

# ADVENT DEVOTIONS



## HOW TO USE

A devotion has been provided by individuals from the congregation for each day of Advent from December 1 through December 25. Set aside a few minutes each day for your Advent devotion. Take time to read over the applicable Bible passage. Continue by reading the devotion for the day. Reflect on the reading and devotion for a few minutes before concluding your study with the provided prayer.



## ADVENT WREATH

Incorporating an Advent wreath and lighting Advent candles is a wonderful practice to prepare yourself for your devotional time. There are historically three purple candles, one pink candle, and one white Christ candle.



## BIBLE

This devotion uses the NRSV of the Bible. You, of course, may use any version you have on hand and are encouraged to read the passages in more than one translation of the Bible for better comprehension and understanding.

# HOPE - THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT



*Painting by Natalja Picugina*

I will light candles this Christmas,  
Candles of joy despite all the sadness,  
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch,  
Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
Candles of love to inspire all my living,  
Candles that will burn all year long.

*"I Will Light Candles This Christmas"*

Howard Thurman

The Advent wreath began in 1839 in a shelter for orphans and neglected children. Each night of Advent, a German pastor named Johann Hinrich Wichern gathered the kids around him to light a candle, tell them a story, and pray. Imagine their excitement as the candle pushed back the darkness more and more, one night at a time.

Any child called John or Joan would be first to help light a candle as they heard about John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus.

Visitors who came to the orphanage loved the wheel-shaped chandelier, and so the custom spread as churches and families adopted it, though the number of candles were eventually reduced to four for each Sunday of Advent and one on Christmas Day.

Light the first purple candle and take a moment to look at the candlelight. Advent means coming. We light this candle of hope as a sign of the coming light of Christ. We are preparing ourselves for the days when *the nations shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.* Isaiah 2:4



# DECEMBER 1

## Psalm 24

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation. Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.*

## Psalm 25:4-5

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.*

A season, a day, a moment, we become aware. We sense something more than we can see with our eyes. All of creation and people in our lives lead us to wonder. Unknowingly, we are known. Unknowingly, we are loved. Then, the need to know is realized. God is far, far ahead of us. God has always known what we need. We can wait. God loves us so.

## Prayer

*Gracious, loving God, thank you for making us aware. We are so glad you know everything about us and love us. You know the truth is what we need. Thank you, Jesus, for the truth. In your name, we pray. Amen.*

*Submitted by David Keith*



# DECEMBER 2

## Isaiah 1:1-9

*The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the Lord, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged! Why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they have not been drained, or bound up, or softened with oil. Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. And daughter Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a shelter in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.*

This is a deeply painful vision. We hear the Lord lamenting Israel's stubborn rebellion against Him. He has repeatedly attempted to discipline Israel and steer them in the right direction, yet they have resisted and continue to bring punishment on themselves, punishment that is graphically portrayed as a broken body (1:5-6) and a besieged city (1:8). This is not only painful for the recalcitrant Israel, but it is also painful for God. The Lord Himself feels forsaken and despised, like a parent with a spiteful child (1:4). You even get the sense that God is like a parent who is exasperated of doling out discipline.

Isaiah's prophetic vision reminds us of our relationship with God. The Lord will not let us go our own way. Like a parent, He will discipline us when we do not choose the right path. The punishment is meant to remind us that if we continue down this road, it will lead to ruin and pain. God Himself, however, is also grieved by the breakdown in our relationship. He does not enjoy our rebellion or administering the discipline. He feels forsaken. Like a parent who struggles with a difficult child, God wants things to be different but is not willing to stop acting as a parent. God will suffer the forsakenness in order to get us back on track because He loves us as His children.

In this way, Isaiah's vision already anticipates the coming Messiah. In Jesus Christ, God comes and suffers the rejection not only of Israel but the whole world in order to put the world back on the right path to eternal life.

### Prayer

*Dear Lord, heavenly Father, this Advent grant that we may become aware of our rebellion against you. Help us to see how it leads us to greater and greater trouble. Make us to understand that your discipline is meant to turn us around toward goodness and life. Above all these things, open our eyes like Isaiah that we may see how our sin deeply grieves you so that we might repent and prepare our hearts for the coming of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## DECEMBER 3

### Psalm 33:3-4

*Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise. For the word of the Lord is right; and all his works are done in truth.*

"No way, there's just no way I'm doing this."

The thoughts were running through my head as I received my music packet for the week. When you register at the Montreat Music Conference, you are provided the music packet. Thumbing through the pieces we had been handed, I came across Handel's *Zadok the Priest*. What? Handel? I skimmed through the music sheets in front of me, all 30 of them. We have to learn 30 pages in less than a week?

These selections were to be rehearsed for church choir; some we had sung many times, and some we had never seen before. With each piece, I needed to find a comfort zone. For you see, I cannot read music. I have to hear it before I can sing it.

At the first rehearsal with Handel, the first run through, I was simply following along and mumbling something in the vicinity of a note while listening to the tenors on either side; I was hoping that they were also first tenors. Was I up for this challenge presented to me?

With each rehearsal, I became more confident with what I was doing. I found my voice within this huge piece of music. I gained a trust in myself and those around me. This was the new song, the song within myself, that God wanted me to sing. At the Friday night concert, we came to *Zadok the Priest*. I was now excited about the opportunity. Halfway through, my eyes began to well up, and it took everything I had to continue. We were creating a joyful noise unto the Lord. It was a very old piece of music, but for me, this was a new song, played skillfully and loudly.

### Prayer

*Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the talents you have bestowed on us,*

*Let us have faith in ourselves and those around us as you have shown faith in us.*

*Lets us be undaunted by seemingly insurmountable tasks knowing you are with us*

*That we may sing a new song of praise unto you, skillfully and loudly.*

*Amen*



*Submitted by Rick Noyes*

## DECEMBER 4

Living in this world today is not for the meek. If we are paying attention, we are reminded daily that we live in a fallen world, an evil world. In **Luke 11:29**, Jesus said, *"This is a wicked generation."* Jesus was speaking of the people of his time, but I believe he would speak the same of this generation. It would be easy to get bogged down by the events of this world. The wars, the weather, the crime....the list could go on. We watch daily as good is condemned and evil is rewarded, but the Bible teaches us that we are not to live of this world.

We may find ourselves judging the evil doers, the corrupt, but that is not our job. In **Psalm 53:2**, God looked down from Heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any who did understand, who did seek God. *"Nothing is a surprise to our Lord. He knows everything. He sees everything. He plans everything."*

**Psalm 147:5-6** tells us, *"Great is our Lord and mighty in power, His understanding has no limit."* The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground. **Isaiah 2:4** reads, *He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples.* As Christians, we should not be anxious about the trials of this world but find comfort in knowing that all these things have been prophesied. They have to happen.

As we enter this Advent season and prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, let's take comfort in His promise to return. This Earth and all of its drama is not our home. Jesus' birth was prophesied. His crucifixion was prophesied, and His resurrection was prophesied. Why would we question Jesus' return which was also prophesied?

**1 Thessalonians 2:19-20** *For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of the Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.* Stay busy with the Lord's work. Keep your joy, keep your peace, and keep looking up because God's Got This!

### Prayer

*God of grace, ever faithful to your promises, the Earth rejoices in hope of our Savior's coming and looks forward with longing to His return at the end of time. Prepare our hearts to receive Him when he comes, for He is Lord forever and ever. Amen*

*Submitted by Terri Combs*

## DECEMBER 5

The Christmas season is upon us. The time of year that we celebrate the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Maybe we wonder, "Why did God send His Son, as a baby, to grow up and live on Earth filled with sinners?" The scripture gives us the answer through the voices of its heroes: He was sent to teach.

Jesus walked on Earth in human form to teach us to love and trust God. In **Psalm 18:1-3**, David praises the God of his deliverance, *"I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies."*

Christ came to teach us to evangelize, to tell the world about the peace that trusting in God brings to his children, and to announce the good things God has done and the joy He brings. In this Song of Ascents, **Psalm 126:2-3**, it is easy to imagine the pilgrims, filled with gratitude, on the way to or having arrived at Jerusalem proclaiming, *"Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."*

The Son of God was born to teach us about salvation and redemption. In the book of Luke, John reminds us that we are saved not because we deserve it but because of the *"tender mercy of our God."*

**Luke 1:77-78** *"Give His people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which The Rising Sun will come to us from heaven."* This last phrase is translated as symbolism for the resurrection of Christ. He is "The Rising SON."

Yes, God had a plan for His Son's walk among men as we see in these three examples from different parts of the Bible. He was sent to teach us to trust God, to evangelize, and to teach us about salvation and redemption. Jesus is our divine teacher who was crucified as the final sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

### Prayer

*Dear Lord, through the busyness of the season, help us be mindful of you. Help us remember your birth, your life on earth, your teachings, and your sacrifice that we might one day live with you forever. In your holy name we pray. Amen.*

# DECEMBER 6

## Philippians 1:21

*For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.*

While contemplating the above scripture reading, I was drawn to discuss the part that reads, "*living is Christ*," especially since I am guilty of quoting it wrong for years. In the past, whenever I quoted the scripture, I would say, "living *as* Christ," which changed the meaning of the verse. When I used *as*, without knowing it, I was comparing my life to His. The word *is* refers to the action of being. Living *is* Christ is being like Christ.

Every time we hold a door for someone, help with their groceries, or thank them for their service- whether they are a parking lot attendant, firefighter, mail carrier, peace officer, or military servant – we are being Christlike. It may seem small, but it can lead to bigger things.

While living in California, I got in the habit of asking the Holy Spirit which way I should go to arrive at my destination safely. If I felt a 'nudge' to turn right, I did, and the same goes for if I felt I needed to turn left. As time passed, I began to feel that 'nudge' more often, not so much in which way I should go but for whom I should pray. I prayed for total strangers in the middle of Target, Walmart, or wherever I was.

Since arriving in North Carolina, I've had the same opportunities. I haven't always followed through and have asked for forgiveness, praying that God would send someone else to minister to an individual. I will never forget the opportunity when we first decided to go to the new Home Goods in Southern Pines instead of a thrift store. As my husband and I walked in, the customer walking out offered us her cart. As she passed me, I felt the 'nudge' and asked if I could hug her. While we were hugging, she told me she needed that hug because her aunt had just died. If we had gone to the thrift store first, we would have missed out on being a blessing. God is so good.

## Prayer

*Dear Father, thank you for the gift of your Son. Please help us to be Christ-like in our everyday lives. Help us to find ways to show your love to all those we encounter. In Jesus' holy name, we pray. Amen.*

*Submitted by Cary Bryson*



# DECEMBER 7

## Psalm 90:10

*The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.*

After the conquest of Palestine by the Roman General Pompey, Judea was considered a backwater province, the Jews a troublesome and stubborn race—a political dead-end for its governors. Israel was a conquered and occupied nation under Roman law, enforced by the Roman army. The power of the Roman Empire compromised even the murderous King Herod. An uneasy peace ruled.

Among the people, there were grinding poverty and hopelessness; national institutions were weakened by foreign domination. The glory days of King David and King Solomon were a distant memory. Could the promises given to a covenant people still be true?

In our season of Advent, we look for answers. Our lives are full of uncertainty. Advent not only means waiting; it also means *anticipation*. Perhaps, an answer will come that surprises us. The people in the quiet towns of Judea and Galilee longed for a Messiah. The people wanted a great General to lead an army; God was to send a baby. The people wanted a King to rule over them; instead, God sent a Savior.

In our modern lives, could we recognize God's work being done in the world? Are miracles still possible? After four hundred years in Egypt, there was the Exodus to the Promised Land. After the Babylonian captivity and exile, Jerusalem and its temple were restored. Can we be patient in the face of hard realities?

## Isaiah 40:30-31

*Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

## Prayer

*Father, We pray for patience so we might endure. We pray for insight that we might see your will being done in this world and can say with the Psalmist: I believe I will yet see the hand of the Lord in the land of the living. Amen.*

*Submitted by Cy Israel*

# PEACE - THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT



Welcome, everything!  
Welcome, alike what has been,  
and what never was,  
and what we hope may be,  
to your shelter underneath the holly,  
to your places round the Christmas fire,  
where what is sits open-hearted!

*"What Christmas Is as We Grow Older"*

Charles Dickens

Turn down the lights, gather around the Advent wreath, and light two of the purple candles.

We light this candle of hope and this candle of peace as a sign of the coming light of Christ. Advent means coming. We are preparing ourselves for the days when *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.* Isaiah 11:6

Let us walk in the light of the Lord.



# DECEMBER 8

## Psalm 24:1

*"The earth is Jehovah's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."*

How many times have you just taken a few moments to look around at our beautifully curious world to wonder in amazement at its fields, trees, rivers, mountains, oceans, and sky? I often sit still and admire the love and care our God put into creating this amazing world for us. It really makes me feel small.

Psalm 24:1 reminds us that the same love and care our living God put into creating this remarkable world for us is the same love and care that He has for us today. It states that we and all that dwell within this world belong to Him - we are His! This is also evident in the birth, life, and resurrection of Jesus. In **Psalm 24:3**, the Psalmist asks, *"Who shall ascend into the hill of Jehovah? And who shall stand in His holy place?"*

Jesus is the only one who shall stand in the holy place. He is the one who has *"clean hands and a pure heart"* (Psalm 24:4). Jesus, the anticipated Christ, Our Lord and Savior, will stand with all those who seek Him. Lift your eyes to the songs of praise this wild, wondrous world sings to our Lord every day. Be confident every day that our God is in control with the same love and care today as in the beginning. He even humbled Himself and entered our humanity to heal us and stand before the Father with those who seek Him.

## Prayer

*Holy living God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, You are our only source of salvation. Those who seek You are Yours. All we have and all we are - and can be - comes only through You and Your mercies. We thank You!!! Please forgive us for stumbling off Your path, Father. Please hold us in Your never-ending love and grace. You are in control of all creation, and You alone can lift us up out of our mire. May Your Son's love, grace, and passion fill us so that we may join the songs of praise that creation sings every day. May we be evidence of the love and care You have for Your world and for all who dwell therein.*

*In Jesus' holy name. Amen.*

*Submitted by Luis Pages*

# DECEMBER 9

## Romans 8:22-25

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Hope in the Bible is the confident expectation of what God has promised, and its strength is in His faithfulness. When I was in my early 30s, I became divorced. My son and I started our new life with so much hope. Derek, my only child, meant so much to me. We had a very special relationship. We knew our journey would be challenging but hoped it would be rewarding. I trusted the Lord would get us through the hard times. I was surprised when I felt that He didn't. It took seven years before I realized God was there all along. Derek was very troubled in many ways. His father had rejected him and called him an abomination. Derek was adopted and gay, and he was subject to anything addictive. He did drugs, became an alcoholic, and went on binges. He was 42 when he took his own life.

For the next seven years, I blamed myself for not being a good mother. I blamed God for taking Derek from me. I spent many days and nights looking up and screaming at God asking, "Why!" Then, one day, I received the answer. I felt like the Lord sat me down and said, "Joyce, listen!" The hope that I longed for was given to me. The Lord blessed me with His love and forgiveness. I was able to breathe again, love again, be a friend again. I knew I had been a good mother. I miss Derek and think of him daily. I know now that he had no more to give, and I still had so much. No one wants to lose a child, but it does happen. It happened to me. The Lord told me that I had work to finish on this Earth.

During this Advent season, believe in HOPE; it will lead to positive outcomes. To hope for something is to want something to happen, a desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment. Advent is about the hope of Jesus' coming birth. Hope is the rock you can rely on. It is with hope that we look towards Jesus' return.

## Prayer

*Gracious God, let Your peace settle over my anxieties and let Your Spirit uplift my spirit. Infuse my day with a renewed sense of purpose and joy, grounded in the hope that only You can provide. In Jesus name. Amen.*

*Submitted by Joyce Robinson*

# DECEMBER 10

## Psalm 126:5-6

*"May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.  
Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves."*

This psalm is one of grief and joy, not a sentimental good feeling, but words of gratitude to God that leap from places of deep pain and of grief. Gratitude grows rich with knowing what it means to live *in the valley of the shadow of death* for unknown lengths of time. From the tears, come shouts of joy.

The first half of the psalm (vv. 1-3) looks to the past whereas the last half (vv. 5-6) requests a good future in the coming time that would reverse the status of the present. We want to be with our loved ones and wish we did not miss them so much during this Advent season.

The verses in the psalm remind me of the rituals and wonderful memories of my family in the past, my grandparents, my parents, other family members, and a child. I ask God to help me honor them in a way that as verse 4, *"We were joyful."* Be with us, God. Bring back loving unity to my family and friends. Yes, I sow tears because each time in December, I remember how things were and still long to be with my family of the past.

The tears I have sown bring me a great joy of life and have given me gratitude and compassion for each day I am here on Earth. New rituals and memories have evolved with God's help. All of us can figure this out. Our tears that were sown brought an abundant harvest of deep faith that we should share joyously with the world this Advent season.

### Prayer

*Lord of our past, present, and future, this season brings with it so many powerful memories. We remember times of joy and times of sorrow. We cannot help but look back even as we prepare for your birth. Our tears will not go unnoticed to you. We are so grateful. Amen.*

*Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.*

Have you thought, "Where is God in the world that we live in today? Why does the darkness seem like it is winning?" When we watch the news, all we see is a world that has gone crazy as everybody argues with each other. We think, "How is mankind seeking out justice? Where is Jesus?" Most importantly, we think, "What is Jesus doing today?"

Do you ask yourself that question? Even John the Baptist asked that question. While John was in jail, he sent his disciples to find Jesus and ask Him, "What are You doing?" The men went to Jesus, and they said, "John the Baptist sent us to You to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:20). Now Jesus did not give them a straight answer. He replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Luke 7: 22-23). By telling the men what He was doing, Jesus, through His actions and not His words, lets John, as well as us, know who He was and is. The things he mentioned were prophesied by Isaiah (Isaiah 35:5-6; Isaiah 61:1), telling about what the Messiah would do. Remember that Israel thought Jesus was going to be a conquering hero/a king to free them, yet there He was serving others.

That brings me back to the question, "What is Jesus doing today?" Jesus is here; in fact, He is inside of all of us. We just have to let that LIGHT shine for others to see. Instead of Christians joining with the world on controversial issues, Christians must stand up and SHINE for what is right. We should not be judgmental, but we should be more like Jesus. We shouldn't be a part of the mob that points fingers at others. John 8:3-11 speaks to us about this. A mob of teachers of the law brought a woman, caught in the act of adultery, before Jesus. They were standing there with their rocks in their hands ready to stone the woman. They told Jesus that according to the Law of Moses, the woman must be stoned and asked what He thought. The mob was trying to trap Jesus. Jesus did not say anything at first, but He sat there and drew in the sand. "When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' Again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground" (John 8: 7-8). We all know what happened then; they all dropped their stones and left. Jesus asked the woman where they went and whether anyone condemned her. "'No one, Sir,' she said. 'Then neither do I condemn you,' Jesus declared. 'Go now and leave your life of sin'" (John 8:11). How powerful is that?! Recall John 3:17: God didn't send Jesus here to condemn people, but Jesus is here to save us. Then, how can we condemn people? Did you notice that Jesus told the woman to leave her life of sin, and that was it! He did not keep talking about it. Judgement is coming, but it will be by God and at His appointed time, not by us.

To wrap this up, let's not be like much of the world, condemning and behaving badly as it does, carrying stones ready to throw at a moment's notice. We have the greatest example to strive to be - Jesus, the Light of the World. That same Light is in all of us, and that is the great thing! What would be even better for the world we live in today is for us to quit judging others and for us to start preaching the Good News and serving the Lord, being an example for all through our actions. People will see our good acts, and they will want to learn more about Jesus and leave their past behind. Actions speak louder than words, and people are watching. Plus, in Isaiah 35:4, we are reminded to be strong and do not fear. God is coming and will save us. I finish with what I tell my "kids," "Keep your LIGHT shining!!!"

*Submitted by Henry Hogan*

**DECEMBER 12**

**The Prayer of Saint  
Francis of Assisi**

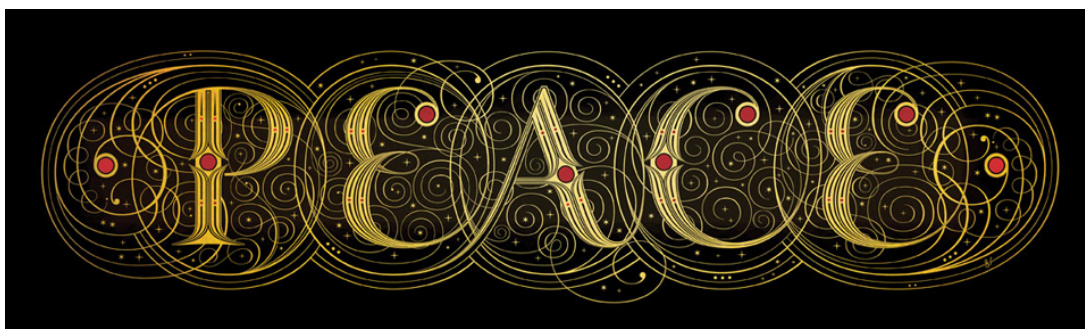
Lord, make us instruments of your peace:  
where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is discord, union;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

*A prayer attributed to St. Francis in The Book of Common Prayer.*

*(New York: The Seabury Press, 1979). 833.*



# DECEMBER 13

## 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

*But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.*

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word. Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will go on doing the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*

One of the points of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is to encourage the church members at Thessaloniki to stand firm under the persecution they were facing. Today, we face so many worldly distractions in our walk of faith. When I read this scripture, I was touched by Paul's summary of blessings the Lord bestows on us: the gift of Election, the gift of His word, the gift of the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us, the gift of salvation through sanctification, and the Lord's faithfulness and love. This is not even a complete list of His mercies.

How great is the Lord and His love for me. This beautiful ending to Paul's letter reminds me to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance to stand strong in my faith and know how to share that faith with others.

Over 40 prayers are attributed to Paul in his writings in the New Testament. Many of his prayers are included in 2 Thessalonians. This prayer is from 1 Thessalonians 3:12:

*"May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all people."  
Amen.*



# DECEMBER 14

## Psalm 149: 1-3

*“Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, His praise in the assembly of the faithful. Let Israel be glad in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King. Let them praise His name with dancing, making melody to Him with tambourine and lyre.”*

## Luke 1: 57-66

*“Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown His great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.”*

*“On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, ‘No; he is to be called John.’ They said to her, ‘None of your relatives has this name.’ Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, ‘His name is John.’ And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, ‘What then will this child become?’ For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.”*

Advent is the season to rejoice in celebration and thanks for God’s gift of love to the world through the birth of the child Jesus. It is a time to wake refreshed by the hope, joy, and peace of the season and to contemplate, “What then will this child become?” “How can I become new with the acceptance of this generous gift?”

I scratched my head at first upon reading the story of the birth of John the Baptist and thought, “Why break with tradition? Isn’t tradition a good thing?” With prayer and study, I began to understand that this passage illustrates a readiness to listen for God’s Word and to do something different. Elizabeth and Zechariah, with the foundation of their faith, were ready to forge ahead and accept a new covenant.

I started to think about the family tradition of Thanksgiving and about how, in preparation, we rely greatly on our past celebrations. There are the hosting households and the visiting families, along with the joy of cooking and eating favorite traditional dishes. We anticipate playing the same games as before with our relatives. We worry about the grief we may hold for loved ones lost, and we may have unsettling feelings about seeing a family member whom we shared a recent misunderstanding. However, from the bond of our faith, with hope, each year we choose to gather together to create new memories. With prayers of thanksgiving, we can “... praise His name with dancing, making melody to Him with tambourine and lyre.”

Advent is the most joyful season of preparation. We prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus which gives us opportunity to embrace the new through love. Advent provides a time to be grateful for our foundation of church and family and a time to set aside doubts and fears and prepare each day to welcome the new covenant born to us on Christmas Day. Advent gives each of us, in every moment, in every minute of each hour, each day, and each season – a new beginning.

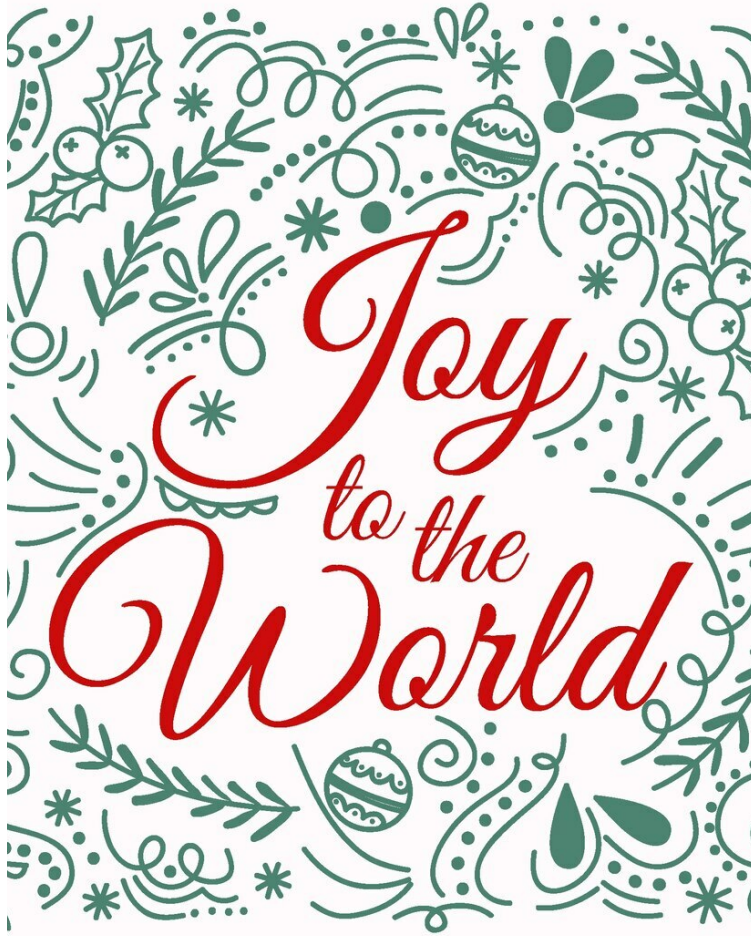
## Prayer

*Dear God, grant each of us the strength and joy in our hearts this Advent season, to ask, in this new beginning, “What then am I, this child of God, going to become?” Let us “sing to the Lord a new song ... Let us praise His name with dancing, making melody to Him with tambourine and lyre.”*

Amen

*Submitted by Martha Keith*

## JOY - THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT



May you know the hope that only Jesus brings,  
May His presence be with you,  
comfort you and give you peace,  
May His joy light your path this day and always.

*"Christmas Blessing"*

Turn down the lights, gather around the Advent wreath, and light two of the purple candles and the pink candle. The third Sunday of Advent symbolizes joy, and its candle is called the "Shepherds' Candle." The Shepherds' Candle is so called because of the message of the angels to the shepherds: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy," and the shepherds' joy at finding the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. The candle is pink because rose is the liturgical color for joy.

We light these candles of hope, peace, and joy as a sign of the coming light of Christ. Advent means coming. We are preparing ourselves for the days when *the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.* Isaiah 35

Let us walk in the light of the Lord.



*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.*

**Zephaniah 3:14-20**

*Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.*

**Philippians 4:4-7**

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

There is Good News we need

To hear in these days.

Don't be afraid.

I am in your midst,

I will bring you home.

Don't let your hands grow weak

Nor be anxious,

But pray with thanksgiving.

God will give you Peace.

We celebrate His coming!

He is here in our midst.

Avail yourself to His grace,

You will know His peace.

Avail yourself to His grace,

Let men know your peace.

God has promised.

God is with us here! Amen.

*Submitted by David Keith*

# DECEMBER 16

## A Blessing for the Light

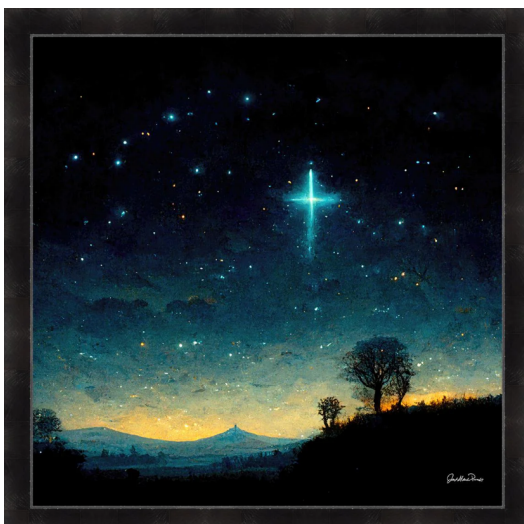
In the light that meets our eyes at the dawning of the day  
and paints each created thing so lovingly  
with color and texture, shade and shadow,  
you give us delight.

In the light that meets our eyes in the setting of the sun  
and bathes the world in burnished gold,  
you give us peace.

In the dusk that blankets us in darkness,  
and settles the world in deepest blues,  
you give us rest.

God, the three in one,  
bless our days and for our nights,  
for the time we have,  
and for the eternity we glimpse from afar.  
If it weren't for the miracle of your love come down,  
we wouldn't have known what to hope for.

O Come, Lord Jesus.



*Inspired by "Phos Hilaron" in Common Worship:  
Services and Prayers for the Church of England.  
(London: Church House Publishing, 2000). 783.*

# DECEMBER 17

## Isaiah 9:2-7

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this*

The prophet Isaiah gives us a perfect Advent passage. Advent means coming, and this season, we are preparing ourselves for the coming of the Lord. We continuously hear themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

Isaiah tells us the people were *walking in darkness*. They were not just in darkness; they were immersed in it. These people who had suffered so much were waiting for, hoping for, the light to come. As the light shone upon them, the people rejoiced. They felt peace. They knew they would be cared for by a King sent from God.

Many of us feel darkness; we are weary and need rest; we mourn and long for comfort; we feel worthless and wonder if God even cares; we fail and desire strength; we sin and need a Savior. Darkness is the absence of light. We want the light to shine on us as it did in ancient times. **Hope** is believing the darkness will be replaced by light. When we have hope and believe in Jesus' coming, there is endless **peace**. As we look to the light of Jesus, our **joy** will be increased. We find joy in our many blessings. We have gratitude for the people and things we have in life. We discover joy in the smallest of spaces.

As Isaiah foretold long ago, Jesus came to us as a child. He was *given to us*. He was sent to become one of us and to be everything to all of us. He is our *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. He is the greatest gift of **love**. This advent season, we need not sit in darkness. The light of Jesus is all around us. It is being shined on us; you only need to look.

## Prayer

*Almighty God, our heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, grant that the light of Jesus may dispel the darkness of our night, our unbelief, our loneliness, and our despair; and through the power of the Holy Spirit give unto all who call upon you now, the light that overcomes darkness, the faith that illumines our minds, our hearts, and our world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Submitted by Julie Formanski*

# DECEMBER 18

## John 3:16-21

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

As a young child, I was encouraged to memorize this verse (v. 16) and found it essential to understanding and explaining the Gospel message. And what Good News it is! Good news of great joy, as the Gospel of Luke says. Jesus is *given* to the world that we might have salvation and eternal life through him.

This gift reveals two things to us about God's character: Firstly, He is abundantly generous, giving up His only Son to come and reconcile the world to Him. He has taught us to be generous, and he has given us all that we need. 2 Corinthians 2:8 says, *"And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work."*

Secondly, God is exceedingly loving. This love is for all of Creation - *"For God so loved the world..."* - not just for a select few, not just for the best among us. God loves you even when you do not return that love or share that love with others.

This Advent, as we anticipate the giving and receiving of gifts, may we slow down and reflect upon the greatest gift given to us - Jesus. May we feel the weighty joy of the gift of Jesus Christ and go share this precious gift with the world.

## Prayer

*Father God, we thank you for your loving kindness towards us. We are undeserving of your generosity and grace. We thank you for giving us Your Son. May we spread the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world that the world may be reconciled to Him. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

# DECEMBER 19

## Psalm 126:3

*The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.*

Christmas Day was fast approaching, and I had no money to purchase gifts for my four children. God gave me the idea to share with each child an item I might have left for them in my will. Ask any of these now-adult children to name their most memorable Christmas, and they will say it was when each of them received something old! A silver candy dish, the Bulova watch given to me at age ten, my "walking" doll with a missing arm, and my father's tennis racket minus a few strings. There was real joy in our home that morning!

Many people suffer emotionally and financially in today's chaotic world, especially during December. Losing a loved one or a job, seeing relentless TV commercials advertising gifts, hearing Christmas carols happily sung while feeling lonely, and knowing others are gathering with family does not bring joy. Instead, they can keep some people emotionally captive to their circumstances as they see others celebrating the season.

In Psalm 126:3, the writer recalls the joy the Israelites experienced during God's earlier restoration of the Israelites from Babylonian captivity back to Jerusalem. What about the many people held "captive" today by circumstances like those listed in the preceding paragraph?

As Christians, we can have joy and peace in our everyday lives despite situations and events that could make us "captive" to them. We know God is the source of our peace (Ephesians 2:14) and the joy of our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Peace and joy are God's gifts to us, deep in our souls, regardless of our situation, as Jesus promised (John 14:27).

As we go through Advent, let us be sensitive to people we meet who need to know the joy and peace God brings through knowing His Son, Jesus. Let us share what great things God has done for us. Let us seek opportunities to be God's channels of blessings to those we encounter.

## Prayer

*Loving Father, as St. Francis of Assisi prayed, "Make us instruments of your peace... and where there is sadness, joy." Please help us to be your messengers to a hurting world. In Jesus name. Amen.*



*Submitted by Gloria Crane*

# DECEMBER 20

## Luke 1:5-25

*Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. 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. ... He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."*

Can you imagine not being able to speak for nine months? Nine minutes can seem like a long time when we think we have something to say. Zechariah had just been given awesome news from the angel Gabriel but was forbidden to share it because of his disbelief. He could not share the news of a son that was to be born to him and Elizabeth in their old age, a son who would be the fulfillment of the prophesy in Isaiah 40:3. *The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

I can't help but wonder if Zechariah's forced silence was perhaps more of a blessing than a punishment. It is difficult to speak and truly listen at the same time, especially if what we should be listening for is God's quiet presence. Perhaps, Zechariah's silence helped him hear God. Perhaps, we could use nine minutes of that silence this Advent season to actually listen to what awesome news God has for us.

## Prayer

*Lord, help us to be still and know that you are God. Amen.*



# DECEMBER 21

## Psalm 90, Psalm 149, Isaiah 29, and Luke 13

Brothers and sisters, today we gather to reflect on the profound truths revealed in the Scriptures towards hope, love, understanding, and, ultimately, the Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 90, we are reminded that before creation itself, God was and is our anchor. He is the source of all hope, love, and wisdom. In the beginning was the Word, and that Word is Jesus Christ and the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise. We seek wisdom by studying Scriptures, meditating upon them, and beseeching the Holy Spirit's guidance. When we embrace wisdom and pursue understanding, we cultivate a heart filled with joy and illumination.

Psalms 149 calls us to praise the Lord continually, both in times of abundance and in moments of struggle. Our trials help us gain additional wisdom and inspiration that further strengthen our faith. Through these tests, we grow closer to God. While it is important to praise the Lord for His abundant blessings, we must likewise give thanks for the trials we encounter, for they make us stronger and more resilient.

Isaiah 29 reminds us that true faith is reflected in our actions. We cannot hide our intentions from God. Those who genuinely seek God's honor are the faithful in heart. Deceit may flourish for a time, but truth always emerges. To deny the Creator is to miss the beauty of Christ and the Spirit; those who humbly submit to God will be blessed. Being meek is not a sign of weakness; it is a powerful posture of faithfulness and reliance on Christ.

In Luke 13, we see Jesus' commitment to His mission—a mission aimed at sinners, not the righteous. We are all flawed and in need of grace. Jesus calls us to repentance, urging us to remove the log from our own eyes before we can help others see. It is important to remember that His Church is a sanctuary not only for the upright in heart and those who are well-to-do but, perhaps, even more so for the weary and downtrodden. We must align our own thoughts, words, and deeds in accordance with His will so that we may help others come unto Him.

As we acknowledge the gift of salvation through Christ, let us also embrace the Holy Spirit as our guide. Through His inspiration, we become lights on a hill, shining brightly in a world in need of hope.

### Prayer

*Heavenly Father, bless us with the Holy Spirit this holiday season. May we remember the greatest gift of all—Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us lift up those who are less fortunate and grant us the courage to guide others towards your Church so they too might experience Your blessings. May our hearts grow closer to You through the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

# LOVE - THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT



Love came down at Christmas,

Love all lovely, Love Divine;

Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,

Love Incarnate, Love Divine;

Worship we our Jesus:

But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,

Love be yours and love be mine,

Love to God and all men,

Love for plea and gift and sign.

*"Love Came Down at Christmas"*

Christina Rossetti

Turn down the lights, gather around the Advent wreath, light two of the purple candles, the pink candle, and the final purple candle.

We light these candles of hope, peace, joy, and love as a sign of the coming light of Christ. Advent means coming. We are preparing ourselves for the days when *the Lord will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel, God is with us.*

Isaiah 7:14b

Let us walk in the light of the Lord.



# DECEMBER 22

## Luke 1:47-48

*"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant."*

We love singing songs at Christmas; don't we? We sing because Christmas is the time to celebrate, a time to praise God for sending His Son. We can't read the Christmas story without hearing the songs of praises of God's people, beginning in Luke 1:46-55 with Mary singing, *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant."* This marked the beginning of Mary's journey. Heaven came down, and a virginal conception was a great trial for a godly, young woman like Mary and for Joseph, her betrothed. Nothing but her integrity, her faith, and her confidence in God supported her during those trying circumstances when her reputation, honor, and even her own life were at stake.

The society in which Mary and Joseph lived was not at all stable, let alone peaceful, and a Roman census required them to travel 90 miles from Nazareth up to Bethlehem, but the gospels fail to convey just how challenging that was. Mary's late stage of pregnancy, as well as her riding on a donkey, made their walk much slower. They could have easily encountered bandits and desert robbers, plus the valley of the Jordan River was a forested refuge for lions, bears, and wild boar, which factored into the nature of the trip.

Mary had an unwavering faith in God, a type of faith that was steady, fixed, and free of confusion or doubt. Trusting in God's plan for us, even when we don't understand His ways, is a goal that we should strive to achieve. It's about having confidence that responds to challenges with immediate obedience, and it's not about having all the answers but trusting in the One who does.

Faith often matures in hardship because trials remind us how dependent we are on the Lord. Mary allowed herself to trust in the Lord more deeply, and we will increasingly find that with Him, we can endure anything.

Let us joyfully remember our Redeemer's glorious birth during our hardships because there is much that is honorable in the humble circumstances of the birth of our Immanuel. When did angels ever indulge in midnight songs or when did God ever hang a new star in the sky? To whose cradle did rich and poor make such a willing pilgrimage and offer such substantial, unsought acts of worship? Seek Him and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, because He loves us and He is with us. Immanuel, God with us.

## Prayer

*Gracious, merciful, loving Father, thank you for your presence with us. Help us to feel it, Lord. Help us to share your peace. In Jesus name. Amen.*

*Submitted by Susan McNeill*

## Luke 1:57-66

*Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.*

It is just a day or two before we celebrate the birth of baby Jesus. It seems fitting that our scripture reading from Luke 1:57-66 is also about a baby, John the Baptist.

Luke's narrative reveals the story of how John received his name. In breaking with Hebrew tradition, he wasn't named Zechariah after his father, but his mother Elizabeth spoke up, "No," she said, "He is to be called John."

Do you have a story about your name?

My first name is Sherrilyn (pronounced Sherry Lynn). I'm not sure why my parents chose this name for me. Sherry, in Spanish, means "dry." Lynn in Gaelic means "waterfall." Yes, I'm a dry waterfall!

For 43 years, I was an NMI – No Middle Initial – person. When I married Dan Wright, my last name, Bradford, became my middle name. Our names are such an integral part of our personalities. Some of us have nicknames. My great nephew and nieces from Raleigh take great joy in calling me their Aunt Fluffy!

As we go through our life journey, we are called by other names: sister, brother, wife, husband, mother, daddy, aunt, uncle, cousin, memaw, papa. Each name brings a new dimension to our lives. We have more than one calling, fulfilling our roles as mothers, wives, and career folks.

As Christians, we share this name: We are children of God. We are made in God's image and are valuable and precious. We become God's children through our faith in Jesus Christ; this is our best name of all! We are loved and beloved.

## Prayer

*Creator God, in this time of gift-giving, we are ever grateful for your naming us children of God. Uphold us that we may uplift you always. Amen.*

# CHRISTMAS EVE - THE CHRIST CANDLE



May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ child. Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever.

*"A Christmas Prayer"*  
Ray Pritchard

Whoever you gather with on Christmas Eve, find time to light your Advent wreath together. On this last night of Advent, light the purple and pink candles. The white candle in the middle of the wreath represents Christ. As you light the white center candle, reflect on the birth of Christ as the Immanuel, God is with us.

We light these candles of hope, peace, joy, and love as a sign of the coming light of Christ. Advent means coming. We are preparing ourselves for the days when *the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.*

Isaiah 9:2

Let us walk in the light of the Lord.



## DECEMBER 24

Christmas, the birthday of our Lord Jesus, is tomorrow. Jesus Christ, our gift from our heavenly Father, was born long ago, but He lives in our hearts today. Jesus is the most perfect gift of all.

During the past few weeks, we have been thinking a lot about gifts. We want the perfect gift for each person we love because we want them to feel our love and our commitment to them and to their happiness. Most of us spend so much time thinking, shopping, and looking through catalogs to find the best gifts for our loved ones.

God loves us so much that He gave us the one thing we needed most: He gave us a Savior. Because of Jesus, we can all live happy, fruitful, and joyous lives for eternity. We can all experience the joy, the peace, and the hope of following our Savior. Jesus is proof that God loves us, each of us, and is committed to our happiness.

When we open our gifts tomorrow, we will feel gratitude and appreciation and love and, of course, excitement. As others open their gifts, we will see their excitement and gratitude and appreciation. The tradition of gift-giving is wonderful and rewarding for both the giver and the receiver.

God's gift to us through Jesus is never-ending. He will never leave us or forsake us. We can pray to Him any time and about anything. His love for us is unconditional. He is our friend. He prays for us and intercedes for us. He suffered, died, and took on our sins so that we can be holy.

Every year, we celebrate Christmas, but we can celebrate it every day as we remember the most perfect gift of all, given to us in love by our Father in heaven. Each day, we can feel the excitement, the joy, the assurance, the hope, and the love of Jesus. As we walk with Him and talk with Him each new day, our hearts are filled with a new song of thanksgiving, praise, and adoration, and we have renewed strength.

Each morning when you wake up, give God thanks and praise for His Son, Jesus, whom He gave to save us from our sins. When you do, you will be opening the most perfect gift of all, Jesus Christ, who will be by your side all day. Celebrate the joy of Christmas every morning by opening God's most perfect gift.

### Prayer

*Our Father, we know that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from You, the Father of lights, who will never change. We give You thanks and praise for Your Son Jesus, the most perfect gift of all. May we celebrate Him and His birth every day as we love Him, trust Him, obey Him, and hope in Him. Each day, may we sing a new song; may we sing to the Lord. May we bless His name and tell of His salvation day by day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen*

## John 1:1-14

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*

*The Word became flesh*—this is the mystery of Christmas. The Apostle John opens his Gospel by telling us that Jesus Christ is the Word of God in the flesh. What he means by that is that Jesus of Nazareth is not a word. He is not merely an interesting historical person. He is not even merely the most divinely inspired person who ever lived. Jesus is *the Word*. That is to say, what's going on in the life of Jesus is something with eternal significance. It is something that has existed long before Israel and even creation itself. Jesus is God's eternal Word that has come into space and time. This person we meet in the manger and again on the cross, his life is not merely shaped by circumstance or accident. Who He is derives from God.

The Word *became flesh*—and yet this eternal Word became like you and me. He enters history. He lives among us as one of us. He faces temptation, pain, and sorrow. He is born, suffers, and dies, just like us. God is eternal and mysterious, yet He wants us to hear His voice resound in our world. He wants us to receive His Word.

*The Word became flesh*—and that is what they need to hear. People everywhere are longing to hear a voice from heaven, and, if not a voice from heaven, at least a good word. Christians believe that in Jesus of Nazareth, we not only hear wise, good, or true words, but we also hear the one eternal Word of God, who draws us into eternal life.

The question this Christmas is are you listening?

### Prayer

*God Almighty, your Word called all things into existence and sustains all things. Your Word reflects who you are in your power, wisdom and love. Your Word has become flesh in Jesus Christ. This Christmas, grant that the ears of our hearts would be open to hear your Word in order that by the Holy Spirit, your Word may dwell in our flesh. Amen.*



Carla Gasser  
AT THE CROSSROADS

## *A Christmas Poem*

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child, make  
thee a bed, soft, undefiled, within my  
heart, that it may be a quiet chamber  
kept for Thee.

My heart for very joy doth leap, my lips  
no more can silence keep, I too must  
sing, with joyful tongue,  
that sweetest ancient song.

Glory to God in highest heaven, who  
unto man His Son hath given, while  
angels sing with pious mirth, a glad  
new year to all the earth! Amen.

~Martin Luther

