



MOSAIC
CHURCH

A SEASON OF WAITING

By definition in Christian theology, advent means the coming or second coming of Christ. In Christian tradition, Advent Season is a time to honor the birth of Christ while holding space in our hearts for the promise of Jesus' return. It is a season of waiting.

The thing about Advent that I love is that it reminds our hearts that our waiting for Jesus' return should be an active season of waiting. Like the 40 weeks leading up to a woman giving birth to her baby, there are preparations in her heart and home to make space for this new addition to her family. Expectantly waiting for Jesus' return gives us the space to prepare our hearts and to vigilantly pray for others to come to faith in Jesus in the waiting.

This is a season of waiting but in this season, I pray that our hearts are bent to a posture of praying on our knees instead of sitting back on our heels - that we would believe in the promises of God so much so that it propels us forward in faithfulness to Jesus.

This may be new to you. At Mosaic Church, we all come from various backgrounds and faith traditions and that is what makes our church body so special. Whether you have been lighting advent candles your whole life or if this is your first year to participate, we are thankful that you are walking through this devotional guide with us this season.

This guide will take you through both the Old and New Testament giving a glimpse of God's promises to us and how all of scripture brings us back to the baby in the manger, born to save the souls of men and returning to make all things new.

My prayer for you this season is that God would stir in us a longing in our hearts to see others come to faith in Jesus and a fire in our bellies to do join Him in making all things new - in Memphis as it is in Heaven.





As we spend the next few weeks together reading God's word and pondering the wonder that is Advent, our hope and prayer is that this is a season of giving - giving our time, pouring out our hearts, offering up our prayers for those in need, investing in people well, and sharing the message of Christmas with those who need a little hope.

We've included some fun ways to be more engaged with your family this Christmas as well as engaging with your community in prayer. Our ladies have been praying for revival in our city and it only seems fitting that we as a church family come together united in prayer for the lost to be saved and that the Holy Spirit work in their hearts this Advent season.

Each Sunday, you'll have a short excerpt about Advent along with family recipes and stories from members of our church community of their favorite Holiday family traditions. Invest these next 4 Sundays in building traditions of your own with your loved ones as you read together and share what God is teaching you through Advent.

I also want to challenge you to go ahead and mark off Tuesday evenings from your calendar. Over the course of Advent, our chapel will be open again on Tuesday nights where we ask that you join us for a time of prayer. The names that come to mind who need the hope of Jesus, let's come together and pray that this would be the year they come to faith. That family situation that seems unbearable, especially in the Holidays, come and lay those burdens at the alter with your church family. The grief that wells up in our hearts as we experience the Holidays without those we've lost, come and be comforted by the Holy Spirit through the gift of community.

May this be a season of Advent we never forget because we approach the throne of grace with boldness and expectation that the same Jesus who was born in a manger is coming again.

Hope has come - and is coming again!

-Casey Grooms

GRATITUDE

A special thank you to those who contributed to this Advent devotional!

Casey Sigler - Thank you for your coordination and your heart for this project!

Rebecca Phillips - The cover art is gorgeous! Thank you for your time on this!

Thank you to our writers:

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And a sweet shout out to those who shared family recipes/family traditions:

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November 28

The First Sunday of Advent

"Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

-The Book of Common Prayer

Take some time to write out prayer requests for this week:

Recipes and Family Traditions

Sweet Potato Souffle - Emily Perez

Ingredients:

3 cups cooked and mashed sweet potatoes
¾ cup white sugar
½ cup butter, softened
2 ½ eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
½ cup milk
1 cup flaked coconut
½ cup all purpose flour
1 cup packed brown sugar
1 cup chopped nuts
½ cup melted butter

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
Combine the mashed sweet potatoes with the white sugar, soft butter or margarine, beaten eggs, vanilla and milk.
Spoon into a 2 quart oven proof baking dish.
3. Combine the coconut, flour, brown sugar, chopped nuts and melted butter.
Sprinkle over the top of the sweet potatoes.
Bake at 350 degrees F for 30-35 min.

Hot Fudge Sundae Dessert - Janice Wyatt

Ingredients:

24 Oreo Cookies
¼ cup melted butter
½ gallon Vanilla Ice Cream
1 Can Hersheys Chocolate Syrup
1 Can Eagle Brand Milk
1 Stick of Margarine
1 Carton of Cool Whip
1 Small Bag of Pecans

Directions.

Crush cookies and mix with melted butter.

Press in a 9x13 pan and freeze.

Soften ice cream and spread over cookie mixture and freeze.

Melt together, bring to a boil and simmer 5 minutes the chocolate syrup, eagle brand milk, and stick of margarine.

Cool.

Spread over hardened ice cream layer and freeze.

When hardened, spread cool whip over the top and top with pecans.

Let stand a few minutes before serving.

"Every Christmas Eve we go look at the Christmas lights that night. And then on Christmas Evening, we like to watch a new Christmas movie but now we have two of our favorites and we're shifting that to just watching our two favorite Christmas movies - "Jingle Jangle" and "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (the newer one) but it's definitely a movie night with Snickerdoodle cookies on Christmas Evening!"

-Candace Obadina

November 29

Genesis 3:8-15

Written by Candace Obadina

REQUEST the Holy Spirit guide you to truth and build your faith during this time. I celebrate your discipline to seek God and am confident that He will reveal Himself to you and honor your faithfulness.

READ Genesis 1-3:15. Ideally this is read aloud in the company of others. This will provide context for today's assigned passage.

RETELL the story. You may choose to recall popcorn style as a group or individually journal what you heard.

REFLECT on what idea or point of the story caught your attention. Take a moment to share with others or record your thoughts in a journal. Many times I've found that the point that we can't forget, or idea that confuses, encourages or challenges us is the message God wants to use to teach us something. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and through you to yourself and others in this moment.

RESPOND to the prompts below, using the text from Genesis 1-3:7. This is the beginning of the greatest story ever told! Our prologue sets the stage for all that is to come. I've offered some questions that guided my study as well as some reflections from myself and other bible teachers along the way. Feel free to ask more questions of the text and make even more connections.

Now:

- What just happened? See Genesis 3:7
- How were their eyes opened? See Genesis 3:6
- What is the significance of this tree referenced in Genesis 3:6? See Genesis 2:15-17
- Why did they eat from the tree? See Genesis 2:9, 3:6
- Who is the serpent? See Genesis 3:1, 2 Corinthians 11:3, Revelation 12:9
- What was discussed in the conversation between the serpent and the woman? See Genesis 3:1-5
- What did God really say? See Genesis 2:15-17
- Where did the woman misquote God? See Genesis 3:2-3
- What claims does the serpent make about God, what He said and is doing? See Genesis 3:5

Tim Mackie from the Bible Project says of this passage of scripture that, "Instead of ruling (the beast) they are lured in self destruction." They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.

- Who is the Lord God? See Genesis 1
- What garden? See Genesis 2:8-10, 2:15 - "and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"
- How did God previously interact with Adam? How is that different now? See Genesis 1:28-30, 2:8, 2:15-22 10 "He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."
- What do we know about their nakedness? See Genesis 2:25, 3:7

11 "And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?"



● What's the answer? See Genesis 3:6-7.

12 "The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me some of the fruit of the tree, and I ate."

Most teachings I've heard on this passage focus on the blame game. However, we clearly see Adam is confessing. This was one of the subtle things I noticed in my own study. I'm personally choosing not to overemphasize or deemphasize what's communicated in the text because of my own viewpoint or ideas. See Genesis 2:18-23, 3:6 - 3 "Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

● How did the serpent deceive her? See Genesis 3:1-5

Again we see that she and Adam were influenced and made a choice to disobey what God said. 14 "Then the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this,'"

● What did he do? See Genesis 3:13

Cursed are you more than all the livestock, And more than any animal of the field; On your belly you shall go, And dust you shall eat all the days of your life; 15 And I will make enemies of you and the woman, and of your offspring and her Descendant; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise Him on the heel."

● Who is cursed?

● What did the serpent go from being more than any animal to in this passage? See Genesis 3:1

REVIEW - My final thoughts. As we close this passage, it doesn't seem like things are going well. People are confessing disobedience, the snake is being cursed, hostility is being highlighted. However, the duel that is foretold between the serpent and the woman's seed provides a hopeful waiting which invites you to keep reading to find out who this seed is and how this will all play out.

In the verses that follow this God addresses Eve then Adam about the result of their decision to disobey his command and take wisdom for themselves. The result is pain: in bringing life, engaging in family relations and sustaining life before eventual death. They were originally made in God's image and told to "be fruitful, multiply, subdue the earth and rule it". The very tasks they were created to do will now be accomplished with great grief and pain.

Next, Adam names Eve the mother of all living. God clothes them and says that humans are now like Him, knowing good and evil. God then sends them from the garden so they don't eat from the tree of life and live forever.

RESPOND to these final questions below.

● How will you discipline yourself to continue reading and find out the rest of the story?

● What scripture can you commit to memorizing that will reinforce the truth that God wants you to learn today? The goal is to establish your learning by memorizing God's word.

RAISE your voice in praise to God! Sing your favorite songs about Jesus and reflect on who He is and what He has done for you.

RESOURCES for further study. I spent some time watching the Genesis 1 video and participating in the corresponding class offered by the Bible Project at www.bibleproject.com.

November 30

Genesis 4:1-16 / Romans 3:21-26 / Ephesians 2:13

Written by Michael Phillips

I was staring at yet another bad report.

I reviewed my son's conduct chart from school trying to think of some reason this would make sense.

It didn't.

My kindergartner had apparently punched a classmate in the stomach. This, of course, put him on the brink of facing more stringent consequences if he didn't change the current pattern of behavior. I sat him down after school and asked a set of questions to try and understand his reasoning. More importantly, I wanted to understand why he couldn't keep himself from physically responding to other students when he got upset. It felt like something he should just know. I never had to have this conversation with his older sister.

As we talked, I could see he was getting more anxious and upset as he recalled the scenario in which he claimed the other student had mistreated him and even goaded him into the punch. Finally, he got so upset that his whole body stiffened, I could see his small hands clenching into tight fists; his teeth began to show.

Eventually his frustration overflowed into words. He grumbled, "If someone hurts me, I hurt them."

As a parent, those words felt like an indictment. I was simultaneously shocked that I would have to explain why that statement was so contrary to our values as a family and deeply pained that I felt I had failed so completely as a parent in order for this to have happened. Those feelings, however, ignore the impact of the condition of sin in our lives.

In Genesis chapter 4, we read about Cain and Abel. Abel's anger burns when he feels judged by God. That anger even drives him to murder his own brother. Then, when questioned about his actions he gives a cold and socratic response, "Am I my brother's keeper?" It's enough for anyone to wonder, as many of us do in much less dire situations, what went wrong? Why does Cain need to be told what he's done is wrong?

In the season of advent we sit in tension. We deeply feel the pain of unresolved and difficult circumstances while we also anticipate the peace that comes with God's response to those questions. While we are subject to the condition of sin, He has made a way.

The season of advent is about the joy and hope that comes with knowing he has made a way.

As we begin the season when we know more stress, tough decisions, and difficult circumstances are likely, let's also turn our hearts fully to our God who has sent a savior to make a way we could not on our own.

Even more, he arrived with all the hope and anticipation of a baby in whom we can see all that is possible.

Join us tonight in the Chapel at 5:30 for a time of prayer with our elders and staff..

December 1

Genesis 14:17-24 / Psalm 110 / Hebrews 6:13-20

Written by Casey Grooms

Promise keeper.

When I reflect on the names and attributes of God that bring me most comfort, “the promise keeper” is high on the list.

We, as humans, are not good promise keepers.

We mean to but we are flawed and in a world where we might feel like no one around us has the ability to remain true to their word, I take great comfort that the God of the Universe, the one who created heaven and earth and who knows the number of hairs on my head is also the same God who has made great promises to us and is a God who keeps his promises.

This is the reminder that we see in these three passages.

Abram – affectionately known as Father Abraham – is holding onto a promise from God.

Just two chapters before today’s reading, God promises Abram, an old man married to his lovely yet also old and barren wife, that he would bless him with offspring, land, the nations, and that he himself would be blessed.

What we continue to see as we read Genesis is that these promises were not granted instantaneously, no. Abram walked faithfully honoring God with full faith that God would keep his promises.

In Genesis 14:17-24, we see Abram has just come out of battle defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings with him. He is met by Melchizedek, serving him bread and wine, who offers Abram a blessing.

Before we move on to the blessing, let’s have a refresher on Melchizedek.

Melchizedek is King of Salem (which some believe could have been short for Jerusalem) and is referred to as the Priest of God Most High. Melchizedek would have been revered and well respected not just as a king but for his righteousness. For sake of time, let’s move forward with Abram’s blessing from Melchizedek.

“Abram is blessed by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High who has handed over your enemies to you.”

Abram’s response was giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything.

This is actually a detail I feel I’ve looked over when reading this text in the past.

In the ESV Global Study Bible, it notes that Abram’s tithe to Melchizedek signifies that he believed him. He believed that he had indeed been blessed by God Most High and that it was God who had handed his enemies over to him as a way of keeping his promise.

God didn’t have to insert Melchizedek into Abram’s story here. The battle had been won, his enemies were defeated, Abram likely knew God was with him.

Why would God put Melchizedek in Abram’s path?

I’m no bible scholar but I think God wanted to give him a little reminder and a little nugget of encouragement for the road ahead. And we need that sometimes too.

God is a promise keeper. And we KNOW that in our minds but when we are walking through the battles that life throws our way, sometimes our hearts need a trusted person of faith to step in and remind us of God’s promises and that He is a God who keeps his promises.

The beauty of the advent season is that we get to revisit the texts of the Old Testament and see the way that God has already kept so many promises while holding tight to the ones we know will be kept in His timing.

Come, Lord Jesus! We are waiting expectantly for your return.

December 2

Genesis 15:1-6 / Genesis 22 / John 3:16-17

Written by Anna Krueger

God says to Abram: "I am your shield, your reward will be very great"

Abram responds with doubt: "Lord, what can you give me, since I am childless?"

God responds "Look at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Your offspring will be that numerous"

Abram believes

God asks Abram to sacrifice his son, Isaac

Abram listens and obeys without doubt

God broadens his blessing to "all nations will be blessed by your offspring"

Seeing Abram doubt God and ask such a raw and honest question like that was super encouraging to me, because there are a lot of times when I feel guilty for doubting God.

I ask questions like, "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why now?" or "Why not yet?" And a lot of the time I don't get as clear of an answer as Abram did here, but rather, I get an answer like "Just trust me." And it's not always easy to trust, but one thing that always makes it easier is to look back at God's previous faithfulness.

He hasn't failed us yet, has He?

I feel like Abram must have done this too, in order to be so willing to sacrifice his son in Genesis 22. He didn't need to doubt God this time because he knew that God would come through. We can see it in his response to Isaac's innocent question: "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering" And while Abram didn't know if God would intervene or not, he was ready to kill his son just because God told him to do it.

So wild! While I don't have any kids of my own, I can't even fathom how hard that would have been.

Even when it made absolutely no sense to him, He trusted anyway. He trusted that God would make a way, with or without Isaac. And we can't forget what is possibly the best part of the passage at the end of Genesis 22, when God revamps his promise to Abram. Instead of just focusing on the number of descendants Abram will have, God promises to bless all nations through his descendants. And this is where the John 3:16-17 verses come in.

Jesus is the blessing that comes through Abram's descendants and the embodiment of the sacrifice that was provided once and for all. He was the way that "God himself (provided) the lamb for the burnt offering."

May we trust that God will come through, that he can and will use whatever we're going through for His glory and our good.

May we never forget God's previous faithfulness and do a better job of remembering as a way of encouraging future trust in God's promises.

May we look to Jesus in our pain, knowing that Jesus was no stranger to pain and sacrifice and that it is through our suffering and questioning that we can know Him better.

December 3

Exodus 12: 1-28 / John 1:29 / 1 Peter 1:18-19 / 1 Cor 5:7-8

Written by Adam Shealy

"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened."

I am not a baker, so this scripture was a little over my head at first glance.

In short, traditional leavened bread is made by saving a small lump of the prior batch of dough to be mixed in with the next. This introduces bacteria that helps the bread to rise, so unleavened dough doesn't rise because it doesn't contain this bacteria.

Understanding this paints a great picture of how Christ's sacrifice on the cross makes us all unleavened.

Jesus, or the "Lamb of God" as John introduces Him, served as a sacrifice to save all of us from our past sins and the sins of past generations, separating out the old 'leavened' ways from our new 'unleavened' life.

The spilling of Christ's blood saved us just as the lamb's blood on the doors of the households in Egypt spared believers during Passover.

"For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb." - 1 Peter 1:18-19

The next time the call to take communion is raised, **remember you are unleavened**, like the bread being consumed, as you are free from sin, but only because of the spilling of the blood of the Lamb of God represented by the wine/juice.

December 4

Exodus 17: 1-7 / 33: 7-23 / 34: 1-9 / Hebrews 12:8-24 / 1 Cor 10:1-4

Written by Esther Ro

No matter how hard I try to capture and feel the wonder and magic of the Christmas season, it tends to elude me.

I have at times yearned to witness a Christmas miracle, hoping that it would ignite the same excitement and joy I see bubbling in others during this season. But a miracle isn't the answer.

As the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness, they were witness to several incredible miracles.

They experienced the faithfulness of God in supernatural yet extremely tangible ways through the provision of manna and undrinkable water made drinkable.

God directed when and where to move, leading the people by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Still, they grumbled and questioned, "Is the Lord with us or not?" (Ex. 17:7)

The Israelites' faithlessness contributes to a widening physical distance from God.

Instead of dwelling within their midst in the tabernacle, we see God's presence must later be sought in the tent of meeting that is set up "far off" from the camp (Ex. 33:7).

During Advent we remember that God came to be with us through Jesus, and we look to Christmas Day with hopeful anticipation.

Christ the Rock that was struck to save the Israelites from thirst came as Christ the Son of Man to be stricken to save all humanity from death and eternal condemnation.

Today, be intentional about dwelling in God's presence. Meditate on His faithfulness and rejoice in His goodness.

December 5

The Second Sunday of Advent

"Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation; Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

-The Book of Common Prayer

Take some time to write out prayer requests for this week:

Recipes and Family Traditions

Esther's Famous Noodles - Esther Ro

Glass noodles
red/yellow bell peppers, julienned
Carrots, julienned
yellow/brown onion, sliced
Mushrooms, sliced (shiitake/portabella)
Spinach
Garlic
Eggs (optional)
1 sesame oil: 1 soy sauce : 2 brown sugar

Marinate mushrooms in sesame/soy/sugar overnight
Blanch spinach, combine with garlic
Cook noodles, marinate in sesame/soy/sugar
Lightly sautee veggies
Combine all ingredients

Kim's Dressing - Lindsay Herrera

1 large skillet cornbread
6 bunches green onions, chopped
1 bunch celery, chopped
2 pkgs fresh sage, chopped
4-5 jalapenos boiled, chopped (save water)
6 eggs, beated
3 cans low sodium chicken broth
1 stick butter (used to sautee onions, celery)

Let cornbread cool then crumble in pay you are cooking dressing in.

Sautee green onions until soft in ½ stick butter.

Pour on top of cornbread.

Sautee celery in ½ stick of butter until soft.

Add to cornbread mixture.

Then add all other ingredients including water from jalapenos.

Mix well.

Consistency will be a little soupy - you may add more chicken broth if needed.

Cover with lid or foil.

Cook at 425 degrees until thick, stirring every 30 minutes.

After it is thick, remove and cover and brown lightly.

I boil the jalapenos in a small pan.

If you use a larger pan, you may not need all of the water.

"My favorite Christmas tradition is on Christmas morning, before we do anything, we go into the dining room and pick out our characters and my mom will read the story and we will act out the story with our nativity set. Then after that, we sing Happy Birthday to Jesus and usually we'll eat a breakfast birthday cake. I love acting out when Jesus was born, we'll be Jesus or the shepherds or the wise men, Gabriel, Mary, Joseph, the animals. My favorite to act out is Jesus but my second favorite would probably be the animals. We fight over Jesus and Gabriel. So we have this manger and a stable and the angel goes on top of the stable. When my mom reads the part where the angel comes in, you have to push down the button on it and it starts singing a Christmas song and it's really funny. We like talking in deep serious voices as we act it out. That's my favorite Christmas tradition." -

Transcribed from Lilly Goforth

December 6

Deuteronomy 18: 15-19

Written by Casey Sigler

Old Testament passages like this one are among my favorites to read over Advent.

Of course it's important that we revisit the Annunciation, Mary's trip to Elisabeth, and the manger. It's important that we understand how the earth itself was transformed at the event of Christ's birth...the massive star, the worshipping shepherds, the utter humility and humanity of the divine wrapped in linen and nestled in straw. But there is something about the ancient prophecies that thrill my soul; the words penned hundreds of years before Jesus that foretell his birth and affirm his identity for us centuries later...that's where I linger during these expectant days.

There is mystery here.

A new Prophet is coming, Deuteronomy tells us.

He will be the voice of God. His words will stand the test of time in their truth.

Up until Moses, God had not used a man to speak to His people. But it was Moses that God had chosen to speak for Him. It was Moses to whom He revealed Himself in all of His glory, to whom He given the commandments and from whom He had accepted the blood atonement for the Israelites. As verse 16 reminds us, the people had asked for a prophet. God's glory was just too great for them to bear. The fire, the voice...it all threatened their very existence with its power. They needed someone like themselves to listen to. They needed a flesh-and-bone man to speak God's truth, to exhort and rebuke, to prophesy and guide them. God gave them Moses...Moses, the cast-off Jew, murderer, and mumbler that he was. But now Moses tells us there is someone else coming. A new prophet is on the way. He will be a man who will only speak righteously and truthfully.

This will be a man who will be God's voice.

The Word of God.

What does it mean that Jesus was the very Word of God? It means that He wasn't just a prophet, a good man with lots of wholesome parables for mankind, or the peacekeeping leader of a bunch of misfits. Being the Word of God meant perfection. This Word of God is a much better "Moses".

He is the King, Mediator, Law-Giver, and the very blood sacrifice Himself.

He is the answer and the Yes to all the promises.

Consider what this means to your daily life. What has Jesus said that you can stake your life on this Advent season? What promises has He given that you need to finally take to heart? Make a list and pray that He would give you a heart to believe His truths.

For Families: Play a game of Telephone using Christmas themed phrases (i.e. Sugar Plum Fairies, The First Noel, A Partridge in a Pear Tree). Point out how easy it is for us to "get it wrong" and explain that Jesus never made a mistake because He is God in the flesh. Discuss what that means to you.

What are some of the good things Jesus said that can guide, teach and comfort us?

December 7

Isaiah 11:1-10

Written by Kaitie Manning

As I reflected on this passage in the Old Testament, my soul could not help but be uplifted. Resting in this passage felt a lot like sitting out on a porch, the sun keeping you nice and toasty; Content, but not sweaty!

There is a peace that dwells in these verses.

It is this peace that inspires us all to hold tight to hope.

In a season that can be difficult, this scripture reminds us of a solace soon to come. A solace we can embrace in our hearts in the now as we strive to seek the Lord's face.

Maybe it's a chaotic Christmas season for you. Maybe it's a season filled with familial conflict, physical burdens, and stress that wreaks havoc on your tired, heavy body. Maybe it's not like that for you, and it's a season sprinkled with cookies and chocolate and laughter. I'd venture to say that for a lot of us, it's a little of both.

From this passage, we can take heart knowing there will be a day when peace is not uncommon among enemies. There will be peace we can hardly fathom.

Praise God for glimpses of this peace now and a certainty of it soon to come!

This sacred thought alone can send warmth and revival into my bones and settle the anxious waves swirling around in my mind. The Lord offers us this same spirit He speaks about in these verses, a spirit of counsel and might.

How is the Lord filling you with His counsel and might this season?

Sit and reflect on the absolute beauty of God's promises, **both for the now and the not yet.**

He never breaks a promise.

Rest in this imagery and picture a world without pain.

Then, come back to the present and notice how He has been taking care of you in this season.

Join us tonight in the Chapel for a time of prayer with our staff and elders.

December 8

Isaiah 40:1-5

Written by Casey Grooms

Isaiah 40:1 - 55:13 was written to the Israelites while in exile in Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

The ESV Study Bible titles this passage, "Encouragement for God's Exiles: The Glory of the Lord Shall Be Revealed."

If I could sum up the overall message that I believe God wanted his people to hear, I would say, "Hold tight. The Messiah is Coming."

There have been seasons of my life where I have felt far from God - I may have even said I felt abandoned by God based on my life circumstances, where I felt like I could closely relate to those in exile in Babylon.

I know I'm not alone in that and you have likely felt that too.

God knew.

He knew they felt abandoned.

He knew they were weary.

He sent them a word of encouragement. He sent a messenger to tell them that hope was on the way.

Church family, some of you may be in your own wilderness right now and I wish I could look you in the eye and say that hope is on the way. There are people you know and love who are weary and they need you to remind them that hope is on the way. There are people all around our city who are lost without a Savior and they need us to tell them that hope is on the way!

Advent is a celebration of hope that has come and that we can hold on tight because He is coming again.

The Glory of the Lord shall be revealed for the whole world to see.

December 9

Zechariah 6:12-13

Written by Micah & Casey Grooms

Zechariah serves as a minor prophet, a messenger for God in the foretelling of what's to come. The message God sends through Zechariah is one of judgement to God's enemies and the gathering of people from all nations of the world to himself through Jesus.

"And say to him, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold the man whose name is the Branch; for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne.'" Zechariah 6:12-13.

In reading this text, it's easy to see how Jewish leaders in the New Testament were so wrong about the coming Messiah. Jesus was right in front of them fulfilling prophecies, quoting scripture, making miracles happen in front of their eyes but they did not believe.

They thought they were getting a different kind of leader.

They were waiting on a strong temple building, government ruling King to come as their rescue.

They missed it.

They knew the prophecies of the Old Testament. They could have quoted this exact text but they still missed it.

Can I tell you something and you not get mad?

I think sometimes we get so fixated on the exact ways we believe God is going to answer our prayers and send for our rescue that we completely gloss over and completely miss out on how He is already working and weaving and making a way right in front of our eyes?

That hurt my feelings just typing it because I know that's true in my life.

Some of us are praying big prayers this Holiday season as we should! We serve a big God who wants to hear the cries of our heart and to know that we believe that He is able to handle our requests. Don't miss out on the ways that God is working and moving, even if it doesn't look exactly like what we're asking Him to do.

He is faithful. He is sovereign. And we can trust Him to make all things new.

December 10

Micah 5:2-3

Written by Heather Scholes

This time of year the days keep growing shorter and darker, and even in the middle of the city in Memphis it's hard to step outside at night and not spot a few stars twinkling in the night sky.

I think God loves a good contrast.

It reminds me of the shepherds following the bright star through the darkness to find the baby Jesus.

Light/Dark, Tiny/Mighty, Weak/Strong, and here in Micah 5 we have another string of contrasts leading to a bright hope.

The people of the divided nation of Israel were in some dark times. Their leaders were mistreating the poor, their prophets were accepting bribes, and invasion was around the corner. When we get to Micah 5:2-3 things aren't looking so good for Israel, and then the prophet Micah starts laying down some beautiful contrasts.

A small, podunk town: the birthplace of a mighty Ruler.

A future, promised hope: one who is "from ancient times" or "from everlasting."

Abandonment: Redemption.

Labor pains: a bright promise of God's covenant love.

One Son: all His brothers and sisters gathered home together again.

Emmanuel, come!

December 11

Malachi 3:1-6

Written by Caleb Sigler

The season of advent is filled with duality.

In this beautiful prophecy from the book of Malachi, written by an unknown author translated as “My messenger” at least 300 years before Christ, we see a clear picture of John the Baptist preparing the way for Christ Himself (vs 1). The one who they have sought, the Messiah, will come. He will fill his temple which, as Ephesians 2 reminds us, is not a physical place, but the people of God.

We are that temple in which he has returned, fulfilling this very prophecy.

It is important to remember that every advent season is both a remembrance of what has been, and what is still to come.

Just as we weekly take the bread and wine and we remember that Christ died for our sins, knowing that we are still bound to the sins of the world, Advent also shows a picture of the “already but not yet”. Advent is a time of encouragement as we look with hope and celebration towards Christmas and Christ’s coming, but also a time to sit in the pain of Jesus having not yet returned to us. We are to lean on Christ’s sacrifice and Him gathering the light of His Kingdom, while also taking time to repent of our sins and ask God to refine our hearts.

The bulk of this passage focuses on the blurred lines of what is, and what has not yet come to pass.

In verses 2 through 4 we have a picture of us now. We see not the passive hippy Jesus proclaiming Love that he is sometimes portrayed as, but rather a refining fire. He has saved us by his blood, but he CONTINUES to make us righteous through His refining Holy Spirit fire so that us as an offering “will be pleasing to the Lord” (vs 4). The two images we get are a blacksmith refining precious metal, and a cloth maker (fuller) using soap to clean. Both of these images are labor intensive, possibly painful, but neither are destructive.

The Love of Christ is through Him making us an acceptable offering to the Lord.

Finally the section ends with a look towards the future. I mentioned the duality of Advent. The beauty of God, in regards to time, is that He is fully above it. When we take communion we take communion with all of the saints who have gone before and will go after. When we think about Jesus in the Old Testament, that is the RISEN Jesus already reigning in Glory in eternity.

As Christ refines us now, He is also seeing all of His image bearers forever being perfected in Him forevermore.

So, we rejoice. We rejoice in what Jesus fulfilled in his coming. We rejoice in how He is continuing to refine us (His Temple and Image Bearers) right now. We rejoice with some fear and trembling, knowing that He is returning and that we are still not fully refined. We rejoice that through faith in Him, and through Him, and for Him we are forever justified.

We take a time of our year to repent, and we wait for him to suddenly fill not just his temple, but the very sky above.

Christ Has died. Christ Has Risen. Christ will come again.

December 12

The Third Sunday of Advent

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

-The Book of Common Prayer

Take some time to write out prayer requests for this week:

Recipes and Family Traditions

Honey's Skillet Apple Pie

Ingredients

10 in cast iron skillet
3 fuji and 1 or 2 granny smith depending on size
Pillsbury pie crusts - come 2 in a box.
1 cup brown sugar
1 1/2 cups of butter

My seasoning Mix

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground clove
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 - 1/2 cup sugar

Directions:

Take your Pillsbury crusts out of the box to let them be getting to room temperature in their wax paper bags first thing BEFORE you start.
Preheat oven to 350.
Mix together my seasoning mix - then toss with apples (Be sure to drain liquid from seasoned apples before putting them into the pie crust)
Set aside til ready to put in crust.
Cut 1 tablespoon off the butter and set aside to top the apples.
Melt butter in cast iron skillet on LOW
Add brown sugar - caution:
It is easy to scorch the brown sugar and butter mixture when melting in a cast iron skillet - KEEP A LOW setting, stirring constantly (about 2 mins)
Take it off the eye as soon as it has melted.
Let it cool.
**If the caramel has cooled just a bit the crust will not become fragile by the fresh heat. (10 min or so)
This is when I drain the apple slices and unfold the first pie crust circle.
Center it above the skillet and lay it down gently.
Adjust it around the edges with extra dough hanging over the edge.
Don't press down onto the caramel.
The apples will do that.
Place the pats of butter on top of the apples.
Add the top crust and seal the edges with your thumb and fingers.
Beat one egg white and smear onto the top crust.
This makes it beautiful! Don't forget the slits on top!
Bake at 350 for 1 hour and 10 minutes, until golden and bubbly.
SHIELD with aluminum foil for the last 10 min to prevent excessive browning.
Cool on wire rack for 30 min before serving.

Weeks before Christmas, my parents would wake up around 4 or 5am to be the first to stand in a long line in the cold of winter just to order ... tamales! If you weren't in that line early, you bet you'd miss out. They've been a staple for Christmas brunch for as long as I could remember. With our finances not always being secure, my mom always joked that "as long as we had tamales, we always had something to unwrap on Christmas Day."
-Stephanie Aguilar

Peanut Butter Balls - Lindsay Herrera

Ingredients:

1 stick of soft butter/oleo
1 box of powdered sugar
2 cups of creamy peanut butter
3 cups slightly crushed rice krispies
(Mom never put them in)

Chocolate covering
6 ounces of chocolate chips
3 ounces of Hershey bar
1/4 cake of parafin.

Mix sugar into butter and add a little at a time until thoroughly mixed.

Add peanut butter.

Roll into ball, 1 inch or less, set aside on wax paper.

Chocolate dip:

In a double boiler, melt the dip ingredients.
Dip the balls in the chocolate, Mom used toothpicks.
Let drip on wax paper.
She indicated it makes 108 balls.

December 13

John 1:1-8

Written by Candace Obadina

REQUEST the Holy Spirit guide you to truth and build your faith during this time. I celebrate your discipline to seek God and am confident that He will reveal Himself to you and honor your faithfulness.

READ John 1. Ideally this is read aloud in the company of others. This will provide context for today's assigned passage.

RETELL the story. You may choose to recall popcorn style as a group or individually journal what you heard.

REFLECT on what idea or point of the story caught your attention. Take a moment to share with others or record your thoughts in a journal. Many times I've found that the point that we can't forget, or idea that confuses, encourages or challenges us is the message God wants to use to teach us something. Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you and through you to yourself and others in this moment.

REVISIT the passage and highlight repeated phrases. Use different colors or symbols for each similar phrase. For example, every mention of "Light" could be highlighted in yellow. Feel free to use crayons, pencils or pull up the text on your computer and highlight digitally.

RESPOND to the prompts below using the text.

- What do we know about the following?
 - the beginning
 - the Word
 - God
 - all things that came into being
 - life
 - the Light
 - darkness
 - John
- How does this passage relate to other scriptures you know of? See Genesis 1, Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3

RESPOND to these application questions.

- How will you discipline yourself to continue reading and find out the rest of the story?
- What scripture can you commit to memorizing that will reinforce the truth that God wants you to learn today? The goal is to establish your learning by memorizing God's word.

RAISE your voice in praise to God! Sing your favorite songs about Jesus and reflect on who He is and what He has done for you.

RESOURCES for further study

I spent some time watching the Bible Project video on YouTube titled "John 1 - The Word Becomes Human," listening to the Bible Project podcast, episode 4 in the Creation Series, and the John 1 Study Notes, also found on the Bible Project website.

December 14

John 1 : 9 - 18

Written by Adam Shealy

"For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace... grace and truth came through Jesus Christ," proclaims John, as he bears witness about Jesus.

This proclamation of the blessings, joys, and steadfast love of Jesus sets an example of how everyone of us can introduce Him to the world.

As Christ is explained as the Word became flesh and as the true light, we are reminded that there are multiple ways we can show others what He makes possible in everyone's lives.

As we celebrate Jesus' birth, look at your individual gifts. If your gifts are more in line with speaking or writing, speak and write to others. If your gifts are more aligned with actions, then we can show others Jesus' love through how we interact.

No matter how we make these connections with others, we must remember to share what's most important: the grace and truth we've received through Christ.

I know that the impact Christian community had on my life was one of the biggest reasons I was able to open my heart to accept Jesus. Even if you don't see the effect of your interactions in the moment, over time the impact can be extraordinarily significant.

Join us tonight in the Chapel for a time of prayer with our staff and elders.

December 15

Luke 1: 5-25

Written by Esther Ro

After roughly 400 years of divine silence, the angel Gabriel visits a priest named Zechariah with astounding news foretelling the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Outside of major festivals, thousands of priests would take their turns serving in the temple for two nonconsecutive weeks each year. Because there were so many of them, their responsibilities were designated by lot. Zechariah's task of making an incense offering in the temple would have been a relatively simple and quick duty, but the opportunity to do so was not an everyday occasion and his actual experience was notably extraordinary.

Gabriel tells Zechariah that his prayer, presumably for he and his wife Elizabeth to have a child, has been heard and provides prophetic details about who this child would become: someone who "will be filled with the Holy Spirit," who will "turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God" and "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (v. 14-17).

This is probably not what Zechariah was expecting to happen when he entered the temple that day, but it was no coincidence that he was chosen to be present in that place at that time. It was not by happenstance that Elizabeth was barren for all those years prior. The things we experience as surprise events may actually be the result of a wise and sovereign plan.

God's plan from the very beginning was to send us a Savior, to gift us salvation through Jesus.

Are you ready to receive Him with joy, or do you need to turn your focus on preparing your heart? To be ready is to be attentive and enthusiastic for what is coming

It is a state of being rather than a state of doing.

Get ready, and stay ready. Christmas is coming soon.

December 16

Luke 1:39-45

Written by Michael Phillips

It was such an embarrassing slip-up. I felt the familiar tightness in my throat; the telling ache in my chest. Still, I couldn't stop the tears.

I should have been able to control my emotions.

I should have been able to better process the moment.

No matter how many times it happens, I don't get any better in those situations. The truth is, that doesn't describe one specific moment, but several over the course of my life. Seeing a former intern grow into a valuable employee and get the big job. Watching one of my siblings graduate or become a business owner. Hearing a friend describe a time when their understanding came to life, especially in spiritual matters. All of those situations, I've realized since, have in common the sense of a long-awaited reality appearing before my eyes.

It's almost like I never believed they would really happen, no matter how often I told others or myself that it would.

This must've been something akin to what Elizabeth felt.

The child inside of her jumped as the mother of the promised Messiah came to visit. The words she uses speak to this uncontrollable joy and emotion: blessed, how has it happened, behold, blessed, fulfillment.

In more modern times she might have said, "This is really happening."

Jesus was already with them and still they were trying to grapple with the reality of his arrival as a baby. That is something I still grapple with, if I am being transparent.

Jesus really has arrived.

He really is with us through the Holy Spirit.

We really do have so much still to anticipate as we remember this time of anticipation prior to his birth.

Let's focus on being joyful and celebrating God's promises being fulfilled even if we haven't seen it completely just yet.

December 17

Luke 1: 46-56

Written by Kaitie Manning

When Mary found out she was going to be an instrumental part of God's beautiful redemptive plan for the world, I began to consider all the ways that she did NOT respond.

She did not ask, why me? or how will this change my life?

She did not plead for more convenient timing nor did she complain about how truly invasive an unmarried pregnancy would be for her body and her life.

This was a powerful and convicting realization.

I bring these wonderings to our attention not to instill any shame for how we are tempted to respond to surprises and hardships, but to set us up to marvel at how genuinely breathtaking Mary's response was.

Mary praised the Lord (in song!) for what I am certain would normally cause suffering, uncertainty, and potentially death in her current culture. She recognized God's hand in the details of her life as an honor and a comfort, trusting Him entirely.

We won't all be running around writing praise songs for the wondrous, challenging, and mysterious circumstances in our lives this holiday season - but by all means, feel free to take a crack at it!

I will say this - I know we can all take a few moments to pause and express our gratitude because the Lord has "noticed his lowly servants," He has done and will continue to do great things for you! Even when those great things seem life altering, confusing, painful, or terrifying!

Take some time in this moment to reflect on where you see God working in the intricacies of your life.

What can you Praise Him for, in spite of feeling uncertain about the purpose or outcome of your circumstances?

December 18

Luke 1:57-80

Written by Casey Grooms

Let's back up just a smidge.

One of the miracles seen in this text is Zechariah's voice returning after John is born and he agrees to give the child that name, despite having no relatives of that name - strange for the culture of that time.

But let's revisit why Zechariah lost his voice.

When Gabriel visits Zechariah to tell him that his wife Elisabeth will have a son, Zechariah doesn't believe him.

You may think it's wild that God punished him by taking his voice because he didn't believe the message that Gabriel had brought from God but it's actually Zechariah's ability to serve in the temple, specifically to give the Benediction, that was his punishment since mute/deaf men were incapable of serving in the temple at this time.

Serving in the Temple was reserved for men of faith and in that moment where Zechariah was asked to have faith in God, he didn't believe.

Scripture doesn't give us much more information about Zechariah during Elisabeth's pregnancy but to be stripped of the thing you love to do for months, unsure of when your voice would return, would have to be unbearable. He was literally standing in the tension - growing more excited, as his wife was growing more and more visibly pregnant, for his child to be born yet disappointed to not be able to serve God in the Temple because of his momentary lapse of faith that God would bless them with a child as he said.

But let's look at the first thing he does when the baby is born and his voice returns - he praises God.

And I don't want to miss this part either - the other piece of this story that I think is important is that those who witnessed the miracle of John's birth as well as Zechariah's voice returning left and told everyone what they had just seen.

This is how people are changed.

The people rejoiced that God had shown mercy to Elisabeth.

The people went throughout all the hill country of Judea and all who could hear them, praising God for the way the Lord had his hand on this new baby.

If we have been saved by the blood of the lamb, we have seen miraculous things in our life as God has turned our heart of stone to a heart of flesh.

We have a story to tell.

We serve a God worthy of our praise.

Go tell it on the mountain, throughout our city, within our families, at our workplace, at our schools, that Jesus Christ is born and He is coming back!

December 19

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

"Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that our Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, on God, now and for ever. Amen.

-The Book of Common Prayer

Take some time to write out prayer requests for this week:

Recipes and Family Traditions

Monster Cookies - Casey Sigler

(Apparently the best breakfast Thanksgiving - Christmas)

Ingredients:

6 eggs
1 pound brown sugar
2 cups white sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons vanilla
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon white Karo syrup
4 teaspoons baking soda
 $\frac{1}{2}$ pound butter
 $1 \frac{1}{2}$ pounds peanut butter
9 cups quick oats
8 ounces chocolate chips
8 ounces m&m's

Mix in given order in large, large bowl.
Drop on ungreased cookie sheet by
large spoonfuls and flatten.
Bake at 325-350 for 12 minutes.
Do not overbake.

Caramel Rolls - Janice Wyatt

Bring to boil $\frac{1}{2}$ c sugar,
 $\frac{1}{2}$ c shortening
and 1 pt milk.
Let stand 2 hours.
Dissolve 1 pkg yeast in warm water.
Sift 5 cups flour,
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp soda,
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking powder,
1 t salt.
Add to 1st mixture.
Beat well.
Let stand in refrigerator at least
 $1 \frac{1}{2}$ hours or as long as you want.
Caramel topping:
4 T butter and $\frac{2}{3}$ cup brown sugar.

Growing up, my entire family lived basically right on top of each other with our houses lined up in a row.

However, that apparently was not close enough because on Christmas Eve, we would all spend the night at Maw and Pop's house so Santa could come visit us all together. Before we went to Maw and Pop's house, my immediate family would come together to exchange one gift together. It didn't matter that we all knew what our one gift would be, I was always excited for just us to be together under one roof before we joined our aunts and uncles and cousins for our big Christmas sleepover. The one gift we opened? Of course, our matching Christmas pajamas to wear that night. My mom would make her favorite appetizers and we would enjoy being together for a bit before joining the others next door (told ya, all on top of each other). I think it started out as my mom's attempt at a calm before the storm.

This is the Christmas tradition I've held most dear for as long as I can remember. In 2010 after my mom's passing, the tradition started to slip away until we started making our annual attempt to recreate the magic at my brother's house with his wife and two boys. It's a smaller crowd than what I remember from my childhood but me and my crew make the hour drive to make sure that we are together for a Christmas Eve sleepover with appetizers for dinner, I provide the matching Christmas pajamas, and you'll find me and my brother by the coffee maker first thing on Christmas morning with cheese biscuits ready to go in the oven. (Here's hoping we move it to our new house this year!) - Casey Grooms

December 20

Isaiah 9:2-7

Written by Casey Grooms

There's something special about the prophecies of old and the way they take root and come alive in our own hearts as we walk with Jesus today.

When I get to verse 6 in today's text, I'm flooded with emotion when I think of the names of Jesus that are foretold in this Old Testament prophecy.

Wonderful Counselor.

Mighty God.

Eternal Father.

Prince of Peace.

Take some time today to practice memorizing Isaiah 9:6.

Here is a fill in the blank to help you practice. (If you have kids in your life, this is a great way to bring them in and give them tools to practice scripture memorization as well!)

"For a _____ will be _____ for us,
a _____ will be _____ to us,
and the _____ will be on his _____.
He will be named Wonderful _____;
_____ God, Eternal _____;
_____ of _____.
Isaiah 9:6

December 21

Matthew 1:18-25

Written by Anna Krueger

Joseph heard God speak.

Joseph believed what God said.

Joseph obeyed. Immediately. Without question. Without worrying about what such an action might mean socially.

"You are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

The name Emmanuel means "God is with us" and a quick google search taught me the significance of this section that Matthew quotes from Isaiah. It's a Hebrew name for God that represents a sign that God will protect the house of David.

Emmanuel - God with us.

God became like us. God became one of us. Almighty God, Creator of the universe, becomes a simple human to die the death of a criminal after living a perfect life so that we can spend eternity with him.

He didn't want heaven without us, so he brought heaven down to us.

Y'all, if God is with us, then who can be against us?

We have the Alpha and Omega on our side, fighting for us, standing with us.

What a gift! All praise and honor and glory and power be unto our Emmanuel.

Join us tonight in the Chapel for a time of prayer with our staff and elders.

December 22

Luke 2:1-20

Written by Brad Wyatt

A "game changer" is defined as an event, idea, or procedure that affects a significant shift in the current manner of doing or thinking about something. Wow!

Has there ever been a bigger game changer than the birth of our precious savior, Jesus!

The Old Testament prophet Micah foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem: "But you, O Bethlehem...are only a small village in Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past" (Micah 5:2).

It was no accident that Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. Before the world was created, God knew that around the year 6 B.C. the leader of the Roman Empire would decree that a census be taken of all the people in his domain. For that reason, Joseph and Mary had to journey about 65 miles to register in the town of Joseph's ancestor, David.

What an incredible inconvenience Mary and Joseph went through to be right in the center of God's will, right in the middle of God's timing to forever change history!

I love the song, "Mary Did you Know?" My favorite lyric is, "Did you know that your baby boy has come to make you new; this child that you delivered will soon deliver you?"

May our hearts be touched this Advent season by the game changing baby; God in the flesh, atoner of our sins and purchaser of our righteousness, our perfect deliverer!

God intends for those of us who profess Jesus as Lord to have a different way of thinking and acting as a result of the birth, life and death of our game changing King.

The shepherds got to see heaven celebrating the birth of Jesus and were invited to go and see the game changer in person. Verse 20 describes the aftermath like this; "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

May we celebrate Jesus well this Advent season.

May our praise of Jesus and obedience to Him be a daily rhythm in our lives!

December 23

Matthew 2:1-12

Written by Nathaniel Chambers

This second chapter of Matthew helps describe the birth of Jesus, his history with Herod, Herod's desire to kill Jesus to keep his throne, and the three wise men's journey to Bethlehem.

As the season of advent draws near, we are constantly reminded of the joy of the coming of Christ and his later resurrection during Easter. Throughout the passage we can see the different reactions to the coming of Christ, and the Old testament prophecies fulfilled through this passage. The New American Standard Commentary states that since his birth, Jesus had started his own friendships with gentiles and conflicts with the authorities. Both the gentile wise men and Herod had different reactions to the coming of Christ.

The wise men presented Jesus with gifts of gold and spices, praising him as they saw their savior as a child in front of them. The gentiles were not treated well by the Jews because of the paganism most of them practiced, but here we can see that these gentiles were amazed by Jesus's birth and believed in him.

The hearts of the wise men were open to the joy of Advent and reacted to his birth with praise to God.

The gifts they each gave Jesus were representative of many different things. The gold signifies God's king-like stature. The frankincense (used to season dead bodies) foreshadows the death of Christ during Easter. Finally, the Myrrh (used in perfumes) shows the pleasant aroma of God's presence.

God purposefully led the wise men to give Jesus the gifts to display his divine holiness and righteousness at that moment.

Herod's reaction to Jesus's birth shows his lust for control over his own position as the king of Judah. He didn't deny the fact that Jesus was God, but focused more upon his own power and control of his kingdom then he did the coming of Jesus. The Old Testament proved to Herod that Jesus had been born, which worried him.

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

This passage from the Old Testament speaks of the good news of Jesus's coming yet Herod's overwhelming thirst for power made the writing seem like a threat to his throne.

Herod and the wise men are two opposite reactions to the Advent, we should think of how we should react to Jesus's coming.

Is your heart joyful and open to his teaching?

Is your heart looking for happiness in material and personal pleasures?

December 24

Luke 2:21-35

Written by Casey Grooms

"...he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." Luke 2:21

As Henry's mom, I felt like I got to know him as I carried him for 39 weeks and 5 days but since we chose not to learn the gender before he was born, I had no idea WHO he would be. I knew who I wanted him to be in terms of his character and his heart for Jesus but we didn't have a name or even any idea of who my child would be. As I read through the text again this year of Jesus' birth, I'm amazed at that tiny phrase in Luke 2:21 - "Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb."

Before the Holy Spirit conceived a baby in the womb of Mary, a virgin, He had a name and a purpose.

Brad mentioned the song, "Mary, did you know?" and I'd like to answer that decades old question with a resounding YES.

Mary knew.

I can only imagine the excitement and also the heaviness that Mary felt as she carried that baby boy - to feel so connected with a child growing in your womb and also grappling with the fact that this baby would change the world.

She may not have known the exact details of how her son would grow into the man who walked that road to Calvary but she knew from the day Gabriel showed up and shared the news that she would have a son named Jesus that this baby was not just any baby.

And we see that affirmed through Simeon, a righteous and devout man. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die before seeing the promised Messiah. As Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to the Lord in the temple, Simeon took baby Jesus in his arms and blessed God.

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." vs.29-32

Mary knew. And Joseph knew too.

But that day, with 40 day old baby Jesus in the temple courts, Simeon reaffirmed what they knew in their hearts all along - this baby had come to save the world.

December 25

Isaiah 11:1-10

Written by Ali Chambers

"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fatted calf together; and a little child shall lead them..." (Isa. 11:6).

It takes a vivid imagination to picture a world where enemies become friends, where hate is replaced with love, where old hostilities are replaced with unity and brotherhood, where predator and prey become family.

It is fitting that this should be the text on the last day of this devotional, the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus because it's in this birth, the birth of Jesus that this hope of a new kind of world comes alive.

The hope of Advent is that in the birth of this baby, in the manger, there is a rebirth of this broken, tarnished world.

While as a culture we celebrate the birth of Jesus and the hope his birth brings, much of this celebration is rooted in a false hope. We know there is something wrong with our world and we have a longing for a rebirth but don't know where it's found. After giving this picture of the world to come, scripture tells us how it will be accomplished in Isaiah 11:10 "In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious."

The book of Isaiah was written at a time when the Jewish nation and culture was falling apart. Because of their sin and rebellion, the nation was led into exile in Babylon. Much of the context of Isaiah's ministry was to bring direction and encouragement to the afflicted people during this time of crisis. Into this kind of world, God spoke of the coming of Jesus saying "there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." The Jewish nation, once like a great and beautiful tree from which all would come and rest in its shade, was reduced to a stump. All that remained was a reminder of what once was.

For many of us this last year and a half feels the same way.

The losses keep piling up in our lives to the point where it can feel overwhelming and hopeless. A still raging pandemic, social unrest, economic uncertainty, and a divided community yet in Advent, there came forth, out of the stump of Jesse, out of the remains of a once great people, out of the remains of a ruined world, a savior who is the hope of a new world.

Through Him will be a resting place that is far greater than any before, one that will never end!

Advent should remind us, in this moment, is that out of the ashes we have a certain hope that will one day soon usher in a new world. This new world Isaiah 11 talks about is a certain and glorious future. And the old world will quickly fade away. And Jesus' birth is the sign and signal of this future reality. As we walk in the hope of Advent, following the stump of Jesse, we get to experience glimpses of this new world to come.

Instead of crafting our own solutions to the brokenness of our world, we are invited to rest in Jesus' finished work and follow Him as he makes all things new.

As we walk in our new identity in Jesus, we are free to allow old hostilities to cease. As we walk in the Jesus of Advent, we are free not just to set next to eat other in church but to stand next to each other in life because our hope is no longer in judgment, or revenge but in Christ. So then we can experience a glimpse of Isaiah 11 today when "...the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9)."

So as you celebrate this Christmas day with gifts and dinners and visits, along with all the losses, remember that Jesus, the stump of Jesse, is our very real hope. Remember that He is working to turn stumps into forests. Remember that He is working to destroy sin, death and the grave, and will one day replace them with new life.

Jesus says to us "Behold I am coming soon" (Rev. 22:9).

In response to this great hope and promise we respond saying "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"

Recipes and Family Traditions

Three Day Coconut Cake - Lindsay Herrera

Ingredients:

1 box of butter cake mix (Mom insisted on Duncan Hines)
1 ¾ cups of sugar
10 ounces of sour cream
9 ounces of cool whip

Prepare cake mix according to package directions, making two 8 inch layers.

When layers are completely cool, split layers in half.

Mom used dental floss to accomplish this.

While cake is cooling combine sugar, sour cream and coconut, blending well, chill.

Before putting cake together, reserve 1 cup sour cream mixture.

Spread the remainder between layers of cake, making a layer cake four stacks high.

Combine reserved sour cream mixture with cool whip blending until smooth.

Spread on top and sides of cake.

Seal cake in an airtight container and refrigerate for 3 days before serving.

This will keep many days longer, if it has the chance.

The Best Cheese Ball Recipe - Casey Grooms

Ingredients:

16 ounces Cream Cheese Softened (2 boxes)
1 Jar Old English Cheese Spread (found by the crackers)
1 ½ cups cheddar cheese grated medium
1 Teaspoon Garlic Powder
1 Teaspoon Onion Powder
2 Teaspoons Lemon Juice
2 Tablespoons Mayo
2 Cups Pecans
1 Tablespoons Fresh Parsley

Directions:

(This will yield two cheeseballs. Once combined, split it and wrap them individually in saran wrap.)

Finely chop the pecans and set aside.
In a large bowl, combine all of the ingredients
stir until smooth.

(This is where you'll split it)
Form into a ball and place on a
large piece of saran wrap.
Place the cheese balls in the fridge for 10-15 min.
While that's in the fridge,
mix the chopped pecans and parsley.
Unroll the cheese ball once it is firm
and roll it in the nut mixture.
Serve immediately or store in the fridge.

"My favorite Christmas tradition that our family does is our Advent family tradition. It's a fun activity for a 30 day countdown to Christmas. It gets more and more exciting as it goes on and on and on. I like how we take turns reading the book that it comes with and I like how we take turns reading it every night." - Transcribed from Charlie Goforth



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