

Waiting
WELL

2025 Advent Devotions



GRACE COVENANT
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Waiting Well

We often hear that dedicating just a few minutes each day to pursuing a goal can lead to meaningful growth. The same is true for our spiritual lives. During Advent and Lent—and indeed throughout the year—setting aside even a few moments for prayer, reading, and reflection can open our hearts to God’s renewing presence.

Beginning November 30, we will enter the season of Advent with the theme “Waiting Well.” Waiting does not come easily to most of us. In our hurried world, we prefer what is immediate and visible. Yet waiting—attentive, hopeful waiting—is at the very heart of Advent. It is the season of the “now and not yet,” when we live between promise and fulfillment. We begin by contemplating Christ’s promised return, and then turn toward the story of Mary and Joseph as they waited for the birth of the Christ Child.

This Advent, our daily devotions, continuing through Christmastide and concluding at Epiphany, are meant to guide us through that sacred waiting. Written from a layperson’s perspective and shared with love, each reflection encourages us to engage more deeply with God’s Word and to draw near in prayer and contemplation. Each day’s entry is accompanied by a piece of visual art and a musical selection—many of which can be found on YouTube—to enrich our time of reflection.

Our hope is that these readings will help each of us grow in faith, strengthen our relationships, and renew our sense of wonder at God’s unfolding grace.

As we hear again the call from Matthew 24 to “Keep awake,” may we enter this Advent season with open hearts—ready to receive, ready to rejoice, and ready to wait well for the coming of Christ.

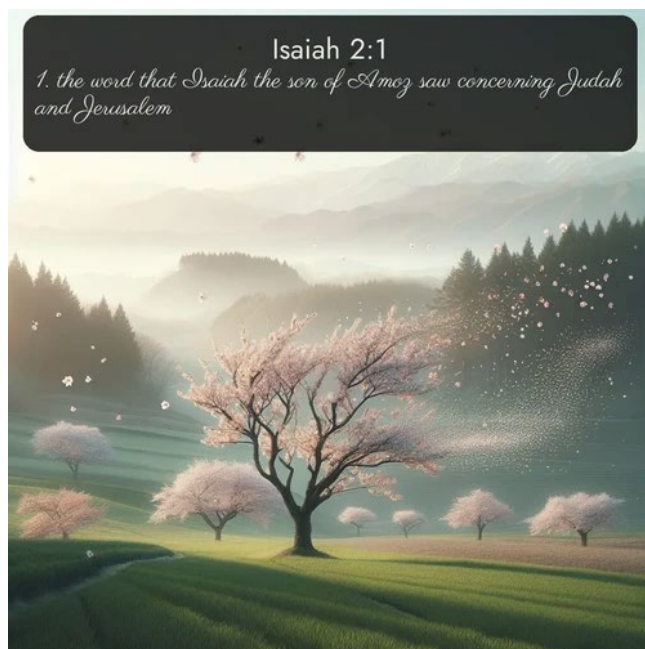
(Thank you to Harold Frye, who has compiled and provided photos and YouTube links for each day. These devotions will be shared daily on Harold’s personal Facebook page from November 30, 2025 through January 6, 2026, at <https://www.facebook.com/hbfrye>. A PDF file of this booklet can be downloaded at gcpc.org/advent.)

Sunday, 11/30/25 by Gene Wilson

Isaiah 2:1-5

And so we begin another Advent season, which, to many Christians, is perhaps the most exciting period of anticipation of our Christian year. (As a singer in the Choir, Advent certainly presents some of the most beautiful and meaningful anthems and carols.) In just over four weeks, we will once again be celebrating the birth of the baby Jesus Christ. My 65-year-old Harper's Study Bible (RSV), tells us that the prophet's name, Isaiah, who wrote the verses to begin our Advent Devotions, means "Yahweh is salvation." But in Isaiah's time, the Kingdoms in his region of the world continued to do war against each other, and it was not a time of Peace, nor one of strong faith in God, which Isaiah assails and demands repentance. In our scripture for today, Isaiah promises that the present judgment for all that was going against God could lead to future glory through the ultimate triumph of God's

kingdom on earth (through Christ's birth?). He speaks of the mountain of the Lord being established on the highest of the mountains and says that all nations shall flow to it. And he promises that God shall judge between the nations, and that "...they 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 anymore." He pleads: "O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." (We would do well to have his depth of faith in the present time!) But let us focus today on the Advent wreath and the promise of the Advent candles. As members of our GCPC family come each Advent Sunday to light the candles of Hope, then Peace, then Joy, then Love (as represented by the birth of Jesus) let us give thanks and open our hearts as those candles are lit in anticipation of the celebration that lies in just a month. Maybe Isaiah was prophesying about the birth of Christ who was the "light of the Lord" on earth. Let us focus on THAT now, as we ponder the anxiety and uncertainty Mary and Joseph must have felt as they made their way to Jerusalem. Let us hold on to Mary's unshakable faith and trust that God had chosen her to give birth to our Savior, our salvation, and all would be all right.



Isaiah 2:1

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2tB26C3FBQ>

Monday, 12/1 by Cheryl Johnson

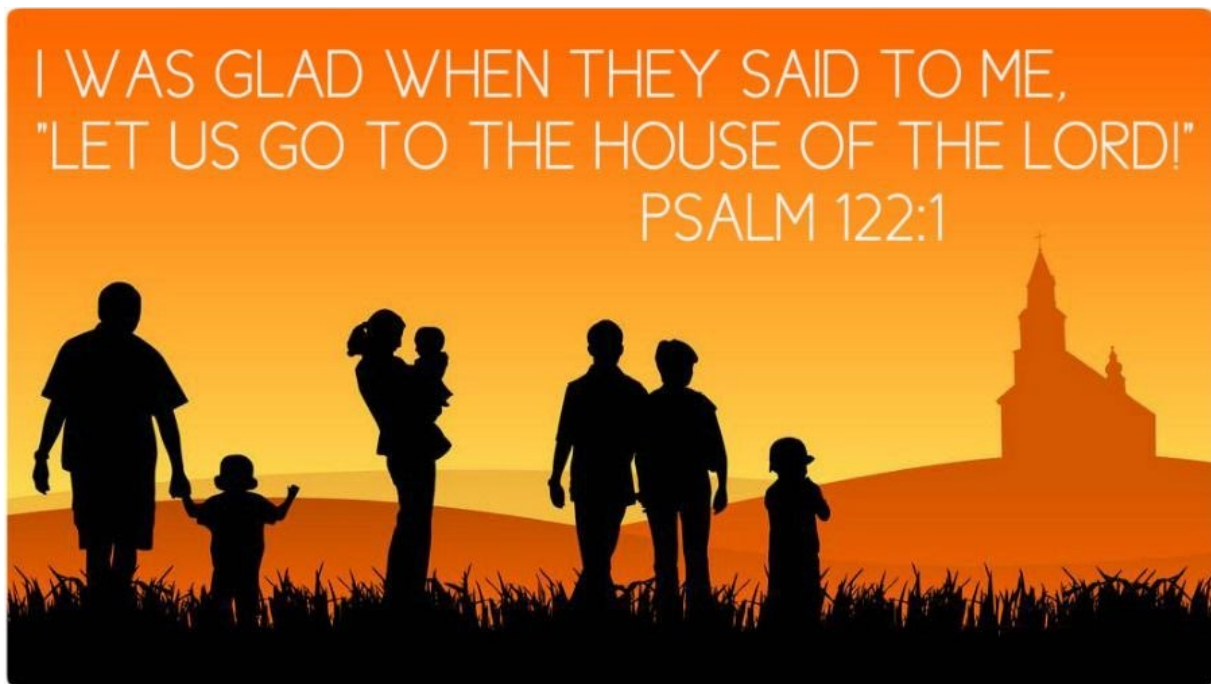
Psalm 122

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord!'"

In my Bible, this psalm is labeled a "Psalm of Ascents" and attributed to David. Jerusalem was built on hills within the Judean mountains. So, when people looked toward the temple in Jerusalem, they were looking up. I know the city was built where it was because it made it easier to defend, but I like the image of people looking up when they were thinking about God.

When I was growing up, my mother had a ritual for tucking my brother, sister and me into bed at night. We would say a prayer and then recite a few Bible verses. Psalm 122:1 was one of them, as was 2 Corinthians 9:7 (God loves a cheerful giver). It seems such a simple thing to do, encouraging your children to connect with God every night before bed by having them memorize a few Bible verses. But our early religious training and the examples set by our parents have helped the Brinkmann children through some challenging times this past year. Several times in my life, I've wondered how people who don't have a relationship with God navigate the trials that life brings.

Every Sunday, Grace Covenant has a large group of children going up for the children's sermon. We know that's important – not only for the future of our church but for the future of each child too. We want them to be able to say they are glad to come to church for things like Smash and VBS and Sunday school because they'll be putting down roots that will help them throughout their lives.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueIFJcWJGW8>

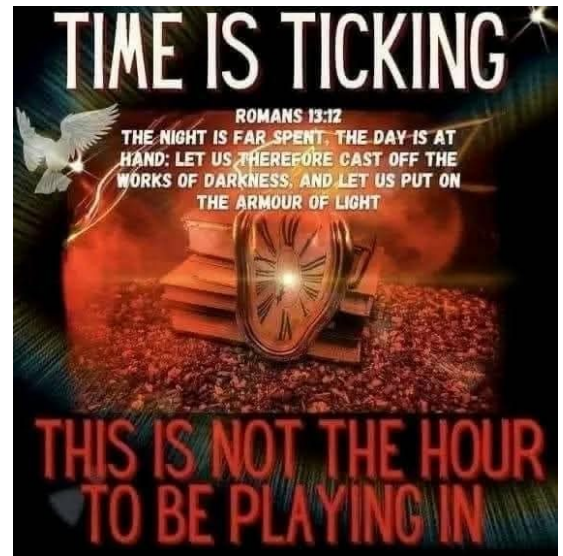
Tuesday, 12/2 by Gene Wilson

Romans 13:11-14

When you read Paul's letter to the Romans which is the scripture for today, it sounds much like an echo of Isaiah's scripture of the very first Advent Devotion this year. In that scripture, Isaiah is admonishing his people to stop their sinful ways, repent, and prepare for the coming of the Glory of the Lord God. Today, Paul is reminding the new Roman Christians that they know the promise of Jesus and that their salvation is close. Paul's warning to them is to stop reveling in "drunkenness, debauchery and licentiousness, quarreling and jealousy." But instead, to put on the armor of light as required by the Lord Jesus Christ. Those admonitions remind me of an Adult Ed Class last August when we watched a TheoED video of a speaker who talked on his "journey of faith." He referred to the old Shaker song, "Simple Gifts."

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning, we come 'round right."

The video speaker's comments reminded me of my own journey of faith which started as a child, based on what I was taught by my Sunday School teachers in my little Methodist Church in farmtown Ohio. When I went to university, I began to wonder and have doubts about some of what I had been taught. I tried to stay faithful. Over time, after Mary Ann and I were married and had our two sons, my beliefs continued to change based on my life experience, Bible study, singing religious texts in choir, and what I was learning from my ministers and Christian friends and others. Having served three times on Sessions in two different Presbyterian churches also was spiritually enlightening, but still with lingering doubts, even though the Presbyterian Book of Order then said that Session members were to be "blameless in life (!)." And my faith kept changing. But I held tight to what we say every Sunday in Worship: "... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Most Christians experience faith journeys that grow, develop, and usually deepen over the years. We also "turn, turn, turn, until by turning, we come 'round right." Advent always comes, and our faith is renewed by the baby in the manger beckoning so WE can "come round right" and find ourselves "in the valley of love and delight."



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xUSI8bwnq_w

Wednesday, 12/3 by Stephen Wing

Matthew 24:36-44

"The Arrival of the Son of Man will take place in times like Noah's. Before the great flood everyone was carrying on as usual, having a good time right up to the day Noah boarded the ark. They knew nothing—until the flood hit and swept everything away." (Matthew 24:37-39, The Message)

"Surprise!" (part 1)

"Surprise!"

That's what greeted him when he opened the door of his home. It was his birthday. He didn't think anyone remembered. But there they were. Everyone with those silly pointy hats. Confetti flying. Laughter all around. And the Happy Birthday song sung mostly off key, people already having had too much to drink.

"You made it!" his friends slapped him on the back. "The Big 3-7!"

"Yeah," another said, "we were going to have a pony sing you the Happy Birthday song, but he couldn't do it because he was a little hoarse." Everyone groaned.

"God bless you, brother," his sister said with a hug. She was the religious one in the family. Him, not so much. All that worship stuff never made much sense to him. So he ignored it. Ignored anything to do with God. He just smiled and said, "Thanks, sis."

At that moment, the day celebrating his entering the world 37 years ago, he flowed onto the floor like he was being poured out of a bottle, suffering a massive stroke and dying.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLIFsuX0iTc&list=RDyLIFsuX0iTc&start_radio=1

Thursday, 12/4 by Nelson Townsend

Isaiah 11:1-10

A Green Shoot from Jesse's Stump

11 1-5 A green Shoot will sprout from Jesse's stump,
from his roots a budding Branch.

The life-giving Spirit of God will hover over him,
the Spirit that brings wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit that gives direction and builds strength,
the Spirit that instills knowledge and Fear-of-God.
Fear-of-God

will be all his joy and delight.
He won't judge by appearances,
won't decide on the basis of hearsay.

He'll judge the needy by what is right,
render decisions on earth's poor with justice.
His words will bring everyone to awed attention.

A mere breath from his lips will topple the wicked.
Each morning he'll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots,
and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.

A Living Knowledge of God

6-9 The wolf will romp with the lamb,
the leopard sleep with the kid.

Calf and lion will eat from the same trough,
and a little child will tend them.

Cow and bear will graze the same pasture,
their calves and cubs grow up together,
and the lion eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child will crawl over rattlesnake dens,
the toddler stick his hand down the hole of a serpent.

Neither animal nor human will hurt or kill
on my holy mountain.

The whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive,
a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide.

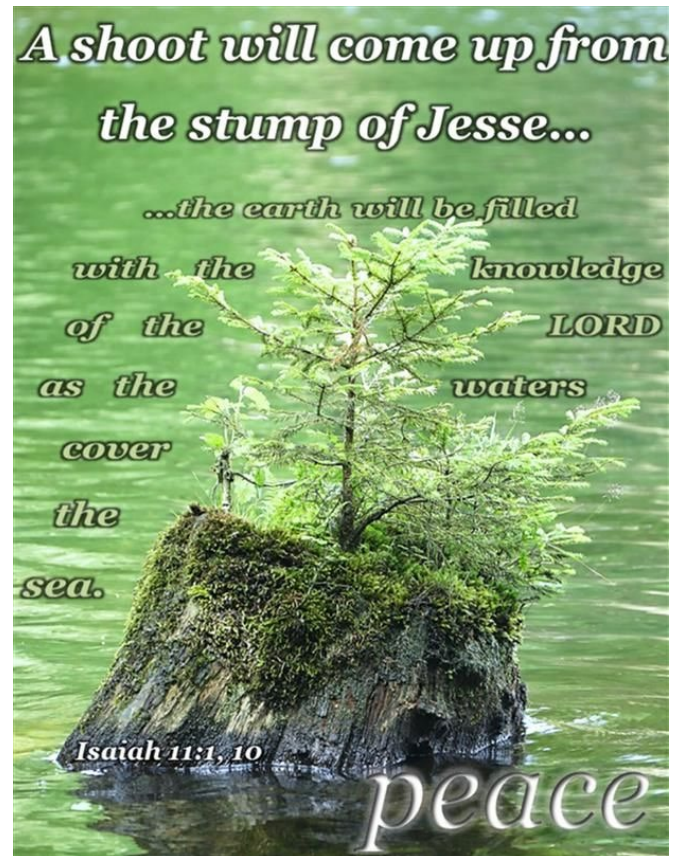
* * *

10 On that day, Jesse's Root will be raised high, posted as a rallying banner for the peoples. The nations will all come to him. His headquarters will be glorious.

* * *

Isaiah 11:1-10 can be divided into three parts: first the promise and description of the Messiah, second the vision of God's Holy Mountain, and last the expectation of a world united by the Messiah.

The first section presents a powerful prophecy about the coming Messiah, who we know as Jesus Christ. This Messiah will emerge from the lineage of Jesse, who was the father of King David. There were 42 generations between David and Jesus. Imagine, keeping hope alive for 1,000 years! Imagine how many descendants Jesse, the father of seven sons and two daughters, had!



Isaiah correctly predicts that Jesus will be filled with wisdom and understanding, counsel and power, and knowledge and Respect for God.

In The Message, verse 5 is rendered, “Each morning he’ll pull on sturdy work clothes and boots and build righteousness and faithfulness in the land.” In the first section, I noticed similarities with Micah 6:8, “Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.” That is an example that we can follow!

The second section describes a realm where the Knowledge of God will be present in all beings – people and animals alike. In this realm, natural enemies will rest together and eat the same food. How can this be? Coming to a place of trust and respect with former enemies is not quick or easy. It could take another 1,000 years! I was contemplating this section while Pastor Karen preached on the Parable of the Sower; and I began pondering the spiritual qualities of the wolf, leopard, lion, bear, and serpent. How are they similar to the rocky places, the hard path, and the thorns? Isaiah is saying we will live as neighbors, in harmony, with animals and people who have sought to bring harm to us and whom we have sought to dominate.

Who are the wolves, leopards, and lions today? In these days as we anticipate the celebration of God-With-Us, how will you make peace with them? What are you hoping for?

As Christians we must follow the example of Christ: making peace, welcoming the outsider, and trusting in God.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me a heart full of wisdom and understanding. Grant me strength to follow your guidance with patience and perseverance.
May it be so.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UV_BxODuu8

Friday, 12/5 by Karen Wright

Psalm 72:1–17

A King Whose Justice Stands Like the Mountains

In Celtic spirituality, mountains are sacred places that speak of God's strength and steadfastness. Their enduring presence reminds us of the constancy of divine love—unmoved by time or turmoil. The ancient Celts often called such places "thin places," where heaven and earth seem to meet.

Psalm 72 is a coronation song—a prayer for a ruler who will reflect the justice and mercy of God. The psalmist imagines a world where even "the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness." During Advent, we long for that same meeting—the coming of Christ, God-with-us. Psalm 72 gives voice to this hope: for a King who will defend the poor, deliver the needy, and bring peace that stretches "from sea to sea." The justice of this King, like the mountains, will not erode. It will stand firm and steady amid the shifting landscapes of human power.

As we wait for Christ's coming, may we find in the mountains—real or imagined—a reminder of the One whose reign is righteous, whose mercy endures, and whose peace is sure.

Prayer:

Steadfast God,

As mountains rise strong and sure,

let Your justice stand firm in our world and in our hearts.

Make us instruments of Your peace

until Your kingdom of righteousness fills the earth.

Amen.



**May He come down like rain
upon the mown grass, like
showers that water the earth.**

Psalm 72:6

Knowing-Jesus.com

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcVV5cwt5IE>

Saturday, 12/6 by Kevin Johnson

Psalm 72:18–19 (KJV)

Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.

And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen.

Recently, my wife Cheryl, our daughter Katie, and I faced one of the hardest seasons of our lives. I went through a long, painful hospitalization—times when the doctors were not sure I would make it. Yet, through it all, we were never alone. By God’s grace, I am now steadily recovering.

Coming through such an experience changes you. I may regain my physical strength, but I’ve learned how fragile and precious life truly is. Sometimes terrible things happen for no reason at all. Yet even in the midst of suffering, one truth remains: God is LOVE.

That love surrounded us in countless ways. Our church family covered us in cards, calls, visits, meals, prayers, and kindness. Love!

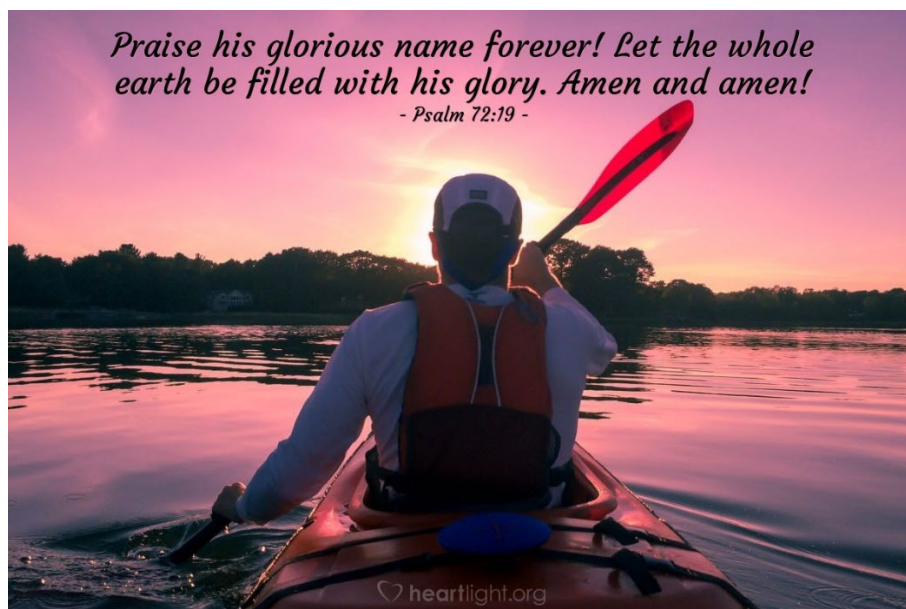
Doctors, nurses, and therapists cared with compassion beyond their duties. Love!

One of the top orthopedic surgeons at KU even spent an evening building a special bed with a frame for contraction to ease my pain. True compassion. Love!

We have been truly blessed—with LOVE.

God is LOVE.

Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen and Amen!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tH2uZKFVMNs>

Sunday, 12/7 by Cindy Schendel

Romans 15:4-13

4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed. 9 and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name.

10 Again, it says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people."

11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him."

12 And again Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope.

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."



This passage is about unity and hope, two attitudes Paul is calling Christians to adopt along with their Jewish brothers and sisters. The home churches in Rome at that time were a mix of Jews and Gentiles (who came from many pagan religions), a sharp departure from their previous firm separation. We can imagine the many disagreements about how Christians should worship God, whether Jewish law should be followed by Jewish Christians and/or Gentile Christians, what foods should or should not be eaten and when, etc. Paul's letters document many of these conflicts. But he is telling us here that our charge as followers of Christ is not to observe rigid rules of behavior but to love each other as Christ loves us all, and to glorify God as a unified church. We are to "accept one another...just as Christ accepted you".

Fast forward to present day Johnson County, KS. There are so many flavors of Christianity we can't count them. The different denominations were usually begun over some disagreement about how to interpret scripture, how to practice our faith, who should be admitted to the church. We are a contentious people and have certainly failed to follow Paul's instructions! As some Christians have merged their faith with politics the divisions between us have grown even wider.

God knows we can't overcome our differences on our own, we need "endurance and encouragement" from the Holy Spirit to let those differences sit next to us, not between us. Only then can we glorify God with "one mind and one voice". Let's pray to open our hearts to ALL of our fellow Christians this advent season as we prepare to welcome the One who saved us all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYL69BZJWH4>

Monday, 12/8 by Carrie DeVries

Matthew 3:1-12

Thunder in the Desert!

3 1-2 While Jesus was living in the Galilean hills, John, called “the Baptizer,” was preaching in the desert country of Judea. His message was simple and austere, like his desert surroundings: “Change your life. God’s kingdom is here.”

3 John and his message were authorized by Isaiah’s prophecy:

Thunder in the desert!

Prepare for God’s arrival!

Make the road smooth and straight!

4-6 John dressed in a camel-hair habit tied at the waist by a leather strap. He lived on a diet of locusts and wild field honey. People poured out of Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jordanian countryside to hear and see him in action. There at the Jordan River those who came to confess their sins were baptized into a changed life.

7-10 When John realized that a lot of Pharisees and Sadducees were showing up for a baptismal experience because it was becoming the popular thing to do, he exploded: “Brood of snakes! What do you think you’re doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to make any difference? It’s your life that must change, not your skin! And don’t think you can pull rank by claiming Abraham as father. Being a descendant of Abraham is neither here nor there. Descendants of Abraham are a dime a dozen. What counts is your life. Is it green and flourishing? Because if it’s deadwood, it goes on the fire.

11-12 “I’m baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom life. The real action comes next: The main character in this drama—compared to him I’m a mere stagehand—will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He’s going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He’ll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he’ll put out with the trash to be burned.”



I always picture John the Baptist looking a little like a big neanderthal - messy hair, frazzled beard, animal fur to cover the essentials, and a bit crazed in the eyes. But as I read this scripture, my mental image of him becomes smaller, simpler, and more gentle. He is speaking to the people who have come to him. People not only sought him out but chose to be baptized because they believed in the message God was bringing to them *through* John the Baptist. This person now looks more like someone people trust, understand, and feel safe to be near. Someone they believe to be free of an agenda to profit from their belief because he lives off the land. Someone who cares enough to be not silent, but to inform and prepare us to be blessed and loved beyond measure.

What I loved most is how he called out the Saddus... for trying to cheat. Following the herd for the sake of status. But he TAUGHT them. It’s not about the appearance; it’s about the follow through. It’s about shedding the snakeskin and becoming someone who belongs among friends. Changing your life and taking a direction being put in front of us all. LIVING into the change.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79mb4ZxrZFk>

Tuesday, 12/9 by Nancy Kalesz

Isaiah 35:1–10

Seeking a Prophet to Save Us

I chose passages from Isaiah purposely because I have been seeking a prophet myself for several years now. I could easily get off by telling you to read the scriptures and figure it out for yourself, but that is not what these devotions are about. These words, I think, are about how we apply them to our living with and understanding of passages that have carried God's people from creation to current times ... and because God so loves the world, God sent the greatest prophet of all, Jesus, to save the world and call us back into the right relationship between creator and creation.



When humans get themselves in a mess, we look for a way out in our search for relief. The words in today's scripture were written to people in exile, taken from the "promised land" to Babylon and held in exile for 70 years. The words in Isaiah, chapter 35, carry the promise of reconciliation with God, and restoration of getting back to the "promised land" and the redemption of the people by their God. It tells them/us that the road back to reconciliation is the promise of God with us. Just think of being exiled and held in captivity from your home for 70 years.

In these 10 verses of chapter 35 from the prophet Isaiah, we read, "Save us Lord," a plea for the reclaiming of a people who have wandered away from their faith. "God is coming" and you shall be restored to the land given to your forefathers, and God will show you the way, the prophet tells them. Restored to the promised land and redeemed by acts of God on your pathway back.

There will be water to refresh you, "streams in the desert" says the prophet and the desert will have flowers blooming abundantly. (Water and flowers in the desert? Hard to imagine.) No harm shall come to the people from animals seeking their prey and a highway will show them the way. Reclaimed by God — Restored to the promised land. Redeemed by God — forgiven.

Rejoicing for a return to a right relationship and gather together as "the people of God" once more. While this seems evident in the prophecy of Isaiah 35, the words from the prophet Micah lay out for God's people the conditions for right living in the contrast between people and God.

Micah 6:8

God has told you, O mortals, what is good and what the Lord requires of you. To do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with your God. So maybe just crying out for a prophet is a more difficult task than just asking, expecting, and taking what comes as our due.

God says: I will, reclaim, restore, redeem my people. These words are written that we might know that our way back is possible, and the words of Micah are the conditions we must live by "to seal the deal."

Keep on calling out for a prophet. Don't expect the conditions to be easy. Stop, look, and listen for words and actions that are around us.

Be a prophet yourself to those who yearn for guidance on the highway to the "promised land" and "a little child shall lead them," and He has, and He will. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51pr30nnFLA>

Wednesday, 12/10 by Eileen Thomson

Psalm 146: 5-10

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

This is undoubtedly a Psalm of Praise! It claims God as a Creator of heaven and earth, God as a Protector watching over the stranger and the needy. God as a Provider giving food to the hungry, sight to the blind, God as an Arbitrator of Justice, lifting up the oppressed and just as important, God as Reigning Forever.

I have often felt that having faith in such a benevolent God has given me much comfort and truly enriched my life. Faith challenges me to care for others, to be fair minded and to act in ways that help provide for those in need. Faith also gives comfort in challenging times, reminding me that I am not alone, that discouragement need not overwhelm me. Keeping the faith is not always easy but always important.

As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, let's also be like the Psalmist, and celebrate our loving and ever-present God.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RgaAqIAZAI>

Thursday, 12/11 by Karen Wright

Luke 1:46-55

Standing at the Threshold of God's Turning
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and
lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich
away empty.

Mary's song—the Magnificat—is a bold declaration of
faith, sung by a young woman on the margins who dares
to believe that God is about to turn the world upside
down. Her words echo the voices of other women in
Scripture before her:

- Miriam, who sang after crossing the Red Sea,
rejoicing that God had freed her people from Pharaoh's oppression
- Hannah, who lifted her voice when God turned her barrenness into blessing and promised that her
child would serve God
-

Mary's song is one of courageous faith—a song of reversal. The proud are scattered, the lowly lifted, the
hungry filled, the powerful humbled. Mary stands between what is and what is yet to come. She carries both
promise and uncertainty, joy and fear. Her voice bridges the old world and the new one God is about to bring
forth.

In Advent, we are invited to stand in that same place, to boldly declare that God will turn the world upside
down. The hymn Cantic of the Turning reminds us of Mary's song:

"Though the nations rage from age to age, we remember who holds us fast.

God's mercy must deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp."

We are called to sing like Mary of a God still at work, still engaged in a great reversal of grace.

Prayer:

God of Reversals,

Like Mary, we stand at the threshold of your promise,
holding both hope and uncertainty.

Make us bold in our faith.

Let us be voices that bridge what is and what is yet to come.

We wait. We hope. We sing.

Amen.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcJRX946AGg>

Friday, 12/12 by Gene Wilson

Isaiah 12:2-6

Those of us who sing in Chancel Choir understand that our purpose is to be worship leaders through our melodies and the words of the anthems we sing. Pastor Karen has preached on that in her series on SEW when she focused on the central role music plays in our GCPC Community worship. Her sermon caused me to reflect on all the anthems I have sung that have deeply touched me in my own soul and occasionally brought tears and a lump in my throat during an anthem because that anthem has moved me in a very special way. My guess is that ALL who have sung in a choir have had that same "God Moment." My reflection also caused me to remember that I have been singing in an organized church choir since my elementary school and that goes back nearly 80 years! All those anthems we have offered over those years have helped to deepen my faith as an essential way to internalize the Scriptures.

Today's Scripture contains words that have been put into an anthem titled: "The Song of Isaiah." Isaiah saw the coming of the Savior centuries before Jesus' birth and his words have significant meaning for us during this Advent season:

"Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in Him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and He will be my Savior. Make His deeds known among the peoples; See that they remember that His Name is exalted. Sing the praises of the Lord, for He has done great things, and this is known in all the world. Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy, for the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel..."

This anthem is sung with the participation of the congregation when we sing: "Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in Him and not be afraid." Hopefully, all members of the GCPC community also have had that same deep spiritual response at one time or another when we have put music to Scripture. This one is particularly reassuring us that God IS our stronghold and our sure defense when we trust in Him and not be afraid.

Because Jesus, the Great One, is coming to be in "the midst of us."



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2rhpiw9ZJ4>

Saturday, 12/13 by Karen Wright

Zephaniah 3:14-20

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.

My core memory associated with this text is from the Great Vigil of Easter when I was serving in Austin, Texas. The Great Vigil is held on Holy Saturday, and the church where I served celebrated it in a deeply participatory way.

One year, this particular text was signed by a woman in the congregation who was deaf. I remember the sanctuary being completely still and silent, mesmerized by her graceful motions. You could feel the congregation leaning in to hear the word of God speak in the silence. As she finished, there was a pause as everyone soaked up the presence of God.

In Advent we are reminded that the coming Christ child is Emmanuel, God with us. That God is in our midst—God who rejoices over us and renews us. May we all take moments of silence to wait for God to speak, for God to renew us in God's love. May we trust defiantly in the one who has promised to be with us through all things and who continues to renew and restore us in God's love.

Prayer:

Emmanuel, God with us,

In the silence, speak to us. In the stillness, renew us.

You rejoice over us with singing. You promise to be with us through all things. Help us wait with open hearts, trusting defiantly in your restoring love.

Come, Lord Jesus. Dwell among us.

Amen.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zwOOI7GM1A>

Sunday, 12/14 by Barbara Douglas

Philippians 4:4-7

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

This passage always reminds me of a song sung in a round: “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say Rejoice. Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say Rejoice. Rejoice, rejoice and again I say rejoice. Rejoice, rejoice and again I say rejoice!” Sung over and over with however many sections of people singing. I love this sentiment. There are always smiles and joyful hearts when singing it!



But how do we “rejoice always” no matter what the circumstances? Paul, the writer of the letter to the Philippians was in jail at the time of writing this letter. How does he still “rejoice” and admonish others to continue to do so? The power comes from faith that the Lord is there no matter what is happening in life. I am reminded how hard red winter wheat is grown. Farmers plant wheat in early fall. It emerges bright green looking like a beautiful carpet of grass. Then as weather cools and winter approaches, it looks like it is dying back to brown earth. But it is not dying at all. Rather it is lying dormant just beneath the ground. It continues to be fed nutrients and moisture from winter snow and cold. Then, in the spring it reemerges, pushing through the brown earth to grow into the strong brown stalks that will eventually be harvested to provide bread for us. Even in its dormancy, God is working to make it strong and flourish.

How can we respond in our “dormant” times? We all have them. God doesn’t stop being there for us when we are going through low periods in life. No indeed! He is always there to nourish us and help us see our light again. So, what can we do? We can Rejoice always!

Bring our petitions to Him even if we feel stuck in our circumstances. He hasn’t moved away but will ALWAYS be available. He will continue to bring His peace and guard our hearts in Jesus Christ. So, REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS, AND AGAIN REJOICE!

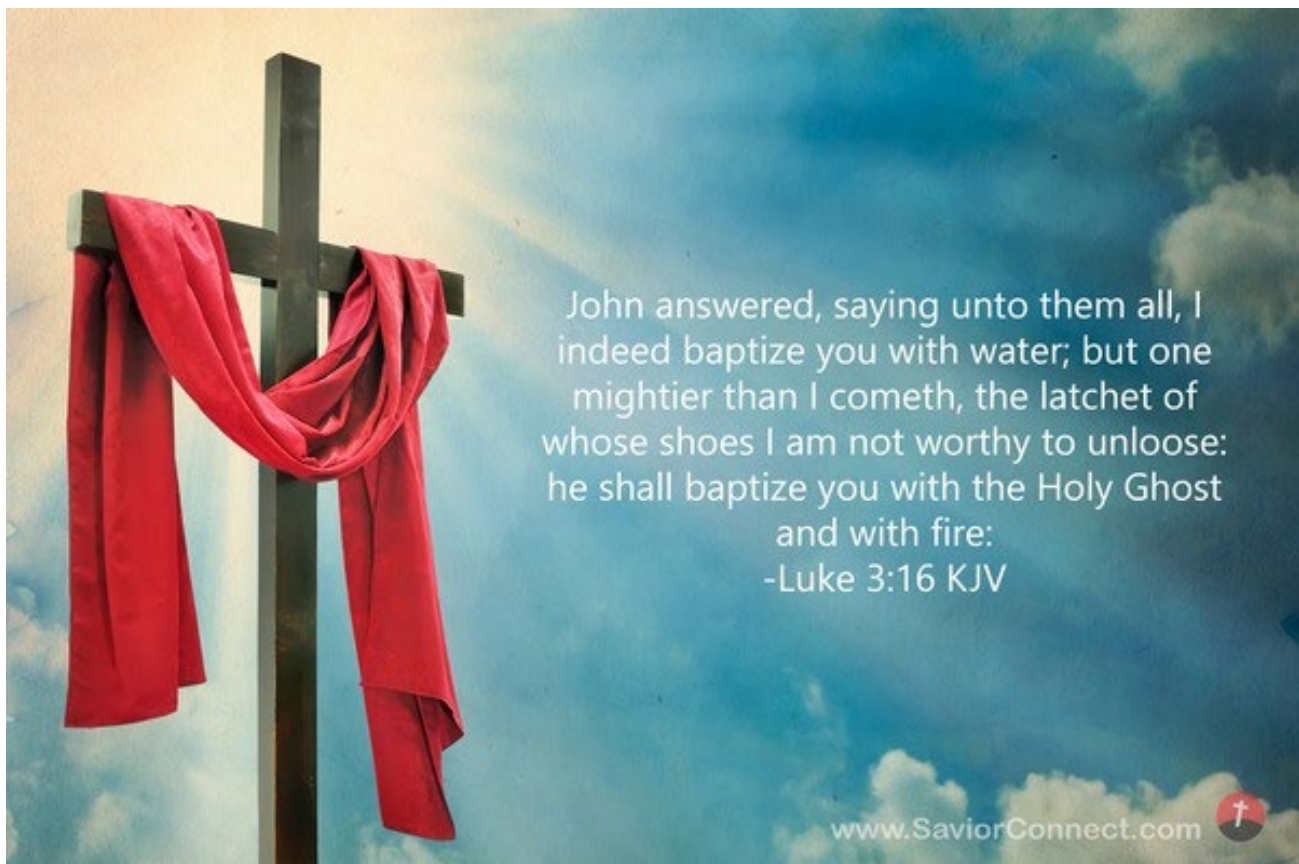
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMcIYOLIXxk>

Monday, 12/15 by Harold Frye

Luke 3:16 "...and I am not good enough even to untie his sandals."

Having raised 3 sons, all who played ice hockey for a combined period of 20 years, I've had my experience tying their skates. If you're not familiar with hockey skates, the degree of tightness is key to successful skating. Young players are unable to pull their laces tight enough until at least 10 or 11 years old and sometimes even older.. And, tying skates is only half the job. When the game or practice ends, laces have to be loosened to be able to slip the foot out of the skate boot. For a few years, I volunteered to help get players ready to go on the ice for league eval periods. During those sessions, it wasn't just one skater whose laces needed to be tightened...there were several.

John the Baptist claims that he is unworthy to untie Christ's sandals. That was a duty reserved for a slave which lets us know that John thought of himself lower even beyond a slave. This was the Son of God, not just a mortal being. The slave would be in a submissive position, down on a knee. Head bowed, the slave loosened the sandals' thongs and, usually, prepare to wash the dust from the feet. At another time, Jesus demonstrated his subservience by washing the feet of the disciples. Untying sandals was an almost ritualistic act. Something like hockey skates.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=014BxAbFcXA>

Tuesday, 12/16 by Barbara Douglas

Micah 5:2-5a

2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. 4 He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. 5a And he will be their peace.”

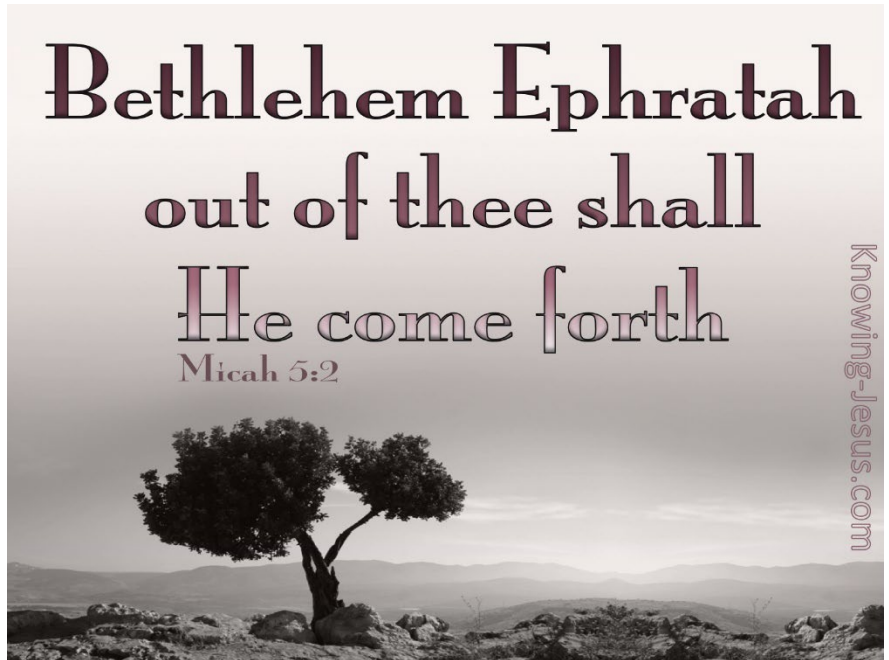
The prophet Micah was a contemporary of the prophets Hosea and Isaiah some 700 years before the birth of Christ. He is writing to the people of Israel (the northern kingdom) and of Judah (the southern kingdom). Much of this book is about predicting the destruction and judgement of God on Israel and Judah. However, it also laced with the power of God’s love and salvation of the world. Predicting the coming of the “ruler over Israel”, the Savior and shepherd Jesus. A true assurance of God’s continuing presence.

Why was Bethlehem chosen as the birthplace of Jesus? It was just a small town about six miles south of Jerusalem. A fairly insignificant town at the time. Just along the trade route but small and quiet. God’s choice of this birthplace might seem odd and simple. But God does work in mysterious ways sometimes.

The Israelites would certainly have known the significance of this “small town” as it is known as one of the oldest towns in Palestine. Jewish history is steeped in the tradition of this quaint little town. In Genesis, Jacob’s wife is buried there. Ruth found her kinsman redeemer in Boaz. And their son Obed was in the lineage line of David and thus to Jesus. Bethlehem, then, was not as insignificant a place as one might think.

“Bethlehem” means “house of bread”. Bread held great significance in ancient Bible times. It was a staple of the diet and a means of survival. Jesus stated He was the “bread of life” and all that came to him would not hunger or thirst. Now it makes sense that Jesus, our bread of life would be born in a place that means “house of bread”. Jesus did come to be our shepherd and bring us the strength of the Lord.

His greatness has reached to the ends of the earth. We can always rest in His peace. May it be so. Amen.

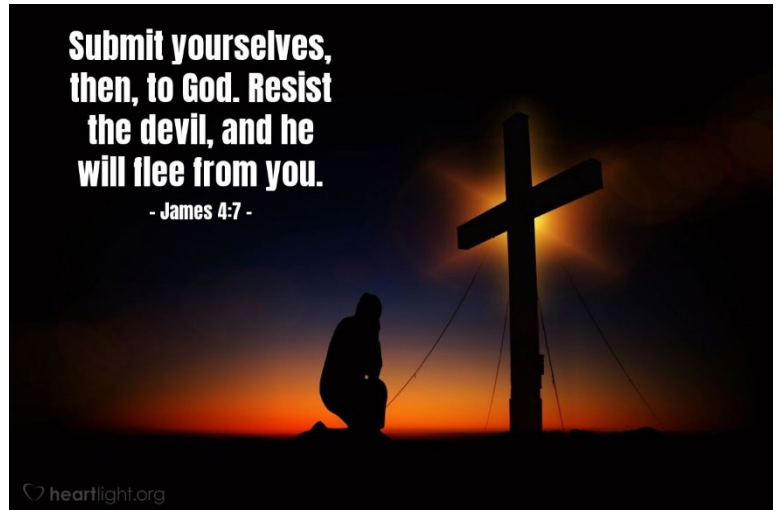


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71eBSK0Z2ww>

Wednesday, 12/17 by Cheryl Johnson

James 4:7-10

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.[b] 9 Brothers and sisters, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! 10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.



The key word in this passage is patient. James is talking about patiently waiting for the Second Coming. I don't know about you, but I am not as concerned about when that's going to happen now (though I do remember some earnest conversations about this when I was in college back in the '70s!). But patiently waiting for something is not easy. Not when you're a youngster waiting for Christmas to come so you can open presents and not when you are older and waiting for something that's important to you.

Kevin and I have had some lessons in patience the last few months. I'm a list-maker and when I'm confronted with a problem, I make a list of things that need to be done to take care of it. Then I start getting things done and crossed off my list. When there's nothing that can be done except wait for some time to pass and the body to have time to heal itself, it's hard. We had to take one day at a time.

One thing that really helped me was something Jan Cummings shared in Bible study last year. Every day, she finds three things for which to be thankful. So, as I was driving to the hospital at 6:30 am every morning to try to be there when the doctors made their rounds, I'd be thankful for the beautiful sunrise. During the day, I'd be thankful for a doctor who took the time to explain a decision or a caring friend who walked my dog. And I'd be thankful for seeing the moon on my drive home in the evening.

I found that opening my eyes to see the good things that were still happening helped me be patient while waiting for the desired outcome.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnF69Rq1Bno>

Thursday, 12/18 by Stephen Wing

Matthew 11:2-11

"I'm sending my prophet ahead of you, to make the road smooth for you." (Matthew 11:10, The Message)

"Surprise!" (part 2)

He couldn't say he hadn't been warned. His little sister had talked to him. She wasn't harsh or rabid in her approach. She was trying to prepare him for the inevitable, He just didn't think it would be this soon.

He had argued with her about the hereafter. She told him stories of "the more", as she called heaven. She made a promising case for what she believed. But he was sure, he had replied, that "this is all there is: 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!'" He just wasn't prepared for that to happen on his 37th birthday.

"Prepared." That was the word that caught fire in his mind as he died. What did it mean? Why was it suddenly such an important word, he wondered in that blink-of-an-eye moment of his death?

"Preparation is everything," he would tell his employees repeatedly. Be ready for anything! In his life he was. But at this moment of his death he suddenly felt completely unprepared.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3dm0k7giBI>

Friday, 12/19 by Nancy Kalesz

Isaiah 7:10–16

Learning to Be a Prophet

A modern “story” from me to you ...

Once upon a time, a man, seeking to learn how to be a prophet, set out on a journey. He was seeking to be a prophet because his community was in “such a mess.”

“Surely,” said the man, “I will go out and learn how to be a prophet — it can’t be that hard!” All I have to do is tell people to “cut out” all this “nonsense” and tell them if they want to get this mess over and done with to just “cut it out or God will smite you!”

So, the man left his community and began his journey toward the goal of becoming a good prophet. At the end of each day after settling arguments and dodging things being thrown at him, he was very discouraged. Each night he spent most of his rest time tossing and turning on hard rocky ground, hoping that the coming day would provide someone with positive things to prophesy about. At daybreak, he got up and started his way over the rocky road that hurt his feet and gave him a very sour opinion of the world. “I’m just going to tell the next place I find in a mess to just stop it.” However, much to his surprise, on that beautiful morning, the man met a fellow traveler. He was a young man with a very positive disposition.

“What are you so happy about today?” demanded the prophet, as he saw the young man being helpful and kind to the people they encountered. “Can’t you see these people are in a terrible mess and very angry? I’m just going to tell them to cut it out, or God will smite them,” he said.

“Yes, I know. You tried that yesterday and almost got stoned to death,” said the young man. “So, how’s that working for you?”

“Aw, shucks” the prophet to be answered, “this is very hard work, and I thought just saying, ‘cut it out,’ would put the fear of God in them and they would straighten up.

“Seems like it’s not working very good for you,” said the man, “Maybe you should try a different approach.”

“Like what?” the would-be prophet asked. “I’m going to tell them they are all going to hell! So, there!” and he stomped off and fell in a bunch of thorn bushes.

Later, after pulling the would be prophet out of the bushes and picking the thorns out of his arms and legs, the young man suggested again, “Perhaps you could approach these so-called mean people with a few words of kindness and a message from God that ‘Love is all you need.’”

“Oh,” said the to be prophet, “ I thought that was only for the Beatles, and they aren’t prophets anyway, and it’s just a song.”

“Yeah,” said the young man, “so is ‘God So Loved the World.’ That’s a good song too.”

“Aw, shucks,” said the to be prophet again.

“Let’s try this,” said the man. “Every morning, we will get up and sing praises to God. We will be refreshed on our journey by following the path known as ‘The Way.’” And so they did.

Each morning, the young man was positive and kind to all they encountered and the hope to be prophet followed his method, making the path they were on much more productive.

To the soon to be prophet, the man said, “God is love. God cares about all of you! And instead of ‘cut it out or God will smite you all,’ tell them that!” So, the to be prophet tried to be positive and was occasionally.

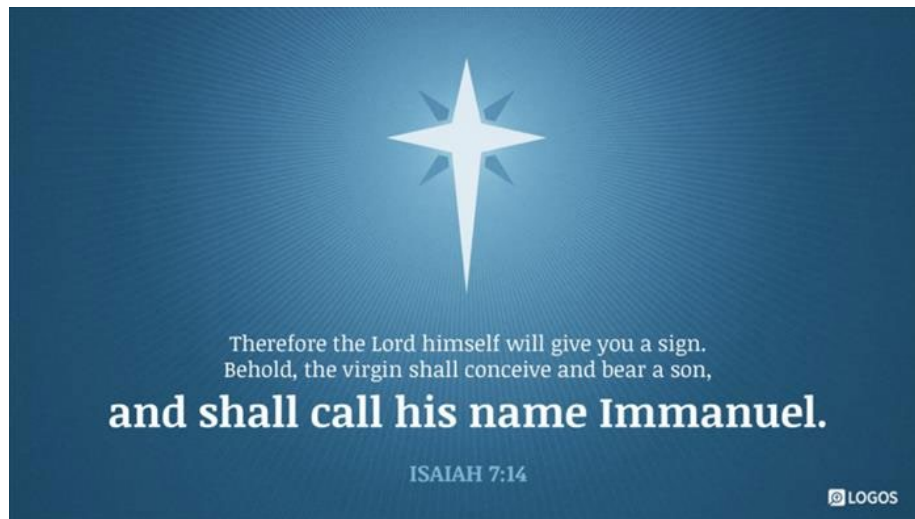
As the journey continued for many months, the to be prophet learned from the young man how to share God’s love — even when they got run out of town and to complain less and less about how hard the journey to full prophethood really was.

Late in the year, the two men entered a town where conflict had broken out right on the road they were traveling. The to be prophet was perplexed, thinking he was “sick and tired” of being “sick and tired.” He looked around for his friend and thought he was lost, but ahead, before him, stood the young man. “This way,” he called out. “Follow me!”

As they sat under the stars that night in quiet contemplation, the prophet to be said, “I see that your journey with me is over as we are near your destination. Pray, tell me young man, what is your name?” And he answered, “They call me ‘The Way — The Truth — The Life.’ Come, follow me.”

Be a prophet for yourself and for others as you meet them on (or off) “The Way.”

Remember, being a prophet is hard work and dangerous if they throw rocks at you — But be not afraid. God is with you, through it all.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw5g9kt_ANA

Saturday, 12/20 by Kevin Johnson

Psalm 80:1-7

80 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength and come and save us. 3 Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. 4 O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? 5 Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. 6 Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. 7 Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. 8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.

The psalmist cries out from a place of deep sorrow and loss, pleading for God to “turn” the hearts of His people so that His face might shine upon them once again.

This turning is not something God forces upon us—it is something we must choose. God’s love is constant, but we must reorient ourselves toward Him to experience it fully.

When we pray for God’s help, we are really asking for the strength to turn our hearts back toward His love and grace—to align our desires with His will. It is in this turning that restoration begins.

Our true home is found in God, living each day within the light of His love.
God is LOVE.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gao0xFgzbeA>

Sunday, 12/21 by Emily Dixon

Psalm 80:17–19 (NRSVue)

"But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name.

Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved."

As much as I love to sing the song on Christmas Eve, Advent is not a SILENT NIGHT. Not really. The Season of Waiting is full of noise: cough-drop-wrapper rustling, little hands digging into worship bags, kids whisper-shouting from the pews, everyone holding their breath as advent wreath candles tip just a little too far, bells and chimes ringing, so much incredible music, wet-eyed congregation members singing their favorite carols, and all with the intensity of this time of year

buzzing in our brains: Did I remember to order the Christmas cards? I promised myself last year we'd scale back, but I doubled down instead! The tracking on the last gift gets it here just in time if there's no weather delays...

And if you can still hear through all of that, it's the sound the psalmist made, crying out in Psalm 80:

"Restore us, God. Let your face shine."

That's not a whisper. All is NOT calm in that petition. It's a plea. It's a shout in the dark from someone who still believes the light will come. Someone who is tired but hasn't given up.

They ask for God's hand to be upon "the one at your right hand", which in their context, meant the chosen king. But we're Advent people. We know that baby in the manger is the one God will strengthen. Not because he has power over others, but because he'll grow up to love so hard it breaks the world open.

"Give us life," the psalmist says. And when I think what kind of life the psalmist refers to, I can't help but see a kiddo proudly bringing a glitter-covered craft home, or when a teenager stays to help clean up after the Christmas Bell concert, or when seasoned eyes well-up during "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," from having sung it through more advents than we've known.

That's life. That's holy.

And still, through the hallowed noise of Advent, there is so more to ask for beyond the shiny packages under the tree and the warm baked goods wafting from the oven.

We don't just want comfort; we want restoration. Not just to feel better, we want to be transformed. Not just to light a candle, but to BE A LIGHT in a world that too often dims the brightness of the young, the poor, the marginalized, the tired.

So what if we, like the psalmist, dared to pray not just for ourselves, but for the world?

What if we lit our Advent candles like birthday candles AND protest signs, because we're longing for JOY and JUSTICE? What if we believed that God's shining face looks a lot like your neighbor's smile, your kiddo's curiosity, the stranger's inclusion, your own holy fire?

As our Advent season draws closer to THE BIG SHOW we've all been waiting for, let's be honest in our hope.

Let's cry out and sing out and maybe even color OUTside of the lines a little bit.

Let's say together: Restore us, O God. Let your face shine. And help us shine back. Amen.

Psalm 80

17 Let thy hand be upon
the man of thy right hand,
upon the son of man whom
thou madest strong for thyself.

18 So will we not
go back from thee:

quicken us,
and we will call upon thy name.

19 Turn us again,
O LORD God of hosts,
cause thy face to shine;
and we shall be saved.

"Amen"

Monday, 12/22 by Harold Frye

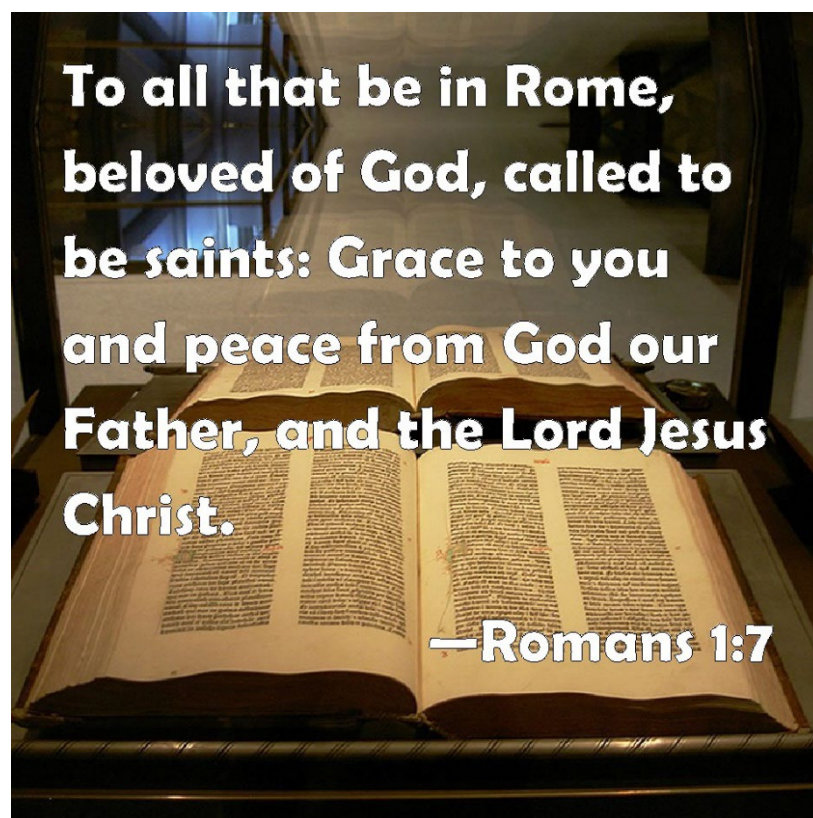
Romans 1:7 "This letter is to all of you in Rome."

MAIL CALL! Nothing was more important than when the Company Clerk announced that mail would be distributed to recipients. In 1969 in Saigon, we all cherished letters from home whether from parents, spouses, or girlfriends. My fiancé, knowing how important these letters were to my morale, wrote multiple letters and mailed them on different days. She sent notes and cards from her students which added to the bulk of the mail call. Of course, there was nothing like email or Facebook or Instagram or text messages or cellphones. My only voice contact during the year came from a long-distance phone call from the Saigon USO.

Paul's letter to followers in Rome were likely the greatest mail call of the times. He apologized that he was unable to visit them in person and hoped that his letter would give them encouragement as well as knowledge and information about the growing communities of Christian believers.

Compared to communication means available in the 21st century, those of 1969 were archaic. Not nearly as much, though, as in Paul's ministry a few thousand years ago.

MAIL CALL!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7Fj9fJbJh0>

Tuesday, 12/23 by Stephen Wing

Matthew 1:18-25

“They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for “God is with us”).” (Matthew 1:23, The Message)

“Surprise!” (part 3)

This is like a dream, he thought as he crumpled to the floor. Maybe that’s all this is, he quickly rationalized. I’ve just come down with narcolepsy, fallen asleep during my surprise party, and having this crazy dream.

Then a Voice like a whisper: “No.”

“No?”

“No; it’s not a dream. This is real. As real as it gets.”

“I thought life was real.”

“Life is just a preparation for what is most real.”

“So my sister was right: there’s more.”

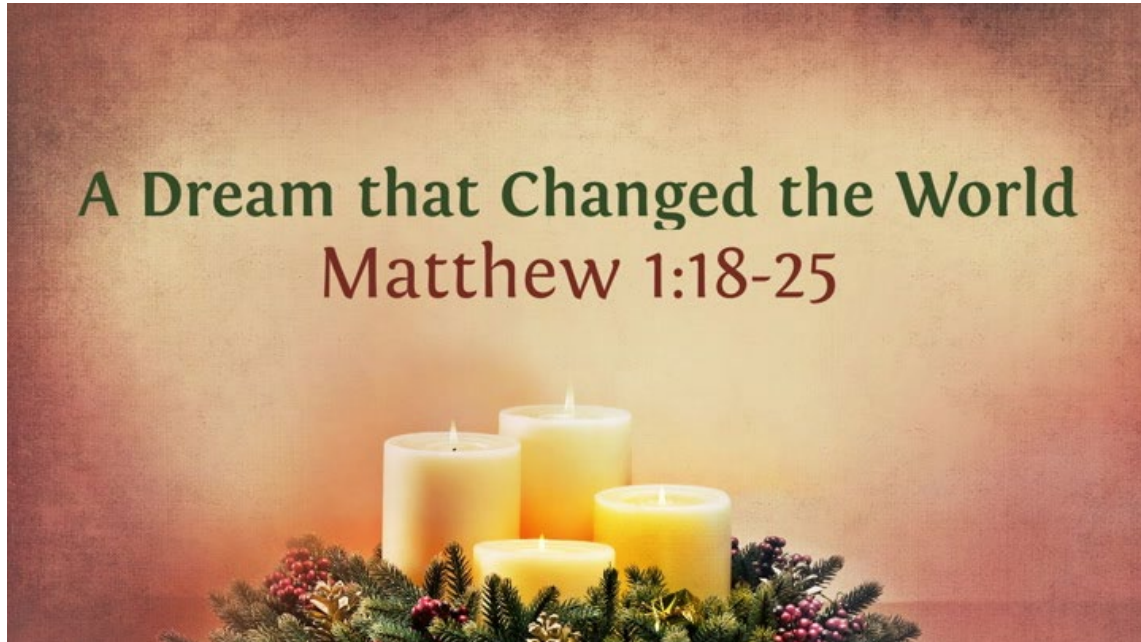
“There’s always more.”

“Then you must be...”

“Yes. I am Yes.”

“And you must be here for me now.”

“I have always been here for you now, in all your now’s.”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXu54Fvb5PI>

Wednesday, 12/24 Christmas Eve by Gene Wilson

Isaiah 9:2-7

Think of the Jewish people: As foretold by the Prophets, they eagerly expected a Great King would come to them and rescue them from their subservient poverty. And imagine Joseph, a carpenter in Nazareth with a nine-month pregnant wife, obligated to walk all the way to Jerusalem to be counted. There was no Uber, so he had to find a donkey for Mary to make that arduous trip. And think of Mary. We don't know her exact age, but we know she was young and about to deliver her first-born. But first, she had to make that trip to Jerusalem riding on the back of that donkey! And imagine Joseph's anxiety. There was no Travelocity or AirB&B to make appropriate reservations in advance, so he had to take his chances that somewhere could be found for Mary to deliver her baby when they got to their destination. Then, when they finally arrived in Jerusalem, the only place they could find to stay was in a stall in a back shed with the animals. In other words, this "King" that was promised by Isaiah was the epitome of humbleness. As Isaiah had said: "For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (And as a chorister, that brings memories of Handel's "Messiah," [adding music to Scripture] which we have sung during Advent many, many times!) Isaiah left out the part about riding all the way from Nazareth to Jerusalem on a donkey. It was God's plan: to deliver the Son of God in a barn!! Jesus was like us. But human AND divine. He came from very common circumstances to save us all! Maybe the message is that we, too, should remember our common, simple roots? Maybe we should seek simplicity in our lives? Maybe Christ's birth should remind us that salvation does not come from any great king, but from that child born in a manger? Maybe "HUMILITY" and Advent are very closely connected and the birth of that child over two Millennia ago should take us all back to that manger stall as we reflect on all of the blessings we have, not the least of which is the Salvation we have received through God's grace in the baby Jesus? On this Holy Night, let us all reflect on these thoughts and be grateful. Let our faith be strengthened by this magnificent story that we know so well. It represents the Ultimate Gift! Tonight, WE anticipate, and tomorrow we celebrate.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qLO6X-9jFuw>

Thursday, 12/25 Christmas Day by Barbara Douglas

Psalm 96

“Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise, he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns.’ The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.”

It is an interesting text for Christmas day. As we again celebrate the coming of the Christ Child it is fitting that we continue to remember the power and majesty of the Lord of all.

We do joyously sing to the Lord a new song. Our “new song” is the joy of the Savior being born in our world. God chose to have his son come into our world as fully human, yet fully divine. How do we not sing gloriously with worthy praise to the Lord of all life who made the heavens and the earth? Let the heavens and earth rejoice and sing with us this day.

God is good! God is good always!

Praise and glory be to Him who lives and reigns in heaven.

Amen.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCQ3ehcC15U>

Friday, 12/26 by Andrew Frye

Psalm 148

On a chilly fall night, the Cub Scouts gather around the campfire. The flames flicker, lighting up their young faces, and the stars sparkle in the clear night sky. For a moment, everyone is quiet. It's one of those rare times when you can just stop, breathe, and feel present. Moments like this remind me what Advent is really about: waiting, watching, and noticing the light that's already around us. Psalm 148 invites all of creation, from the mountains and trees to the animals and people, to praise the Lord. During Advent, that praise becomes a kind of song of waiting. We look for signs of God's presence in everyday things: the laughter of children, the warmth of community, and the stillness of a fall night. As a Scout leader, I see that sense of wonder through the Scouts' eyes. They're amazed by the sparks rising from the fire or the shapes of constellations above them. Advent calls us to rediscover that same sense of awe and to remember that God still brings light into unexpected places. When the world feels dark or rushed, the campfire reminds us of hope. Its light doesn't erase the night, but it shines just enough to remind us that morning is coming. As you reflect today, what "campfire" moments have helped you notice God's presence this season? How can you share that warmth and hope with others?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VIYwxqolaEc>

Saturday, 12/27 by Jane Knoche

Hebrews 2:10-18 NIV

In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

He says,

“I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”

13And again, “I will put my trust in him.”

And again, he says,

“Here am I, and the children God has given me.”



Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

I recall the excitement of going to our two-year Junior High in Gardner, Kansas. My school day was greatly changed, and I went to several different classrooms and had different teachers throughout the school day. When the sports season of football began, I joined the Pep Club and learned that our mascot was a Rambler [historical note, prior to 1971]. Our mascot’s depiction was a capital “R”. How simple for Junior High, huh? Our High School mascot was a Trailblazer. How could that be depicted? In the seventies? It was a covered wagon with oxen – Gardner calls itself ‘where the trails divide’ (the Oregon, Santa Fe, and California wagon trails separate into two trails outside town). Today, the High School mascot is depicted as long horn ox (leaving the wagon to your imagination).

My high school mascot came to mind in reading the verses above. In this case the mascot symbolized blazing the trail – taking a new path. I could see Jesus as the lead wagon bringing other wagons along with him. The other wagons were “the brothers & sisters” he identified with. Why not the wagon master? The wagon master is different than the lead wagon. Perhaps I placed God in that role.

The lead wagon blazed the trail and made the path for the other wagons. It took on the hard parts first – crossing the rivers, going up steep slopes and more dangerously coming down them. It wasn’t angels making the trail. It resonated with me that this is why Jesus was made like us – fully human, and why he was the leader. He blazed the path through suffering and temptation and provided a way for our atonement before God. He was and is the pioneer of our salvation! Thanks be to God!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MEnjhcU3hE>

Sunday, 12/28 by Stephen Wing

Matthew 2:13-23

Joseph obeyed. He got up, took the child and his mother under cover of darkness. They were out of town and well on their way by daylight. (Matthew 2:14, The Message)

“Surprise!” (part 4)

“I don’t deserve this,” he thought as, in one of his last conscious moments, he felt his shoulder and head hit the floor.

“Death?”

“You.”

“It’s not about ‘deserving.’ It’s about me being who I am.”

“Yes?”

“Yes; being Yes.”

“Can I see you?”

“Yes.”

As he died, he was seeing light. Not a blinding light, like in the Sunday School stories he had been told growing up. Not a light he had to shield or close his eyes to. Not a light at the end of a long tunnel, as he had read about in near death experiences. It was more like an artists sunset light. So many colors. So much horizon. Like watching the sunset while sitting alone on a warm, sandy beach, feeling good, finally whole. The partial sunlight slowly, slowly dipping out of reach, but leaving the most beautiful bloom of colors in its place. Yes.



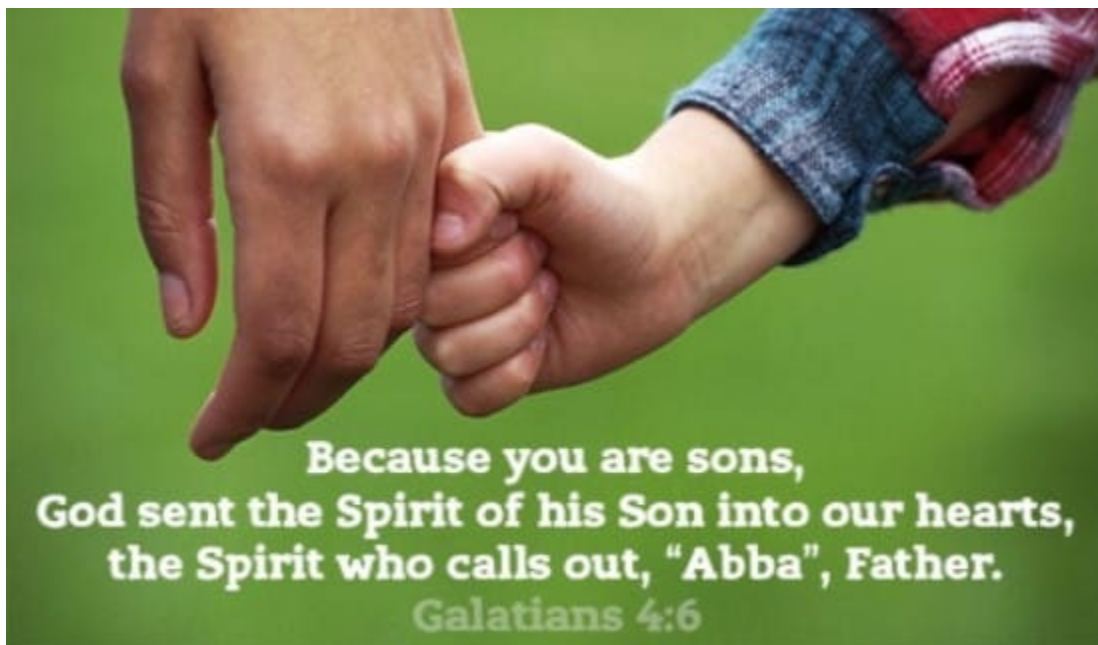
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgN35XWnPKg>

Monday, 12/29 by Harold Frye

Galatians 4:6 "Now that we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts."

For many years, I have taken interest in a regular article carried in the Kansas City Star. This piece features a child or youth who is hoping to be adopted. The photo always portrays the individual in the best possible pose. The words describe attributes that are positive and inviting to prospective adoptive families. I always wonder what might not be told. Is the youth successful in school? Is the child always happy and without misbehavior? Sometimes there are siblings who, of course, want to be adopted together. Then I wonder about potential adoptive parents. Will the match bring forth a lifetime of loving relationships? There has to be more to adoption beyond a single photo carried in one week's edition.

By our profession, we are God's children. He knows us intimately. When we accept him and become his children, our hearts are filled with the spirit of his own Son. It's a perfect match! Hallelujah!



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H28Hn7GI_2g

Tuesday, 12/30 by Don Wilson

Psalm 8

The Eighth Psalm is one of my very favorite psalms. Opening with praise to God for the vastness of Creation, one imagines the psalmist gazing at the night sky, viewing the stars. Awed by the wonder of it all. As we come to verse 3-4, the psalmist expresses humility in pondering with amazement God's gifting humankind with the status of being "a little lower than God" [NRSV]. Then verse 6 describes what I think of, as a "gift of partnership" with God in managing the creation. With partnership comes both honor and responsibility. In a partnership, the partner becomes invested in the outcome.

One can hardly read this psalm without reflecting on the creation stories in Genesis 1 & 2. Creation stories have been described as God's creating order out of chaos. One might view humankind's great gift referenced in Psalm 8 as being commissioned to continuing the work of preventing or overcoming chaos.

I believe God's purpose for us includes that we experience both the stewardship and enjoyment of the creation. Indeed there is much to enjoy! However If we focus only on enjoyment we risk overlooking the responsibility which includes our stewardship of the resources and the blessings of creation. Failing to be good stewards will dramatically affect the outcome, for others as well as ourselves.

The psalm concludes as it began, with words of praise: "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Praise and gratitude go hand in hand. In celebrating God with both praise and gratitude we will find inspiration and empowerment to live up to the responsibilities which God has entrusted to us!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPSv8vredVs>

Wednesday, 12/31 by Andrew Frye

Numbers 6:27 "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."(NKJV)

When I'm coaching hockey, I remind my players that the most important name on the jersey isn't the one on the back, but the one on the front. That name stands for something bigger than any one person. It represents the whole team. In this passage from Numbers, God does something similar. He places His name on His people and promises to bless them. It's His way of saying, "You belong to Me." During Advent, we remember that through Jesus, God has placed His name on us too. We are part of His team, His family, and His story of light coming into the world. As we wait for Christ, let us live like we wear His name on the front of our hearts, showing His love, His grace, and His peace wherever we go.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nm4HDcsm038>

Thursday, 1/1 by Stephen Wing

Matthew 2:1-12

“They could hardly contain themselves: They were in the right place! They had arrived at the right time!” (Matthew 2:10, The Message)

“Surprise!” (part 5)

They were his very first thoughts, after.

He realized, with a smile, he had just experienced something profound. Vastly more profound than anything he could have imagined. Because it was real.

It wasn't anything like his sister had told him. It wasn't about sin and judgment, heaven and hell. It was about being “saved,” but his sister had it all wrong. Being saved was being brought to just the right place at just the right time. And he knew for a fact he couldn't have done it on his own. It was about being brought. And being real. Being saved was about being brought into the real.

He wished he could go back and tell her. But she would find out in her own time, in her own place. He now had just the right place to be.



<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3634410290220704>

Friday, 1/2 by Cindy Schendel

Ephesians 3:1-12

- 1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ for the sake of you Gentiles -
- 2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you,
- 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.
- 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,
- 5 which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.
- 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.
- 7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.
- 8 Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ,
- 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things,
- 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,
- 11 according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Mystery was a familiar concept to the people of Jesus' time. There was so much about the world they did not know or understand. But we modern day Christians living in prosperity and security often believe we have it all figured out, there are few mysteries remaining and we don't spend much time pondering them. We tend to think all things are knowable through human research and science.



Paul tells us here that the saving grace of Jesus Christ IS a mystery, one he has been called to preach to the Gentiles so that all God's people may share in it as the one holy church. In fact, the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (thought by most scholars to refer to angels) are to be witness to the unfolding of this great redemptive plan so that they will know His 'manifold wisdom'. How does this work? There are many theories of redemption if you want to read theology, but at the end of the day it's a mystery how God could send his Son to cover our sins, how Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One, and how no matter what we do, Jesus removes all barriers between us and God' love so that "we may approach him with freedom and confidence.". As the Magi make their way to Bethlehem to worship the manifestation of God's mysterious plan, let us rejoice in His infinite wisdom and love for all human beings. Glory be to the Father!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoMgSY9NCrU>

Saturday, 1/3 by Karen Wright

Psalm 72: 1-7

The Dawn of Justice

As Advent gives way to Epiphany, we move from waiting for the Light to seeing it rise. Psalm 72 echoes this dawning hope—a prayer for a ruler who embodies God's justice and peace:

"May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice...

In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more."

This psalm looks ahead to the reign of a divine king whose justice brings renewal like rain falling on the grass—gentle, refreshing, life-giving. In the season of Epiphany, we see this prayer fulfilled in Christ, the Light revealed to all nations. The glory that shone over Bethlehem now spreads to every corner of creation, calling us to live as people of that radiant justice.

Psalm 72 invites us to recognize Christ's reign not only in heaven's glory but in the goodness of earth renewed. This resonates with Celtic spirituality, where light and creation are intertwined. The soft morning sun over misty hills, the steady rhythm of rain, the quiet strength of stone—all point to God's faithful presence.

As we approach Epiphany, may our eyes be opened to the light of Christ rising among us—bringing peace that endures and righteousness that grows like dawn across the land.

Prayer:

Radiant God,

Let Your light shine upon us like morning sun on the hills.

Renew us with the rain of Your justice
and the peace of Your Son, our true King.

Amen.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3l0c1OqG6I>

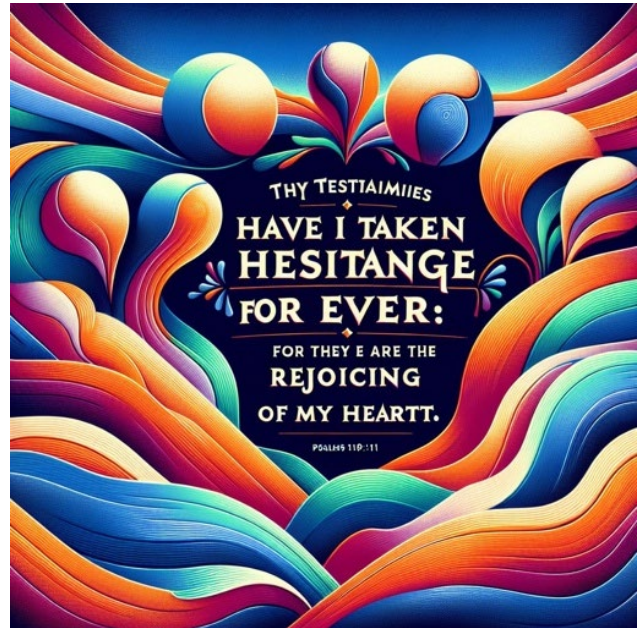
Sunday, 1/4 by Karen Wright

Psalm 72: 10-14

The Light the World Recognizes

"May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles render him tribute,
may the kings of Sheba and Seba bring gifts.
May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service." — Psalm 72:10–11

For this Advent devotion, this marks the third time I have written about Psalm 72. I chose this intentionally. It is always interesting to see the different ways a text speaks. From a coronation song that spoke of the strength of mountains becoming the strength of the king, to the dawning of justice from yesterday, and now it speaks to a king who is recognized by all the world—not because of power, but because of justice, mercy, and compassion. The Psalmist envisions a leader that others come to because that leader is a light worth following.



Epiphany, which is in two days, is the revelation of Christ as the light of the world. The Magi's journey echoes the words of the psalm as they bring gifts to the child in Bethlehem. A single, steady star has been the light that has drawn them across miles and borders to find the Light of the World.

The light has come. The world recognizes its true King—not in might, but in mercy; not in wealth, but in wonder. May we reflect the light of Christ today, that others may see his presence as well.

Prayer:

God of light and revelation,
shine in our hearts and through our lives.
As the Magi followed the star,
may we follow Your light into places of mercy and justice,
that the world may know Your glory.
Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tH2uZKFVMNs>

Tuesday, 1/6 Epiphany by Gene Wilson

Isaiah 60:1-6

And so, we arrive at the day of Epiphany, the end of the Advent season. This day commemorates the manifestation of Jesus to the world. When we began Advent on November 30, Isaiah was calling out the Judeans for their sinful ways and admonishing them to repent. (Isaiah 2: 1-5.) He also was prophesying about the coming of the Glory of the Lord and the bright light that would show the way to those who did repent. Now, on Epiphany, which for contemporary Christians is celebrated on January 6, Isaiah is describing what it will be like when "...your light has come." He says the days of darkness that covers the Earth will be gone because "...the Lord will arise upon you, and His glory will be seen upon you." He adds that "...nations shall come to your light and Kings to the brightness of your rising." He also predicts that this brightness will extend to "all nations (interpreted as Jew AND Gentile), and that Kings will come bearing "gold and frankincense." Isaiah's prophesy from the Old Testament ties to the coming of the Three Kings in the New Testament who were guided by bright starlight to Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus for themselves and to pay homage to the Christ child. "Epiphany" comes from the Greek word meaning "to reveal." It has become a special day for Christians as we celebrate how that "light" guided the Wise Men from different nations (Gentiles) to the manger when the baby Jesus was "revealed" to the World (Matthew 2: 1-12). January 6 was celebrated by the Byzantine and Roman churches as Christmas in the Julian calendar and those two faiths still do that. Christmas was moved to December 25 by the Western Christian church, and we now celebrate Epiphany this date. Isaiah proclaims that "Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice." As we have anticipated Christ's birth throughout this Advent Season, we now, on Epiphany, can also rejoice and be radiant in the reality of God in Christ coming to Earth. Let us all go forward and recommit to honor Him through our hearts and our actions.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0K5-8SIzi54>



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Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
11100 College Blvd.
Overland Park, KS 66210
913-345-1256 | gcpc.org