

Advent Devotional Guide 2022

Otterbein United Methodist Church



Advent Mission Focus:
Charterhouse School in Edinburg, VA



Charterhouse School in Edinburg, VA, is sponsored by United Methodist Family Services and is a place for students with special needs to get out of their comfort zones and start to get out into the world. They serve students ages 6 - 22 and are able to serve the needs of Autism, neurological differences, emotional, learning, intellectual, and development disabilities, as well other health impairments. If you would like to make a donation to the school, please make your check payable to Otterbein United Methodist Church and designate "UMFS - Charterhouse School" in the memo line.

Sunday, November 27

[Matthew 25:1-13](#)

Jesus Tells the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

The translation of this Scripture in the New International Bible says that Jesus told this parable to clarify what it means to be ready for His return and how to live until He comes. It teaches that each person is responsible for his or her own spiritual condition. I can't imagine anything more terrible than not being ready when Christ returns.

The ancient Jewish custom was that the groom and his attendants would come to the home of the bride's parents and take the bride, along with her attendants, in a bridal procession back to his parents' home where the wedding celebration would occur. We aren't told why, but this bridal party was late, so late that all ten of the bridesmaids had fallen asleep during their long wait.

To us it might seem that there isn't any grace in this story. After all, the bridegroom (the wedding party) was late in coming. Had he come earlier the bridesmaids would not have run out of oil.

But that's just it! We don't know when our Bridegroom will return ("no one knows the day nor the hour") so we need to be ready at all times. Today, as we see all that is happening in our world, it seems that the return of Christ must certainly be imminent. May we all be ready for His return.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, our Bridegroom, help us to live each day as if it is the day of your return—because it may very well be. Help us to so live our lives that we will be ready for that day. Amen.

Rosalie Bailey

Monday, November 28

[Luke 20:1-8](#)

When I was approached to write an advent devotional, I figured I would get some nice Christmassy verse about the birth of Jesus...Well, someone else must have gotten that one.

When I read the selected verses, at first, I was not seeing a theme. We have in these verses a situation where Jesus is teaching and he is yet again approached by those pesky Elders who are always trying to trap Jesus. Sometimes I imagine them as Wiley Coyotes, coming yet again to spring some elaborate trap on Jesus.

This time around the question is "what's your authority" for teaching what you are teaching. Sort of the Biblical equivalent of show me your permit or license. Now we see in the verses how Jesus takes them down a peg by turning the tables on them (after, I might

add, he had turned over some real tables at the temple), but the verses got me thinking about something else.

For many who are in authority, that can become the overriding issue, maintaining that power...

Isn't it interesting that the Elders did not question the correctness of what Jesus was teaching...in fact their goal was to silence the message he was teaching because it was bringing to light their own hypocrisy. They wanted to deflect the issue.

Some weeks ago, Adam, our pastor, mentioned how difficult it is to fight for social justice in our community. I think sometimes those who stand in the way of reforming the way we deal with the poor, the hungry, and the marginalized use the same tactic to deflect efforts...because deep down they know the way we treat the less fortunate in our society is really not defensible.

So, in hopes that those who want change will grow weary, they talk about the lack of political clout involved or the logistics of dealing with the issue; all perhaps points to be considered, but at the same time a way to avoid the simple truth that our brothers and sisters live in want.

Often times these are the same folks who at this time of year like to make a big deal over the baby Jesus, so sweet, so quiet, so helpless as he lies in that manger...but they aren't as gushing about that man who grows up and starts preaching the Gospel. That man who got angry with the injustices of his society and worked to make a change.

So during this season as you consider the babe, also give some reflection for the man he became, and roll up your sleeves...there's work to be done.

Jim Clough

Tuesday, November 29

[Isaiah 1:21-31](#)

Restore Us Again

In this passage, the prophet Isaiah is directed by God to restore his people in Zion/Jerusalem of the many sins they have embraced. It's pretty clear from God's message that he is furious. *"I will take revenge on my enemies."* God sees his enemies as those who have rebelled, turned against him, and become thieves, murderers, and bribe takers. God is also speaking to those who have failed to care for the oppressed. I admit that it's a very graphic reading and I wanted to just avoid this scripture. However, upon re-reading and pondering, I realized that this sobering message is speaking to us at this time.

Unfortunately, we don't need to look very far to see some of the same things in our current day reality.

God must be terribly disappointed in his children. There is so much injustice. People seem to have turned away from God. We are not faithful to the Lord and his commands,

just as the religious people that Isaiah was instructed to restore. Infidelity to God leads to infidelity toward people. When we are not faithful to the Lord and his commands, the result is the mistreatment of other humans. People become self-serving and live for their own personal advantages. We ignore the needs of our fellow man and do not care about who is hurting. When we reject God as our ethical standard, there is nothing to stop us from committing all kinds of atrocities against each other. We see this happening every day.

As Christians, we are called to be faithful to the Lord and be faithful to his commandments. The law lets us know we are sinning. So, repentance is necessary to be restored. Those who return to the Lord will be redeemed. *“Zion will be restored by justice; those who repent will be revived by righteousness.”*

This Advent season, let us let us reflect on our own restoration and how we might become involved in making a difference in social justice for our community. Social justice will only be effective when hearts and lives are faithful to the Lord.

Patsy Liskey

Wednesday, November 30

[Isaiah 2:1-11](#)

“Exalted above the hills.” “The glory of His majesty.” “Established on top of the mountains.” These are just a few of the phrases this passage contains highlighting the magnificent splendor of the Heavenly Father. The book of Isaiah includes two starkly juxtaposed elements in the biblical story: the transition into oppressive Babylonian rule for the Israelites, but also the beginning of claims about this coming Messiah and kingdom that will liberate God’s chosen people. Even amid fear, there is this new sense of hope for the deliverance that will come.

But this passage contains more than just this celebration of a glorious kingdom. It begins with promising words of hope of this coming Savior, but then turns into a serious self-reflection for God’s chosen ones. Isaiah reflects on Israel’s horrible pride that has distanced them from God. The announcement of the coming kingdom means, according to Isaiah, that it is time for Israel to humble themselves. To *“enter into the rock”* and *“hide in the dust.”* Israel must turn away from their pride and be humbled to receive the glory of the coming Messiah.

Let us this season follow these words. Let us celebrate the Messiah’s coming and humble ourselves in His presence just as He humbled himself on this earth, remembering that it is only by His grace alone that we can experience salvation and restoration from our pride and sin. If and when we enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, we will rejoice in the day where, as Isaiah says, *“The haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”*

Jonathan Williams

Thursday, December 1

[Luke 20:27-40](#)

Heavenly Father, the miracle of your Son's birth, life, death and resurrection is beyond anything I have personally experienced here in this earthly existence. My human mind can become mistaken and confused trying to understand the true nature and design of the resurrected life promised to me through my faith in Jesus Christ. Like the Sadducees, I sometimes question and probe what that promise means, and in questioning, I can become doubtful and lose my way. Even the humans who stood in the very presence of your Son here on Earth could not fathom what a resurrected life might mean based on any familiar mortal reference point.

In this season of celebration, my heart is filled with gratitude for the beautiful gift that is Jesus Christ. It is my faith in Jesus that will bring me into the Eternal Life promised to me. Jesus told us that in Heaven we will be like the angels. Help me remember that His word and His resurrection are the only references I need to rely on and that Heaven is not something I can comprehend on this side of the veil because it will not be like anything from my earthly experiences. I will live because Jesus lives. It is a matter of faith. And praise to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for the immensity of their gift to us!

"For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."

Renée Wenger

Friday, December 2

[Isaiah 3:8-15](#)

Preparation and Repentance

Have you ever considered the process of writing a devotional to be a form of preparation in drawing closer and understanding God? Writing a devotional of any kind may seem like a homework assignment, however it really is an opportunity to connect with God through scripture and grow your faith. Every Advent season, like clockwork, Linda sounds the call for Advent devotionals. As many of you are familiar with her loving persuasion, it is best to act and commit quickly to this need of the church. She then sends three choices of scripture from which to formulate a thoughtful text. In my own time and space, I set the conditions to meditate and do a close read of each scripture to formulate deeper connections within my heart. Then I choose one of the three scriptures to take a deeper dive and anchor my ideas for writing.

I have learned a lot from our devotionals, not just from my own writing process, but from the experience, knowledge, and challenges presented by other devotion authors in our congregation. One of the concepts I have come to appreciate is spiritual vigilance. Without fail, I am reminded of how my faith evolves with understanding, and that understanding must be frequently refreshed (and reinforced) either by Bible study, fellowship, traditions,

and faith routines. And so, as we begin to recognize a continuum of growth in our relationship with God, we begin to appreciate the need to remain humble and focused on preparation. Writing devotions are certainly a mechanism for preparation and a faith-building opportunity.

Advent is a period of spiritual preparation in which we as Christians make ourselves ready for the coming of Jesus Christ. It is a season we all look forward to in anticipation, hope, and joy - the advent seasonal narrative most of us have heard before. The celebration also involves a season of prayer, fasting, and repentance. Repentance is a frequent refrain in our faith walk. Merriam-Webster defines repentance as: the action or process of repenting especially for misdeeds or moral shortcomings. I would challenge you to consider what this definition means to you in a spiritual context. All too often regarding sin, we rationalize and culturally justify our ideas, actions, and choices, but if we trace with integrity to the source, we find that they are routed in sin - 'everyone else is doing it' does not make it right. The focal scripture from the prophet Isaiah for this devotion hits center mass on this very topic. Proud sinful living, oppression of the poor and injustices highlighted in this scripture by Isaiah serve as a warning from God to **repent**. Sadly, there are correlations in our society that bear a resemblance to Judah and Jerusalem of that time. One would think, the privilege of having access to scripture spanning the last 2,000 years would suggest we could be better than to repeat history.

Tying all this together, let's recall the discussion of preparation. If we are growing in our faith and moving closer to God, shouldn't we feel a deeper conviction for our sins when we commit them? Thus, our relationship with God gives us the proper attitude for repentance - with sorrow, a strong desire to atone for them, and stronger discipline not to commit them again. If that is true, then the obverse of that coin is a society like Judah as Isaiah describes - no contrition for sin and disconnected from God. But there is hope. Jesus is coming back for his own. "*For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed*" (1 Corinthians 15:32). That is our glorious hope! Jesus Christ is the reason we can be victorious and not lose heart even when the world around us is falling apart (*Treasures in Jars of clay* 2022).

Prayer: *Merciful God, You 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 celebrate aright the commemoration of the nativity and may await with joy the morning coming in glory of Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. Amen.* (Stookey 201)

Kevin Andrade

References: Stookey, Laurence Hull. "Advent." *The United Methodist Hymnal Book of United Methodist Worship*, The United Methodist Publishing House, 2001, pp. 201-201.

Tyndale House. (1996). *Life application study bible: New king James Version*.

Unknown, U. (2022) "Treasures in Jars of clay," in U. Unknown (ed.) *Wesley Adult Bible Studies*. 4th edn. Fishers, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, pp. 69-75.

Saturday, December 3

[Isaiah 4:2-6](#)

*In that day the **Branch of the LORD** will be beautiful and glorious,
and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.*

Isaiah 4:2 (NIV)

When you see the word “branch,” what comes to your mind? Perhaps you think of the branch on a tree or a small stream. You may think about a branch of your family tree if you are interested in genealogy, and you would be on the right track with that thought. In our focus verse for today’s Advent devotional, we find the phrase “Branch of the Lord.” It sounds a little like a title and actually is a name or title for Jesus. When checking online I noticed sites stating there are about 200 names for Jesus in the Bible. One example is Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” We hear this name often during Advent. Our key verse ties the “Branch of the Lord,” or Emmanuel, to God and also to humanity in the phrase “fruit of the land.”

There are scriptural references to this “branch” in the Old Testament books of Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Isaiah. Another example from Isaiah 11:1 (NIV) is: “*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*” You will note that the word “branch” is capitalized in this verse from Isaiah, as well as in our key verse. However, some translations may not use this feature.

One carol that we sometimes hear during Advent is “Es Ist ein Ros entsprungen” which translated from German is “Lo, how a rose e’er blooming.” It can be found on page 216 of our current Methodist hymnal with text written by an unknown author prior to the 17th century. The carol’s lyrics are pasted below:

1. Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse’s lineage coming,
As men of old have sung.
It came, a flow’ret bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half spent was the night.
2. Isaiah ’twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind;
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God’s love aright,
She bore to men a Savior,
When half spent was the night.

3. This Flow'r, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispels with glorious splendor
The darkness everywhere.
True man, yet very God,
From sin and death He saves us,
And lightens every load.

The text of this carol states the lineage of Jesus and declares Him truly human and also God: He came to earth to be our Savior! Come, let us worship Him.

Judy Richardson

Sunday, December 4

[2 Peter 3:11-18](#)

Verse 11...*So think about how you should live now. You should be the kind of people that God is happy about. You should show that you belong to God.*

Verse 14...*So my friends, live in a good way. Try very much to do what makes God happy.*

Verse 15...*Remember that our Lord wants to save people from their sins.*

Verse 18...*You must grow as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, who saves us. Continue to know him better and better.*

12 Ways to Grow in the Grace and Knowledge of the Lord

1. Delight yourself in the Lord.
2. Saturate yourself with Scripture.
3. Pray.
4. Listen to good preaching.
5. Read good books.
6. Think of yourself theologically.
7. Talk to others about what you are thinking, reading, studying.
8. Find good teachers.
9. Love the Church.
- 10.<Cut back on> amusements. (Original version used "crucify")
- 11.Suffer.
- 12.Repeat.

David S. Schrock, (<https://davidschrock.com/2016/04/01/the-making-of-a-theologian-twelve-ways-to-grow-in-grace-and-knowledge-of-the-lord>)

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to grow in your grace and knowledge. Teach us how to love one another. Allow us to believe in you more and more until we reach our heavenly home. Amen.*

Susan Pollard

Monday, December 5

[Luke 21:20-28](#)

Preparing for Second Advent

The Old Testament has many passages preparing the Jews for the coming of the Messiah: Deuteronomy 18:15 and familiar Isaiah 9:6 are examples. These prophecies were laying the foundation for the first Advent, telling the Jews what God was planning for them so they would recognize the Messiah when he came. As we know, few recognized or acknowledged him as God's son.

In today's scripture, verses 20-24, Jesus is warning his Jewish contemporaries of the fall of Jerusalem and advising them to flee at the first signs of enemy invasion. Disciples of Jesus heeded his warning and left before the wrath of God came fully upon the city. The Second Advent is foretold in the remaining verses. Jesus said, *"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehension of what is coming on the world, for heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time, they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*

As we prepare for celebrating the first Advent, let us also set our hearts and minds on preparing for the Second Advent. And while we do not know the date or time, rest assured Christ will come again; let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Vicki Gaines

Tuesday, December 6

[1 Thessalonians 5:12-28](#)

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances,
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I am sure you have come across people in your life who are able to embody the message that Paul is sending to the Thessalonians. He is closing this letter with some last reminders for those who seek to follow Jesus. What would it look like in your life if you were able to rejoice, pray, and give thanks in all circumstances? How would our families, communities, and the world at large react if more and more of us could BE in the world like this every day? This is not an easy ask for us. We all suffer daily annoyances, trying times, and the trials and tribulations that life throws at us. As author Kate Bowler says, there is "no cure for being human!" So as we seek this Advent to do something and be something a little different in the world, perhaps we can start with rejoicing, prayer, and thanksgiving!

A Blessing When You Need a Little Motivation to Change
by Kate Bowler

I am rummaging through this day
in search of evidence
that tomorrow could be different.
As many times as I wake up
determined to bend the future
with each effort and expectation,
my conviction evaporates by the day's end.
Lord, we are given so few chances
to direct the course of our lives.
So with what little is in my control,
could you help me try?
Let me know the satisfaction of sleep
exhausted by my effort.
Walk me to the edge of comfort
and keep me there long enough
to reach for something more.
Rescue me from familiar self-hatred.
(You'll never do it. You can't do it.)
Refine my ambition into honest goals.
Quiet my mind when it is already certain
that nothing could possibly be different.
And rekindle a tenderness in my uncertain heart
for my own small moments of courage
for you've given me nothing to do
but what's mine to be done.
AMEN.

Christy Blagg

Wednesday, December 7

[Isaiah 6:1-13](#)

Then one of the creatures flew down to me, carrying a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with the burning coal and said, "This has touched your lips, and now your guilt is gone, and your sins are forgiven." Then I heard the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?"

Isaiah 6:6-8

All of us have sinned and feel unworthy to do the work of God from time to time. Yet, we still yearn for a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives. This quest underlies most of what we do, whether we are young or older. In our current culture it is easy to focus on salary, status, and material goods. At some point we wonder what kind of difference our life will make and what is the meaning of our works. Does what we do help to alleviate the suffering and needs of others in the world?

What is our purpose/vocation in life? Are we influenced by those around us, encouraging us to become involved in life works that do not bring us pleasure or meaning? We do not want to be at the end of our lives and realize that all that hard work could not matter less to us or anyone else.

Most of us will not receive such a life-changing visitation and graphic forgiveness of our sins as Isaiah did. However, like Isaiah, we must be aware of our sins and lack of God's purpose driving our lives. Then we will be able to receive the forgiveness of God and to be ready for the call to purpose for our life. Our call may come during a quiet time of meditation, a Bible study discussion, while reading a book, or while talking with a friend. Our call is to live our faith in our daily work, families, and communities. We are called to serve God through our ordinary, everyday lives. Whatever work we do should be an expression of our faith. Our works can transform the environments we find ourselves in.

Mary Sue Wenger

Thursday, December 8

[James 5:7-10](#)

Therefore, brothers and sisters, you must be patient as you wait for the coming of the Lord. Consider the farmer who waits patiently for the coming of rain in the fall and spring, looking forward to the precious fruit of the earth. You also must wait patiently, strengthening your resolve, because the coming of the Lord is near. Don't complain about each other, brothers and sisters, so that you won't be judged. Look! The judge is standing at the door! Brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as an example of patient resolve and steadfastness.

James 5:7-10

Waiting is hard! And to wait patiently...We all know the difficulty of that! During Advent, waiting is one of the major themes in the scripture readings. Every year as we prepare for Christmas and the coming of Christ Jesus, we are counselled to wait with patience, with hope, with attention and with joy.

What does that look like in your daily life? Perhaps you take the time for contemplation and silence when your day is packed with deadlines, activities and

frustrations. Maybe you notice someone struggling with a problem or physical burden and provide a helping hand or listening ear. It could be that you share a meal and laughter with family or friends or even strangers. Even as we struggle to wait with patience, may we participate in the beloved community. We are invited to rest in the assurance of God's steadfast love and grace; turn away from the noise of the news cycle, social media, and frantic demands to buy more stuff. May we turn to the One who claims us as beloved as we wait for the coming light.

Prayer: *O God, may we rest in the assurance of your grace and steadfast love. Fill our hearts with hope and renew our spirits with joy. Lead us to serve you as we serve all that you bring to our attention. We pray in the name of Jesus, the one who has come and is coming. Amen.*

Pat Wingert

Friday, December 9

[2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5](#)

This advent, there are significant phrases in this passage for us to consider:

- God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.
- That you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- May God our Father comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.
- The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.
- May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.

Advent is traditionally a time of preparation of our hearts for a new coming of Jesus into our lives. With eyes trained to see the Baby Jesus in a manger with His parents looking on, the shepherds kneeling in adoration around him with their sheep, and the three wise men coming from afar to honor him, it is not always easy for us to remember why Jesus came to us at all.

The Baby Jesus was sent to us by God in the lowliest of places: a stable for cows and donkeys. We find it so easy to accept a baby into our hearts and homes. But as we think deeply about the significance of His birth, we know that He came to save us in a very real way from the evil one.

Through the whole process of claiming Him in our hearts by faith, committing ourselves to live for him by faith, and steadfastly directing our hearts into every good work and word and the love of God, we have faith that He will protect us all along the way, that He is faithful to keep us from falling until we see him in glory.

And yes, there is a comfort in that relationship with Him that will carry us throughout life and bring us at last to heaven to be with him. It all started with the Baby Jesus in the

manger, being protected by His mother and father, and the Spirit of God filling every corner of that stable.

May we spend a little time today remembering why He came to us: to save us for His glory, to strengthen us for His glory, and to make us steadfast in His love until He comes again. To God be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Judi Espinoza

Saturday, December 10

[2 Thessalonians 3:6-18](#)

Paul's passage sounds unforgiving. It commands us to stay away from believers that are not productive and do not live according to the Bible's teachings. In other words, each person should take care of themselves and not look to others to do that.

Of course, God is forgiving and does not shun people, but will give them second chances. Said another way, we should encourage and help those who do not provide for themselves to do so and to live according to Christian teachings. I think of another passage when I read this. Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and he can feed himself for a lifetime.

Andy & Tammy Duxbury

Sunday, December 11

[John 3:22-30](#)

Advent - a season in the church filled with a flurry of extra activities to prepare for the celebration commemorating the birth of the Messiah, the Christ, Jesus. All are involved in some way (or ways) whether in church membership or leadership or staff. We all have a role in planning, or preparing, or attending. The church building is spiffed up and decorated, the choir has extra practices, the pastor prepares special messages, the staff prepares seasonal printings and distributions and coordinates enhanced activities all in anticipation of that glorious Christmas Eve and Christmas Day!

Whatever your role in all this, Why do you do it all?

In the verses referenced above, John the Baptist is continuing to baptize even though Jesus had already begun his ministry nearby. Some of his jealous disciples questioned him why he continued to do so in bringing people to Christ when HE was baptizing also. Why did he continue and not become a disciple of Jesus himself? John's answer was simple, and powerful. John explained that he was called by God to lead people to Jesus. That was his work and he would continue to perform it until God called him to another task. Even though Jesus had begun his ministry, John could still turn people to Jesus, He reminded them that

he was not the Christ, but one sent ahead to prepare the way and now that HE had come, all devotion needed to focus on Jesus.

However we will be involved in Advent activities, we need to remember, as John tells us here, that we need to perform our individual roles to bring people to Jesus. Yes, we can prepare, or plan, or worship, or sing, or fellowship generously, but not to bring praises to us, or OUMC, but to make Jesus greater and we must become less. We know how to do that - John showed us the way!

The REASON for the SEASON!! Jesus!! Merry Christmas!!!

Mike Earman

Monday, December 12

[Luke 22:39-53](#)

Prayer can obtain everything.
It can open the windows of Heaven.
It can shut the gates of Hell.
It can be a Holy constraint upon God.
It can detain an Angel until he leaves a blessing.
It can open the treasures of rain.
It can soften the iron ribs of rocks
until they melt into tears and a flowing river.

Prayer can unclasp the girdles of the North - saying to mountains of ire,
"Be thou removed hence, and cast into the bottom of the sea."

It can arrest the sun in the midst of its course.
It can send the swift-winged wind upon our errands.
To all these strange things and secret decrees,
add unrelated transitions which are above the stars.

When Hudson Taylor was asked if he ever prayed without any consciousness of joy, he replied, "Often. Sometimes I pray on with my heart feeling like wood; often, too, the most wonderful answers have come when prayer has been a real effort of faith without any joy whatsoever."

"I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for anything but it came at some time - no matter how distant the day - somehow in some shape, probably the last I should have devised, it came."

~Andomiram Judson

In the Gospels, we do not find Jesus merely talking about prayer. *We see Him praying.* The Savior modeled a life of continual communion with the Father. That is what it means to pray. Simply put, prayer is communing with our Father God. It is not a complicated spiritual practice: it is being with the Almighty, (and sometimes even talking to Him). Think of it as drawing close to the One who made you, knows you best, and loves you most...and opening your heart.

In the Gospels, Jesus prayed early in the morning, and all through the night...for others, for His anguish, joys, etc. By His example, we walk in His steps of prayer.

I believe prayers are sent on wings of hope, that “hope” stands for He (Jesus) Operates Power Equipment. I believe this truly.

My oldest brother has had no communication with me for almost nine years. Any reaching out to him has been rejected. I have prayed for him each night that God would enclose him with His wings of protection and grant him safety and wellness in His grace. Today, October 22, my brother called me. Through prayer, God put the past in the past where it belongs and gave my brother and me a future. God’s timing, not ours.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord Jesus, for teaching us to pray! To you, I give glory, honor, and praise. Amen.*

Marylee Huffman

Tuesday, December 13

[Isaiah 9:1-7](#)

What’s in a Name?

*For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given,
and the government shall be upon his shoulders;
And his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6

What is in a name? “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet?” Shakespeare used this line in his play *Romeo and Juliet* to convey that the naming of things is irrelevant. But wait a minute, Shakespeare! Isaiah would beg to differ. What the coming Messiah would be called is very relevant!

Of course, these are really titles Isaiah gives to the one to be named, Jesus, but you get the gist. Much of the hope and comfort coming from this prophet comes from the names or titles he gives to the anticipated Messiah.

- **Wonderful Counsellor** - Wonderful and wise; the one to go to for the ultimate guidance and direction for every aspect of our lives.
- **Mighty God** - God himself who can handle all life brings to us; our true source of strength and purpose.
- **Everlasting Father** - Faithful Father who never turns his back on us; whose love is forever.
- **Prince of Peace** - Gives peace to our troubled hearts and calms our fears. Provides the ultimate example for bringing justice and mercy to our world.

Prayer: *We pray for Christ to be present in our lives today as our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. We are thankful for the comfort and hope this brings. Amen.*

Betty Redmond

Wednesday, December 14

[Mark 1:1-8](#)

According to the Oxford dictionary, Advent is the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event. For the Christian Church, Advent is a time of anticipation, waiting, and then preparation to celebrate Christmas. This season begins four Sundays before Christmas. When we were children, my brothers and I followed the countdown to Christmas with an Advent Calendar. We took turns opening a little window each day until we reached number 24. Behind that window was the Holy family and we knew it was Christmas.

In this passage of Mark 1:1-8, Mark opens with *"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness...'"* The passage continues to tell us of John the Baptist. John was the messenger sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He was the servant who announced that Jesus, *"will be more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."* John baptized people in the river Jordan from Judea and Jerusalem. He was proclaiming baptism was for the repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

John baptized with water, but he told his followers *"He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."* John was calling attention to the one coming after him, the one who is the Son of God. He was preparing the way for Jesus by stressing to people that repentance was more important than laws. If you will, John was announcing an Advent of one who was coming to lead them to the Kingdom of God.

Liz Lawson

Thursday, December 15

[Isaiah 9:18-10:4](#)

In this scripture, Isaiah warns us of the repercussions of wickedness. He also condemns the wealthy and powerful individuals in the world that use their positions of power to maintain injustice and take advantage of the poor and marginalized. Like the flames of a fire, wickedness consumes everything in its path. These flames permeate not just wicked individuals, but society at large, serving as fuel for the flames of God's wrath. Rather than emulating God's impartiality and righteousness, those in power often abuse their positions to serve their own selfishness.

God shows no such partiality through His judgment, and no amount of wealth or power will save a wicked soul from His wrath. Much like Jesus' eternal kingdom, we must seek to display the principles of kindness, love, and peace for each other despite our differences. We were given personhood and free will, and the persistence of evil in the world must always be combatted through using such freedom for good.

The temptation of wicked nature is always among us, but so is God's grace. Righteousness and wickedness are not simply social constructs, but truths given to us by God and His holy character. Wickedness will break down our relationships with God, ourselves, and one another, but seeking justice and redemption through the grace of Jesus Christ will spread his generosity and fellowship throughout the world rather than those flames of violent oppression. God calls us to see the divine within ourselves and each other He intended when we were created in His image, and partiality towards what is just and right must always prevail regardless of one's circumstances. Only then may we find redemption through the Prince of Peace's love and love one another for eternity in His kingdom.

Lizzy Thomas

Friday, December 16

[Matthew 11:2-15](#)

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.

Matthew 11:4-6

Have you ever sinned? I think fear, doubt and anxiety drive us to sin because we lack faith in God. John also had fear while being held behind bars but was placed there because he followed his Christian values. Being a Christian is truly not easy and we will surely be ridiculed for following our Christian values. We are to have faith that God is in control as he

says he is. But do you ever sometimes doubt this like John did while being in prison? Do you ever look up to the heavens and ask yourself “where are you Lord?”

As John has described in this passage, entering God’s kingdom takes courage. Courage to know that God will take care of you as he says he will. During this holiday season as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, let us not fear and know that he is in control.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly father, thank you for the birth of you son Jesus. Thank you for the gifts and love you have given us. Amen.*

Bonnie Andrade

Saturday, December 17

[Jude 1:17-25](#)

The Duty to Fight for God’s Truth

In the last time there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires. These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the spirit.

Jude 1:18-19 (NIV)

Jude introduces himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James (Jesus’ brother). The Book of Jude is the 26th book in the New Testament, containing one chapter, 25 verses, and is the fourth shortest book of the Bible with 613 words. In this chapter, Jude is using his big brother tone to warn all Christians everywhere to be aware of false teachers who use God’s grace as an excuse for irresponsibility and dangerous doctrines that were helping to lead the early church astray. He stressed the fact that earlier apostles (Luke in Acts 20:29; Paul in Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Peter 2:1-3, and 2 John 7) had warned them about Satan sneaking unbelievers into the church so they could confuse and destroy true believers. Now, Jude is urging the church to take this seriously if they want to spend eternal life with Jesus Christ.

Jude’s first intention was to write about salvation, but because of his love for the church and the seriousness of protecting it, he is writing on how to fight against false teachings. He urges the people to build themselves up in their most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep themselves in God’s love, be merciful to those who doubt, and reach out and show mercy to others, but to be careful that their own footing was secure and that they did not become like the non-believers.

Jude closes with probably the greatest doxology in the Bible. The late Doris Ely always closed our United Women in Faith (UMW) meetings with this doxology:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy - to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority; through Jesus Christ and Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Jude 1:24-25 (NIV)

Wilma Mitchell

Sunday, December 18

[Isaiah 42:1-12](#)

There are a variety of themes that move us into and through the season of Advent. One I had not previously considered was justice – God’s justice. The prophet Isaiah clearly tells us that God’s chosen servant, the one on whom rests God’s Spirit, *will bring justice to the nations* (v. 1). The servant *will surely bring justice* (v. 3). The servant *won’t be extinguished or broken until he has established justice in the land* (v. 4). We would do well to consider in this season what that kind of justice looks like. (I am grateful for the vision, planning, and action brought about through Faith in Action to help me see.) The servant will NOT establish God’s justice by bludgeoning people into submission. God’s justice will not be established through shouting, ranting, and raving in public places. God’s justice comes to us through the loving and gentle changing of hearts and minds and lives; through the gift of ‘new eyes’ opening our lives to seeing God’s way in a God-denying world. ***I, the Lord, have called you for a good reason. I will grasp your hand and guard you, and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations...*** (v .6, *Common English Bible*). Covenant means God’s unbreakable promise. It is at the same time astounding and humbling that the work of God’s chosen servant to establish justice includes us.

Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring. (Charles Wesley)

Jim Wingert

Monday, December 19

[John 5:30-47](#)

The scripture reading for today is part of John’s gospel where Jesus is proving he is God. In the passage, Jesus is accused of healing on the Sabbath and thus breaking the Jewish Law. When confronted, Jesus says, “My Father is still working, so I am working.” Not only did the Jews condemn Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, but they were also incensed that he was calling himself the Son of God. During a courtroom trial, witnesses are called upon to present evidence for the defense or for the prosecution. Here, Jesus calls upon “witnesses” to prove he is the Son of God. John the Baptist gave testimony to Jesus being the Son of God (“*I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Make straight the way of the Lord.*”) God himself testified that Jesus is His Son when Jesus was baptized (“*And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.*”). The Old Testament provided multiple witnesses and the people came to know about who Jesus is, what he would do, and their place in God’s scheme by reading Genesis through the book of Malachi. And Moses served as a witness as the accuser of his people for not accepting Jesus as God because if they believed Moses, they would have believed Jesus. What is our

connection here? Do we continue to be as excited as John when we speak of Jesus? Do we continue to study the Bible to learn more about Jesus? Do we spend time in prayer and meditation seeking God? As we strengthen our faith in God through his son, Jesus Christ, we are also witnesses to who Christ is. It seems to me that the Advent season would provide excellent opportunities to begin or renew these habits. What kind of witness for Jesus will you be?

God of hope, who brought love into this world,
be the love that dwells between us.
God of hope, who brought peace into this world,
be the peace that dwells between us.
God of hope, who brought joy into this world,
be the joy that dwells between us.
God of hope, the rock we stand upon,
be the center, the focus of our lives
always, and particularly this Advent time. Amen.
(https://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent)

Bill Pollard

Tuesday, December 20

[Luke 1:5-25](#)

*But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord."
Luke 1:13-15*

How many times have you continually prayed for something and it never happened? That seems to be the case in this story of Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth. They followed all the commandments and what was expected of them, but Elizabeth was still barren. In that day, that was a disgrace and legitimate grounds for divorce. I am sure she had cried many a tear as she is now the age of a grandparent.

Then a miracle happened and the angel, Gabriel, appeared to Zechariah and tells him that Elizabeth will bear a son to be named John and gave him a list of things that would happen throughout his life. This then leads us into the birth of Jesus, the unlikely births of two infants born in miraculous ways.

How does this speak to us today? There are times in our lives when we have problems and it seems that all hope has reached a dead end. We don't understand God's timing which leads to doubt as to whether he is listening to us. Despite our weaknesses,

God proves faithful and sometimes in unexpected ways, such as in our scripture. In this Advent season, may we see God in unlikely places, such as through a baby born in a stable. May we go out into our community and spread the hope and good news of the coming of our Savior.

Kathy Billhimer

Wednesday, December 21

[Luke 1:26-38](#)

We have all gotten news that surprises us. Life is full of unexpected twists and turns, and sometimes we are blindsided by something wonderful, but are unable to accept it right away. But imagine, for a moment, that you are Mary on this night when God sends Gabriel down to her to break the news. Telling her that she was chosen by the Lord to bring his son, and the savior of all humanity into the world. That is some big news. And God knew that she would have some doubts at first hearing this, so he had Gabriel tell her that her cousin Elizabeth is with child now even though she was thought to be barren. Gabriel tells her that nothing is impossible if you have faith in God. And she accepts his word, and finds that her faith grows stronger because of it.

That is the root of this passage for me. We have all gotten good news, bad news, and life changing news. But the one constant in the chaos of life is our faith. God walks with us every day. He works through us, and we have to remain open to him to allow him to guide us through the ups and downs life holds. Our faith comforts us, in times of grief and sadness, and it lifts us up in times of joy and happiness. Mary did not know what challenges she would face while carrying the child of God. She did not know that she would have to travel to Bethlehem, she did not know that she would have to give birth in a manger, she did not know that she would have shepherds and wisemen visiting her, and she had no idea the trials her son would have to face. But she had her faith, and because of that she knew God would be with her and would take care of her. God does the same for us.

Marian Woodington

Thursday, December 22

[Luke 1:39-56](#)

*And Mary said "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices
in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble
state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name..."*

Luke 1:46-49

Prior to this section of Luke, Mary has been informed by the angel Gabriel that she will be with child as a virgin and that her cousin, Elizabeth, is pregnant at an advanced age. In this passage, Mary travels to be with Elizabeth and help her during the late stages of her pregnancy. At their meeting, Elizabeth exclaims that Mary is blessed among women and that she (Elizabeth) is honored to be in the presence of the mother of the Lord, even though Mary has not told her that she is pregnant. Mary's reaction, the first part of which is listed above, is to glorify the Lord.

She does not say "woe is me, to be with child and not married," nor does she say "wow, I'm really special, aren't I?" She praises the Lord, humbles herself as His servant, and goes on to list his mighty acts. She accepts the will of God and sings his praises with no emphasis on her individual situation. She has listened to the angel, accepts that God is calling her for a special assignment, and puts the emphasis on the goodness of God.

It is unlikely that any of us will be visited directly by the angel Gabriel. We will not be asked to do something as monumental as carrying and bearing the child of God. Our calling is likely to be more subtle. Will we truly hear what God wants of us? Will we accept the charge as graciously as Mary accepted hers? Will we sing praises to the Lord no matter what he asks of us? We each have a part to play in being God's people on Earth. The Lord is constantly hoping that we will put our trust in Him in the same way Mary did, so that he can shower his blessings upon us as well. He will not deceive us, nor lead us astray. During this Advent season, let us be especially attuned to what we can do to extend the kingdom of God in our midst. Let's pay attention to what God is asking of us and accept it graciously.

Janet Gloeckner

Friday, December 23

[Revelation 22:6-11](#)

In just two days, the Big Day, the one retailers have been preparing us for all year, will finally be here. All the decorating, baking, and preparation will have paid off and the celebration will begin! We're almost done, aren't we? House cleaned or almost? Hearts cleaned? Soul good and shiny?

Advent is a season of preparation for both the birth of our Savior and His return. THAT thing, much like fruitcake for many, we all try to ignore and hope it goes away. Well, John's birthday is today's gospel passage, so, in honor of how he felt about avoiding "bothersome" and uncomfortable topics, let's go for it.

In Revelation 22:18-19, we see plenty of "harsh" realities for those who failed in the most important preparation work. We are told anyone who adds to the words of the book will be given the plagues of Revelation, and anyone who subtracts will be removed from the Book of Life by God himself. How many times do we hear ourselves, or others, say, "oh later I'll do better or I'll get to that tomorrow" when referring to our sinful habits or excuses not to do justice or love another? Verse 10 prohibits John from keeping his thoughts to

himself, but insists these words are available for everyone to read. Are the religious leader(s) you're listening to adding or subtracting from the Word? Are you sure or have you just assumed? Do you know Jesus' feelings about this book? (see verse 7) What are Isaiah's thoughts on speech in today's reading? Guessing/hoping it's the same? Guess you'll have to read and find out.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Daddy, Help us to read and meditate on all Your Holy Word, not just the parts that support us, especially our sinful behavior. Give us eyes to see, minds to comprehend, and hearts to follow what Your Spirit reveals to us as we study Your Word. In Jesus' precious name, amen.*

Tara Eckenroad

Saturday, December 24

[Philippians 2:5-11](#)

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus."

Philippians 2:5 (NIV)

Arriving home after a long day I planned to listen to music, check email, and pay some bills online. I soon realized there was no internet connection. I groaned. Then I discovered that the TV wasn't operating properly. With irritation mounting, my first thought was, "I just paid this outrageous cable and internet bill yesterday and this is the service I get!"

I unplugged the modem in an attempt to reboot the system. Well, that didn't help. My only option was to call Technical Support. But, I knew that my attitude needed a reboot as well. After studying today's scripture from Philippians over several days, I was ashamed at my initial prideful and arrogant reaction to this situation. With an air of superiority, I felt that because I was a customer in good standing, I should not have to suffer this glitch in service.

Prayerfully, I asked God for the humility I would need in order to speak respectfully and politely to the technical support representative who would soon be on the telephone walking me through a solution. Lania was extremely kind and patient. She remotely pushed some magic buttons and everything was again working properly.

I thanked her profusely. She responded with what I perceived as a smile in her voice, "It's my job to help." I told her she had done much more than just a job. I explained how much I appreciated her patience, and her kind, caring, friendly manner in guiding me to a solution in my state of helplessness.

My frustration had melted as a result of prayer on my behalf and by the humble, respectful assistance offered by Lania. Never before had I experienced such a sense of peace and calm after a telephone encounter with the cable provider.

Jesus, God Incarnate, demonstrated the depths of his love by humbling himself in servanthood, humility, and obedience to the Father. If we abandon our prideful way of

thinking, drop the Me-My-Mine attitude, and consider the needs of others above our own, we can adopt an attitude of humility that is in Christ Jesus.

Not only during this Christmas season of Hope, Peace, Love, and Joy, but ongoing, may we demonstrate our willingness to yield ourselves in humble service so that others may know God's love. We can trust God for the wondrous results.

Let our minds be on Jesus Christ our Lord.
Let our attitudes and actions reflect Him.
All this to the glory of God the Father! AMEN.

Carole Gaines

Sunday, December 25

[John 1:1-14](#)

Congratulations! You have made it to Christmas! All of the work and preparation are theoretically complete, now it is time to stop and enjoy the season. It is hard to write this some two months before Christmas knowing that there is a lot of time and work to get to this day. And I know that as you read this, the variety of experiences you will have had leading up to today will be impossible to know. As we do get to this day it can sometimes feel like a relief. We have done so much preparation, can we actually enjoy the moment? Even enjoying the moment has become cliché, the whole "reason for the season" sounds like some hallmark marketing plan to sell more stuff to help us remember Jesus.

What helps me remember more than anything is the scripture we read today from John. It has none of the normal Christmas background that we often see. No angels, no shepherd, no sheep in the field, no baby in a manger. And while I do like all of those details in Luke and Matthew, maybe John is a little clearer in helping us understand what Christmas really means. At the end of the day, when all the presents are unwrapped, all the food put away, all the carols sung and guests napping, Christmas is about Jesus being present with us. No longer was God some distant Divinity who spoke through prophets and laws but "*the Word became flesh and lived among us...*" Jesus showed up at Christmas to be like us, to share in the experience of being human and show us how to be more divine.

While in the moment of getting ready for all Advent and Christmas are to us personally, we might forget John's message about Jesus. That is okay, at least for the moment, but when we stop and reflect, take a deep breath and pause, we should always come back to John. God sends Jesus to help us connect with the divine. A Jesus who is born in a manger, worshiped by magi, adored by shepherds and sung about by angels, but in the end is very much like us. A Jesus who lives among us, knows our joy, knows our grief. A Jesus truly worth taking the time to celebrate on this day and every day.

Merry Christmas!

Adam Blagg