

Advent Devotional

2024



Advent

...means “coming” or “arrival.” During this season we look both backward and forward; anticipating Jesus’ arrival in that manger 2,000 years ago and his coming in the future. Jesus’ arrival into the world changed everything. It paved the way for reconciliation. It pointed to God’s faithfulness to His promises. It promoted a new way to live! Jesus’ arrival brought into focus the meaning of hope, peace, joy and love.

During this Advent, here at SCC, every day we’re going to take time reading scriptures and stories regarding this special season. As we navigate the entries in this devotional, provided by folks from our church, I trust you’ll be encouraged, inspired, and drawn into a closer walk with our Lord.

I look forward to how we will be shaped by this glorious season.

Blessings,

Pastor Jeff



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Scripture: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.” - *Isaiah 9:6*

Reflection:

There is a wonder about the season of Christmas. The way the first snows begins at the heights of the mountains, gently drifting down into the valley to meet our senses. Or how the air somehow feels and smells cleaner-crisper, and our eyes seem to be able to see details on the horizon that we didn't notice before. A steaming cup of coffee is sipped slower and enjoyed more deeply to combat the beautiful cold around us.

Darkness falls earlier, but light shines brighter. The sound of a choir lifting their song brings a warmth that rivals our church's new heating system. All things seem to take on a new meaning during the Christmas season. A united meaning that aims to direct our hearts' attention to the true Wonder of Christmas. The snow coming down the mountains, the clear views, the welcome warmth of a drink, the lights, the music; these wonders are part of a holy symphony whispering the same six words to us: “Unto us a Child is born.”

They are only signposts or glorious suggestions designed by their Maker to arouse our wandering hearts. To tell us that the Wonder of Christmas does not lie in any gift we might receive or sight we might see. It lies in a manger. The Wonder of Christmas is that the God who gave us all the very things we enjoy at Christmas and much more- the God of galaxies and snowflakes, oceans and poems- stepped into the very existence which he holds together to give us the greatest Gift of all: himself.

- *Eli Webb*

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Son, born to us. As we marvel at the wonders of Christmas, may our hearts be drawn to the true Wonder- Jesus. Help us to embrace his light and love, and to share this joy with others. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“...the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”*
- **Matthew 4:16**

Reflection:

As the calendar moves from November to December, the days get darker, and the nights get longer. Each morning, the sun rises a little later and sets a little earlier. This darkness culminates on December 21st, the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year and the day with the least amount of light. Isn't it interesting that in the darkest time of the year, we celebrate Jesus coming to earth? Perhaps we do this because it's in the darkness that we need light the most.

Many of us have struggled with a dark season of life. I know I've had my fair share of long nights. Nights where I've struggled with physical and mental health. Those long nights turned into dark days, and the dark days turned into a season of living in a land of shadows. Maybe you find yourself in a season like this, characterized by broken relationships, financial struggles, or illness. You find yourself living in what feels to be an unending night.

But in the darkness, there is hope. A light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. In the long nights of our lives, Jesus gives us the promise of a new day. No matter how long the night, it will end in sunrise, and no matter how long the nights we find ourselves in, they will end because of the son who has risen. Like light, hope shines brightest in the darkness.

- *Keith Sandell*

Prayer:

Jesus, we live in a world where we have troubles. We encounter seasons of struggles and obstacles. Thank you for coming to this world of difficulties to be our light. Let us take heart in dark times, for you have overcome the world. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” – Matthew 1:21*

Reflection:

Names carry meaning. Each person’s name is important and distinct. It is amazing that parents get the special honor of giving a name to their child. No one else gets such a privilege.

I remember trying to name my second baby. We had some name ideas but none of them really fit this little bundle. We spent a couple days looking at her until we finally landed on the name “Evelyn Joy.” Her name means “Life Joy” and she has lived up to it!

She’s a joyful girl who brings life to our family every day. When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would have a son, he also told her what the child’s name would be - Jesus. This was the name the Father had chosen for him. And it certainly carried a great deal of significance. Jesus means “The Lord is salvation.” I wonder if Mary felt the anticipation, gravity, and hope in her son’s name. This was the one whom the whole world had been waiting for. This was the savior who would redeem all people from their sins and provide a way back into relationship with God.

This was the name at which demons would tremble, and nations would bow. This was the name above all other names! This was the name in which to put our hope. In this season of Advent, let us remember the hope only found in the precious name of Jesus!

- Kristi Godwin

Prayer:

Jesus, we thank you for being the true source of our hope. No matter what happens in this life, we know our salvation is secured in your Name. Help us as we go about our day to constantly put our hope in you. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. - Isaiah 7:14*

Reflection:

Living in the wonder of Immanuel begins when we grasp the kind of love God has poured out to us. While we were far from God, Jesus came to earth to draw near to us! Jesus reaches out to us in many ways, demonstrating intense love for you and me.

Recently, my mom was in a Lutheran Hospice as she neared the end of her 92-year life. I prayed over her a few times. Then, I had one last day for a good prayer session. Since I was not sure she was a Christian, I began to pray a “hope/call for salvation” type prayer. She was resting peacefully, and I believed she was asleep. Partway through my prayer, my mom reached over to hold my wrists. She opened her eyes. She appeared to be agreeing with me in my prayer! As my prayer ended, I felt God’s presence fill the room.

My mom was already asleep. I felt like Jesus was holding me up and taking care of all the details of my mom’s exit from earth and her entrance to eternity. I think of the words from the Psalmist: When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:3-4 NIV).

Why did God come down to be “with us”? Because he so loved the world! He came to walk with us, talk with us, cry with us, pray for us, and give us living water! He came at a great sacrifice, suspending his Godhood to take on flesh. His name is Jesus and he wants you to know him. He wants you to draw close to him on a daily basis in a time of quiet where he can speak to you. Thank you Lord for being with us!

- Gary Litchfeldt

Prayer:

Lord, I reflect on the great love that you have shown by coming to earth to be with us both in the flesh and now in your eternal presence. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” – John 1:14*

Reflection:

In this Advent season, we are invited to reflect on the profound mystery and wonder of the Incarnation—God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. John 1:14 reminds us that Jesus, the eternal Word, stepped into our world, demonstrating the fullness of grace and truth. “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.” John 1:18.

The wonder of Jesus dwelling among us is not just a theological concept; it is a reality that transforms our daily lives. Imagine the Creator of the universe choosing to live among his creation, experiencing our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears. This act of divine humility and love is the heart of the Christmas story.

Jesus’ presence among us is a demonstration of God’s grace. He came not to condemn but to save, not to judge but to heal. His life was a continuous outpouring of grace—healing the sick, forgiving the sinner, and welcoming the outcast. At the same time, Jesus brought the truth of God into our midst. He revealed the true nature of God—his holiness, justice, and love. Jesus’ teachings, miracles, and, ultimately, his sacrifice on the cross unveiled the truth about God’s plan for salvation and the depth of his love for humanity.

As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, let us marvel at the wonder of Jesus dwelling among us. Let us embrace his grace, allowing it to transform our lives and relationships. And let us hold fast to his truth, letting it guide our steps and shape our actions.

- *Pastor Rick Dietzman*

Prayer:

Father, may this Advent season be a time of renewed awe and gratitude for the incredible gift of Jesus, the Word made flesh, who came to dwell among us, full of grace and truth. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” – Isaiah 11:1*

Reflection:

My childhood best friend from 1st-8th grade was dying of leukemia and was not expected to live the night. Our pastor took me to see Arlene at the hospital. Once I entered her room, I was immediately stopped in my tracks. My friend was sitting up in bed, smiling at me and telling me that it was ok – I could come in. Brilliant light flooded the room like a veil over the whole scene. I pressed myself against the wall, not certain what I was experiencing. We talked, and she smiled, but I was frozen. After a couple of minutes, I said I hoped she would be feeling better soon, and as I turned to exit, I looked back. The Arlene I had just seen as an 8th grader appeared suddenly as that cute little 1st grader I had met and befriended years before. I left completely bewildered, and she died before we reached home.

The ride home was quiet. I was so puzzled that I couldn't wait to tell my Mom. Mom didn't say much but I knew she was thinking something deep.

It would be at least 20 years later when her memory returned and I came to understand the high hope of heaven and the presence I was privileged to be in. Perhaps hope is a lot like a vision – seeing through the eyes of our heart things that are not yet.

- Carol Bennett

Prayer:

Father God, we pray for your will to be done as we eagerly await the long-expected outcome according to your Word! In this lifetime until Christ's return, may we glorify Jesus, the Branch, and may others see your glory in us as I saw your glory in my friend. We praise you and thank you for the promises of your Word. Help us not to lose hope, to stand strong in our faith now and always. In Jesus' name, amen.

What is God saying to me?

Peace



Scripture: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” – **Luke 2:14**

Reflection:

In today’s passage, we are reminded of the angelic proclamation that heralded the birth of Jesus. This verse from Luke 2:14 encapsulates the essence of Christmas: the glorification of God and the gift of peace upon humanity.

The birth of Jesus is the ultimate manifestation of God’s glory. In sending His Son to dwell among us, God revealed His profound love and mercy. The angels’ song, “Glory to God in the highest,” reminds us that the Incarnation is a divine act that brings glory to God. It is a testament to his faithfulness and the fulfillment of his promises.

But the message of the angels does not end with glorifying God. It extends to us, offering peace to those on whom His favor rests. This peace is not merely the absence of conflict but a deep, abiding sense of well-being and wholeness that comes from being in right relationship with God. Through Jesus, we are invited to experience this peace, a peace that surpasses all understanding.

To be those on whom His favor rests, we must open our hearts to Jesus. It means receiving him as our savior and allowing his teachings to guide our lives. It involves living out the love, forgiveness, and compassion that he exemplified. When we do so, we become vessels of his peace, spreading it to those around us. Isaiah 26:3 says “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” This message of peace is there for all who believe in Him.

– *Pastor Rick Dietzman*

Prayer:

Lord, let us continue to reflect on your glory, which was revealed in the birth of Jesus. Let us embrace the peace he offers, allowing it to transform our hearts and lives. As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, may we be mindful of the incredible gift of Jesus and the profound impact his coming has on our lives. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
– *Philippians 4:7*

Reflection:

This passage promises God’s peace, and verse 6 provides guidance: “Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” God promises His peace to those who come to Him in prayer – with thanksgiving – about everything. When we do, His peace transcends our ability to fully understand it.

I’ve learned to depend on God from an early age. Throughout my life, there have been difficult experiences: my near-death experience at 19; my 15-month-old in ICU for five days; the untimely death of my brother in a plane crash; challenges raising a family; balancing careers with life; ICU due to a bad fall; difficulty in marriage; too many surgeries to count; passing of parents; recent challenges with critical heart issues – God has granted His peace.

I’m so thankful God has extended His grace to me and that He’s provided His peace, a calmness amidst the storm, and an awareness that God is always in control. God is always good, and he will bring spiritual good out of all circumstances in my life (Romans 8:28).

Toward the end of Christ’s journey he reassured his disciples as he does us today, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

– *Gwen Glessner*

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the plan salvation which makes us right with you and which opens the door to come to you with our requests and thanksgiving. Enable us to be consistent in our times of reading your word and prayer. Align our hearts to your most perfect will for us and grant us your peace in every circumstance we face. Equip us to shed your light and to share with others your Good News of peace and reconciliation.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.” – John 14:27*

Reflection:

This passage reminds us that true peace is not found in our ability to control circumstances but in trusting Jesus’ promise. His peace transcends our understanding and remains steadfast, even when we cannot see the outcome. Embracing this peace requires surrendering our need for control and resting in his assurance.

Hard times come and go. Peace in those times, all times, has always been a quality sometimes, seemingly out of reach in my life. I usually want to see the problem, plan for the outcome, and control and lead it from here to there.

God was my main supporter...not my leader.

Suddenly, my wife became quite ill. Our well-thought-out preparations for living “older” wouldn’t work in this new situation. We needed to live in a safer space for her illness moving forward. We needed to sell a townhouse quickly, find a new house, and renovate it for her aging safely.

I was so NOT at peace about this that all I could do was go to God in prayer. I did, and he told me JUST TO LET HIM LEAD. It was pretty clear. So, suddenly, the right house appeared for sale. Our townhouse was sold immediately, construction started and was completed, and we moved... ALL GOD DIRECTED. He would show me what to do, I didn’t question, and I did it. It all worked. There was peace in the process. There is peace now.

- Clark Reeves

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your peace that surpasses all understanding. As Jesus promised, let his peace guard our hearts and minds. Help us to trust in you, not be troubled or afraid, and to share this peace with others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: “You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.” – *Isaiah 26:3*

Reflection:

January 31, 2019, is a day I will never forget. I was asked to come into the imaging center at OMC for a second mammogram and ultrasound. Honestly, I was a bit nervous but not overly worried. The radiologist who did the ultrasound was upfront with me and told me it was almost always cancer when he saw this type of growth. They decided to do a biopsy that day, which was a miracle; all I could think was, “Get my husband; he is in the waiting room.” When I went home that day, I was emotional and, if I’m honest, a bit mad at God. I spent an hour or two crying and telling Him all the things I did not want to miss if I were to die from breast cancer: daughters getting married, grandchildren being born, etc. Then I told God, “Okay, I am in your hands; I will trust you through this new journey we are about to embark upon, and whatever happens, I know it is your will; I will trust your plan.”

For the most part, I had perfect peace throughout the entire treatment process. I felt at ease with my surgeon, doctors, and technicians because I knew God would walk with me and carry me if necessary to get me through this journey. I was so blessed to be able to continue ministering to the church during this journey. The precious people of Sequim Community Church loved me, supported me, and encouraged me through chemo, losing my hair, and radiation treatments. I can truly say that this journey I never wanted to take changed me. I don’t worry as much about tomorrow; every day is a gift from God. I appreciate my husband, family, and friends even more than before; they are also a gift from God. If you are walking a journey you never asked for, whether physical, emotional, or relational, take to heart this promise that God will keep you in perfect peace as your mind is centered, steadfast, upon him.

- *Melody Wilson*

Prayer:

Our loving Lord, thank you for your never-changing love. Thank you for walking with us and carrying us through the journey of life as we place our lives completely in your hands. Your love never fails, and your mercies are new every morning. Thank you, in Jesus’ name, amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: “[Jesus said] I have told you all these things so that you may have peace, in this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.” – **John 16:33**

Reflection:

Our passage today reminds us that Jesus’ peace is a gift that transcends our circumstances. It is a divine assurance that we can remain calm and secure in his love despite the chaos we experience. This peace empowers us to face life’s challenges confidently and extend grace to those around us. The world is not a comforting and easy place, but Jesus is with us through every circumstance.

Let this season be a time to renew our faith in his overcoming power and to share his peace with others. As we reflect on his promise, may we find strength and courage to navigate life’s trials, knowing that we are never alone.

We have a blessed promise through Jesus Christ. Peace in a loving relationship with God our Father. There will be situations in our lives that seem impossible but we have been rescued through Jesus. He will meet you in your sin and wash you white as snow. Praise the Lord.

God did not create in us a spirit of fear. When we choose Jesus and seek after him, he will bring us out of our sins and into a peace-filled relationship with the Father. In our sin, we were lost; now, we are found in Jesus.

So take heart.

– Pam Seaman

Prayer:

Dearest Father God, we come to you in prayer. We bring our worries, situations, heartaches, and fears to you, Lord. You make a way when we don’t see a way. You bring peace to our chaos. We reach out to you and rest in your presence. You know our hearts. We praise you, Lord, for the peace beyond understanding that only you can give. Please bring us closer to you. In Jesus’ name, we pray, amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: “The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.” - **Psalm 29:11**

Reflection:

When I was seven years old, I was placed in a foster home after my parents divorced. Looking back, it was probably one of the best things that could have happened. You see, my foster parents were Christians, and they exposed me to Jesus and the importance of having him in my life. They told me Jesus loved me and would always be with me.

Jumping forward ten years, I graduated high school and joined the Marine Corps. Shortly after boot camp and combat training, I was off to Vietnam as a young 18-year-old serving as a rifleman. During that time, I recall countless nights sitting in a foxhole, wondering where the enemy was but not questioning where Jesus was. While frightened, I also had a strong sense of peace because I knew who shared my foxhole and who was with me when I engaged the enemy. The peace He gave me was even greater during the two Christmases I spent there.

At that time in my life, I thought of myself as being a Christian because my birth mother had me baptized, but I had not yet accepted Christ as my savior. What now amazes me is the Lord was with me, giving me peace, even before I had committed myself to him.

Within three months of returning from Vietnam, while attending church with my best friend, I accepted Christ as my savior. As a result, I live my life knowing the Lord is always with me and that he blesses his people with peace. I retired after 36 years as a police officer, and I can assure you the Holy Spirit gave me much peace during many difficult situations. The peace that Jesus offers strengthens us and gives us the courage to accomplish the impossible.

- *Jim Spreine*

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we ask you to give us peace in our mind, body, soul, and spirit. We want you to heal and remove everything causing stress, grief, and sorrow in our lives. Please guide our path through life and make our enemies at peace with us. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Joy



Scripture: *“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” - Luke 2:9-10*

Reflection:

As a kid, we went to Grandma’s house on most Sundays, and those around the holidays carry some of my best childhood memories. I remember watching the Thanksgiving and Christmas TV specials with my cousins. “Charlie Brown Christmas” was one of my favorites, if only for those brief moments when I heard those precious words about Jesus’ birth. I didn’t know much about the Bible then and didn’t hear much about it at home or even church. But I did know about Jesus and the Christmas Story - because a Christmas special was made when we could talk about God and Jesus on TV.

How can we forget when Linus famously quoted the King James Bible as he told a frustrated Charlie Brown, “Sure Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about.” He referenced the same verses above and continued through verse 14, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.”

I love Christmas so much that I started playing Christmas music in October!! And, during the Holiday season, I love that I can go to Home Depot (as I often do) to find Christmas decorations. Through some of my darkest days, I worked near a Home Depot and would go on walks, where I would almost run to get there because I knew that walking in the door and finding Christmas decorations - would always bring a brief smile and a peace that once again, for another year - the world would slow down to remember Jesus.

- Troy Ceriello

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for sending your Son to save us and for the little things in life that can have a significant and lasting impact, like a Christmas TV special. There are never enough thank yous for all that you’ve done, and I pray that as we move into the Christmas season in 2024 - the world does pause once again - to celebrate your Son’s birthday. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”*
- **Psalm 16:11**

Reflection:

In the Advent Season, we are presented with the only source of lasting joy. The angels appeared to a small group of shepherds and told them where real joy could be found. It was an unlikely place at an unlikely time in the form of a baby. They rushed into town to see Him, and as they returned to their lives, they had to tell everyone what they had seen and heard. Real joy must be shared; it cannot be contained.

When Jesus was taken to the temple to be dedicated to the Lord, Simeon, a devout man waiting for the Messiah to come, was overcome with joy, realizing this was the One. Close by was an older widow, Anna. She heard the commotion, went over to the baby, and began praising God because He had fulfilled His promise. This day started out for Anna and Simeon as just another day to spend at the temple. Today was different, and this child was different. Everything had changed. The Messiah was here. The “great joy for all the people” the angels spoke about was here.

Advent joy is not the perfect present, not the best dinner, or the best family gathering. Though those things may bring some joy, they will be gone in a few days. It is not about trees, presents, gifts, or parties. It is all about Jesus. The real joy we can experience through Advent is that God loved us so much he came to be our Savior. The Sovereign Lord is with us no matter the circumstances. Now that brings JOY!

- *Marne Cottriel*

Prayer:

Lord, help me look past all the trappings and festivities this season brings and focus on you. Fill me with that joy and help me share it with everyone I can. May the world be blessed as they see you, my Lord and my Savior. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” - John 15:11*

Reflection:

Complete joy comes in various ways, and when we least expect it! Pay attention to catch yourself smiling...God just made a joy complete in you! It might be through a found item that went missing, an unexpected call from an old friend that has been on your mind, a beaming smile from a loved one, the sweet caress of a newborn child, miraculous healing, watching your dog catch a ball in mid-air, restoring a broken relationship, or securing a new position that elevates your ability to serve with your God-given skills and talents. I encourage you to keep a ‘Joy Journal’ to reflect on how alive and active God is in your life each day!

He rewards us with good conclusions and new beginnings that are handcrafted in a way that speaks to us personally! He allows us to find completeness in going full circle, back to our beginning, yet in a deeper and higher way. God’s continuum is eternal, focusing on helping us ‘up our game’ to serve Him. That is where our joy is also complete! He guides us to strive to reach our potential in all aspects of our lives. He is a God of mystery and a God of resolve. He is a God whose greatest joy is giving joy to us!

Our ultimate joy will be complete when we join the hand of our Lord and reunite with our loved ones in heaven, like my beloved cousin Gail, who went home to the Lord in 1995. She was only 39 years old and passed away five days after giving birth to her fifth child. She changed my life by being the catalyst that led me to receive the Lord as my Savior.

- Lisa Pierson

Prayer:

Lord, please fill me with gratitude and confidence for how alive and active you are in my life! With praise, I fully submit my agenda for the day and invite the Holy Spirit to lead me each step of the way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.” - Psalm 28:7*

Reflection:

When my wife Maggie and I were engaged, we spent much of our engagement apart. This was incredibly difficult for us. We were young and experiencing love like never before. However, hope was on the horizon. Christmas break was arriving soon, and I could see her for two full weeks! The day I finished my finals, I made the long drive to Maggie’s apartment in Sequim. When I opened the door, she leaped into my arms with utmost joy! All the heartache of being apart was suddenly healed. The lyrics of a thousand love songs could hardly express the joy of seeing her again.

I am reminded of the passage in the nativity story of Mary visiting Elizabeth, in Luke 1:44-45, “As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

Even as a baby, John could sense the coming arrival of Jesus, the Son of God and Savior of the world, and John leaped with great joy inside Elizabeth’s womb. Mary’s response to Elizabeth’s blessing upon her was a song of great joy, known as the Magnificat, in which she expresses her thankfulness to God for providing for her and her people. In a similar way, David responds to the Lord’s provision, saying, “My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.” The Lord’s presence and provision in our lives are worthy of a joyful response that encourages us to sing his praise!

- *Branden Bettger*

Prayer:

Lord, help us to acknowledge your presence and provision in our lives. Thank you that you are our strength and our shield. Thank you that we can put our trust in you and you help us. May we be filled with your joy this season and give you praise. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him.*” – **Romans 15:13**

Reflection:

Hope, joy, and peace are all words we cling to in desperate times. The fact that Paul is sharing this powerful truth with us from a cold, dark jail cell never ceases to amaze me. Paul knew he could count on the Lord to supply his joy and peace as he allowed roots of trust to grow deeper with each difficult circumstance he faced.

I have had a few verses that have encouraged me greatly over the years, and this verse happens to be on a coffee mug that was given to me by a good friend. One day, I was given some difficult news that required a lot of soul-searching and more strength than I had at that moment. When I looked down at the coffee cup in my hand, this verse was written on it. The words jumped out at me like a megaphone as they told me to hold tightly to this truth.

The Lord would repeatedly show me through prayer and the reading of His Word in the following months that joy and peace will be found as I take my anxious thoughts and turn them over to him. This verse would be my foundation for the next couple of years anytime fear would start to take hold.

The Lord knows what we must go through to grow our trust in him. That prior conversation had been hard, but the way God worked things out was way beyond what I could have dreamed or imagined. God sent His Son to be our hope, joy, and peace at just the right time, and Advent is a wonderful reminder that God will always provide our joy and peace. Often, this happens when things are at their darkest, and He becomes the shining light to see us through.

– Julie McCrorie

Prayer:

Lord, please help us to seek you for a filling of hope, peace, and joy that will transform us as our trust deepens. Please teach us to be patient in this process and share this good news with others. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” – *Psalms 100:1-2*

Reflection:

It was Christmas Eve, and nothing was like it should be. We were alone and had no family or friends with us to celebrate the birth of Christ. The palm trees being blown about by the warm wind were beautiful yet left me with an unsettling feeling. Why had Jim and I thought that spending Christmas week on Kauai would be an enjoyable adventure? Everything seemed so commercial and fake. Even as we were walking towards the small church in Waimea, there was apprehension in my step. How could I be joyous when nothing seemed right?

As we got closer to the small church, I was amazed at how festive and welcoming it looked. The windows were thrown open and filled with gorgeous red poinsettias and white candles on each sill. Congregation members were dressed in colorful Hawaiian dresses and shirts and passed out leis. The church was filled with Hawaiian flowers and music...and tourists! In fact, the tourists outnumbered the church family by far! Not overwhelmed at all, our hosts were welcoming and invited each of us to stand, share our names, and where we were from. In minutes, we all were smiling and feeling a part of a special family, God’s family, who had traveled to Kauai to celebrate the birth of our Savior together. Joy filled our hearts and floated through the open windows as we sang our favorite Christmas carols in joyous praise. Once again, God opened my eyes and gave me the gift of joy, which is always present when I walk with him.

– *Sandy Reed*

Prayer:

Lord our Savior, you know how uncomfortable and unsure we are when placed in new and different situations. Instead of feeling joy, we feel apprehension. Dear Lord, help us remember that you have inserted joy into every facet of our lives. All we need to do is put aside our fears and discomfort to find joy through you. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Love



Scripture: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” – John 3:16*

Reflection:

I remember the first time I ever heard this verse. It is probably the most universally quoted and well-known scripture in the whole Bible. The first time I heard this verse was the day I invited Jesus to be my Lord and Savior. I was about five years old, and I was having a conversation about death with my mom. You see, I was afraid of her leaving me. When she told me that death was not the end and that she would be in heaven when she died, I asked if I would go there too. She told me that I could, and she shared this verse with me. “All you have to do is believe in Jesus,” she said, “He loves you so much he will take away your sin and give you eternal life.”

That day, I prayed and made Jesus my Lord and Savior. To quote Stuart Townsend, “How deep the Father’s Love for us. How vast, beyond all measure. That he would give his only Son, to make a wretch his treasure.” The love of God is so powerful. It is because of God’s deep and genuine love for us, that he made the ultimate sacrifice, sending Jesus to die for our sins. As a parent, I can’t imagine God’s grief as his ONLY Son suffered on the cross. It had to be painful. Yet it was the Heavenly Father’s will to “make a wretch his treasure.” As we go into the Advent season, let us hold tight to this remarkable truth. We are treasured by God.

– Kristi Godwin

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for showing your remarkable love for us by sending Jesus to be our Savior. Help us remember we are treasured by you, and motivate us to love each other as well this Advent season. Amen.

What is God saying to me?

Scripture: *“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” – I John 4:9-10*

Reflection:

On this special night, as we prepare for the arrival of the Christ-child, our senses are flooded with candles, carols and crèches, Tannenbaum (German for “fir tree”), and tinsel lights. Each, in its own way, directs our attention to the heart of Christmas – God’s amazing love.

The Apostle John expresses it so simply in verse 9, “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live...” Yes, God’s love played out in the story of Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and angels. Yet, in the Gospels, God puts a face to his love – that is, Jesus.

On this night, we’re reminded this love of God was initiated by Him. Like a child who looks under the Christmas tree and sees gifts with his or her name on them, this love of God is a gift originating with the Lord. Again, notice how John expresses it, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son...”

This love – initiated by God, revealed in Jesus – is extended to us for our benefit. Look at verse 9b that we might live through him. More than aware of our propensity to struggle and strain, God’s love acts to offer us a way through to a life reconciled with Him, restored with others, and renewed with ourselves.

I hope you’re able to join us for one of our Christmas Eve services tonight. As we gather, singing carols and lighting candles, I trust you and I will be reminded of God’s love that is powerfully personal and inspiringly intentional. Merry Christmas!

– Dr. Jeff Chandler

Prayer:

On this special night, O God, allow me to be saturated with the reality of your love. In the various elements of this season, may they point me to the new life you’ve afforded in and through Jesus, the Christ Child. It is in his name I pray, amen.

What is God saying to me?

A special
Thank You

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