heaven above, Jesus Christ our Savior, who provides us eternal joy and the peace that surpasses all our earthly understanding that guards our hearts and minds. Amen.

**Thursday, December 24<sup>th</sup>**

*Jennifer Cuthbertson*

**Scripture:** Luke 2:8-20

**Reflection:** Sitting by a fire in the silence and deep darkness of a wilderness night, a group of shepherds suddenly comes face to face with an angel. Simultaneously, the glory of the Lord thrusts them into the spotlight. Accustomed to listening for the stealth of the enemies of their flock, this loud, bright encounter flooding down from above terrified them.

As with most biblical angel stories, the angel begins by encouraging the shepherds not to be afraid. After all, the news the angel brings to them is good news, joyful news. The long hoped for Messiah has finally arrived. The message delivered to the shepherds is almost as shocking as the appearance of the angel—the Messiah isn't the expected military liberator leading an army that will overthrow the Roman occupation. No, the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord is a baby, a baby born in a barn. This baby's army is a heavenly army. This army comes not bearing arms but a message of peace—peace among all the people he chooses. And, who does he choose? The whole world.

I love the irony of unnoticed people being put in God's spotlight, of those living with animals being the first to greet this baby born among animals, of people looked down on by society being the first to welcome the King, of an expected military commander turning out to be the Prince of Peace.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for being the Prince of Peace not conflict. Thank you for giving me peace. May I, like the lowly shepherds, be a messenger of your peace to the world. Amen.



**Friday, December 25<sup>th</sup>**



Elena, Olivia & Wyatt Cunningham

2020



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Katherine & Caroline Wilkinson

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<sup>2</sup> 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.  
<sup>3</sup> Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.  
<sup>4</sup> 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;  
<sup>5</sup> and he shall be one of peace.  
-Micah 5:2-5a

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