



2018 Advent Devotional

by the Laity of the

West Virginia Conference

of The United Methodist Church





This devotional was compiled by the Laity of the
West Virginia Conference of
The United Methodist Church.

Please meditate on each daily reading and pray for God's
Spirit to direct your life in a special way during this
Advent Season.



THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Scripture: Jeremiah 33:14-16 | Sunday, December 2, 2018

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

God's promise to the house of Israel is a time of peace and righteous, something we all look forward to having. In a world filled with hatred, violence and injustice, we look forward and believe in a time of peace. If you read a little farther it will seem as if God is saying that the time is coming when the world will be as He intended it to be, a land of justice and peace.

During this time of Advent let us remember that God is fulfilling His promise in the form of a tiny babe. This righteous branch has come to establish a time of unity in the world. In all the hustle and bustle of this season, let us remember what it is really all about.

When I read of all the conflicts in Israel and the conflicts in all parts of our world, I find myself saying "Come, Lord of righteous and make us all whole again."

Prayer: Lord help us to welcome into our lives the gift of Your Son and help us be aware of what we can do to make your world a place of justice and peace. Amen

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A PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE AND FOR DELIVERANCE

Scripture: Psalm 25:1-10 |Monday, December 3, 2018

These verses, reflecting a fervent prayer to God by King David, address his worries about shame and his fear of enemies who wish him harm. Who among us has not faced these same things, albeit in differing circumstances . . . and who among us can honestly say his/her life has been free from periods of regret? I think of the current political landscape which is fraught with divisiveness and animosity. If ever we have needed guidance and deliverance it's now! And I can't help but think of our United Methodist denomination which is facing a very crucial issue concerning human sexuality . . . an issue which has caused us to become rigid as we "dig our heels in" without considering another's point of view. The perfect answer to these perplexing problems will never come to us as flawed humans; rather they will rest in the hands of the Lord as David so accurately reminds us in verse 9. "He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble His way." King David had his flaws just as each of us are flawed, but God's grace paved the way for him in ancient times just as God's grace paves the way for us today. God's perfect answer will prevail. I pray that it might be so!

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, as we look forward with anticipation to the magnificent birth of Jesus Christ, may we be of humble spirit and trust that You, and You alone have the answers to so many of life's questions, answers that seem to elude us. Guide us, we pray, as we seek unity with each other through loving relationships, particularly during this season of advent when our thoughts turn toward the ultimate love as displayed by Jesus. Amen

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SERVANT-HOOD

Scripture: Samuel 2:18-20 | Tuesday, December 4, 2018

Both Samuel and Jesus (Luke 2:22) were taken by their parents as babies to the temple to be dedicated to God. Samuel later answered God's call by listening and responding "here I am Lord. I will serve You!" His name, Samuel means Son of God. Jesus, as the actual Son of God, was the divine result of Mary's response to God's calling, "behold, I am your handmaiden." Thus, in faith she became the mother of Jesus, who came to be our role model and to save us by his grace through the sacrifice of His life. Samuel and Mary are shining examples of servant-hood. Are we listening to God today? How is your dedication to God? Will you say "here I am Lord. I will be your servant?" Will you use Jesus as your guiding star?

Prayer: God, we know You are calling us every day as we see and hear instant media information from all over the world. This is Your world and we are all Your children. We thank You for all who answer Your call to servant-hood! We know that we cannot have too much love in reaching out to our brothers and sisters both in our neighborhoods and around the world! Let us remember our main purpose on earth is to be Your servants. Hear our prayer, O Lord. Amen

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD DRAWS NEAR

Scripture: Luke 21:25-36 | Wednesday, December 5, 2018

“In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that God’s kingdom is near.” (Luke 21: 31, CEB)

I often struggle with current events. There are so many issues and fears and threats and anxieties that I cannot begin to list them all. Part of this information overload is because we have become so inter-connected and news spreads farther and faster than ever before. Even so, I find it hard to shake the feeling that our world is becoming a darker and more dangerous place.

However, this passage acknowledges that there will be times when we witness things that are wrong in this world and we are afraid. We see the rising waters and feel the surging of the sea around us. Despite all of this, these will be the times that Christ and God’s Kingdom will draw near to us. God is with us always.

We cannot let our hearts be dulled by either the things that intoxicate us, or the anxieties of day-to-day life. Our focus must remain on Christ, and our hope that even in these times, we are close to God and He is still working in our world.

Prayer: This day, we pray for whatever fears and anxieties we hold in our hearts. Help us to give them over to our Creator’s love and care. May we always stay vigilant for the kingdom coming near. Amen.

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THE COMING MESSENGER

Scripture: Malachi 3:1-4 | Thursday, December 6, 2018

Malachi 3: 3 ..he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. (NRSV)

A young family made their living traveling a circuit of Renaissance Festivals. The father was a medieval silversmith craftsman. He sat at his fire with his little pot, watching over the molten silver, and carefully skimmed off the impurities with a tiny spoon-like tool. The tiny drops of dross, or impurities, went into a bowl of wet sand. His concentration was intense. He crafted his purified silver into exquisite pieces of jewelry for the amazed crowd. The wife, spokesperson for the family, explained the process, took orders for custom pieces, and sold their wares. The children, dressed in period costume, adorned with shiny silver headdresses unique jewelry, danced through the crowd inviting people to “come and see” what Daddy was creating. Folks, charmed by the children, came to the booth. They watched, talked, listened, and longed for those beautiful pieces the silversmith crafted. Few were able to commit their meager savings to the master’s unique work. But they wanted to carry something tangible away from this experience.

So, they bought dross jewelry. The impurities skimmed off the silver and dropped into the bowl of sand formed strange, odd shapes and patterns. Sometimes the sand turned to glass around the edges of the dross as bits of silver shined through. The young family fashioned the dross into bits of inexpensive jewelry that the crowds purchased without hesitation. The dross, crafted into something beautiful, brought the crowds to the master craftsman and his delightful family.

We can place ourselves, the church, and seekers into this story. The dross, although not perfect, has been through the refiner’s fire. Each piece is a beautiful and unique creation. The Master can return the dross again to the fire to be combined and refined. Only then can the Master recreate it into more pure and beautiful works. So it is with us. We are not perfected – yet. From the moment of our baptism, God recreates us into more and more beautiful reflections of His love. As we gather and prepare for those times that refine us, let us celebrate the beauty the Master has already formed into our being.

As we journey toward the Christmas Season, our role is not to be the Craftsman seeking out impurities, but to invite the crowd “come and see” what our Father is creating.

Prayer: Creating God, purify me in your Love and Grace. I confess, I am afraid of change. I am afraid of letting go of the familiar “me”. Help me celebrate the works you have created and continuously recreate in me. Accept my life as a love offering humbly laid before your throne.

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ZACHARIAH'S SONG

Scripture: Luke 1:68-79 | Friday, December 7, 2018

Luke 1:78, Because of our God's deep compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us.

The dawn of a new day. As I write this devotional the day is just beginning. I see the dark of night becoming gradually lighter and brighter. In October 2017, I was on the beach in Maine watching the sunrise. There were other people around. Some dog walkers, a lone fisher at the edge of the water. A flock of geese flew over with the sunrise silhouetting them as they headed south. As the sun continued to rise I was keenly aware of the presence of God around me. It is always a comfort to know God is with me and His love surrounds me.

Are we in a darkness that seems to overwhelm us? Can we see the light or feel the hope of a new day? There is comfort in the scriptures. God reaches out to us to give us His promises, guidance and truth. During this time of Advent I invite you to spend time in the scriptures, prayer and meditation. God is present and He will show you the light. That light is His Son Jesus Christ. Sometimes the people we hold in high esteem will let us down but if we look to the One who has come to pay the price for our salvation, we will never be disappointed.

Zachariah was quoting from Psalms and declaring the arrival of his son. He named his son, John as instructed by the angel. John the Baptist was born to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. Zachariah was filled with the light of God and was singing praise to God for all his blessings. Zachariah had been struck mute since he had questioned the angel Gabriel about the impending birth of his son in Elizabeth's and his advanced age. This scripture from Luke was the first time Zachariah was able to speak since he doubted the angel. But what a mighty testimony of hope and the way to peace he gives to his friends and family as the Holy Spirit speaks through him.

Prayer: God of all creation, help us see You in the mighty acts of each new dawn! Thank you for the Word, for Your Son and for Your Spirit among us. Teach us to respond to Your guidance for our lives. Amen

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BEGINNING A GOOD WORK

Scripture: Philippians 1: 3-11 | Saturday, December 8, 2018

Verse 5: I'm glad because of the way you have been my partners in the ministry of the gospel from the time you first believed it until now. I'm sure about this: the one who started a good work in you will stay with you to complete the job by the day of Christ Jesus.

Our church is a small country church. We celebrated our 125th anniversary at our Homecoming this past August. We often say that we are “an incubator church”. We can't afford a full-time pastor with benefits but we have started some on the road of service and helped to begin a good work in their lives. When I read of the good work that Dan and Sue Lowther do for our Disaster Relief program, I was proud that they started on our charge.

As Paul was unable to be with churches that he started, our charge isn't always in touch with Dan and Sue. But we are always proud of their work for Christ and willing to pray for their needs. Unlike Paul we don't always remember them in our weekly prayers. We are trusting God to put loving, supportive people in their lives to help bear their burdens and multiply their joys.

In the short time that we have these pastors we are able to build a foundation with them. A strong foundation is based on personal knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. We are able to encourage them and help them connect to the community.

Someone, before these people arrived at our church, saw the hand of God in their lives. That person or persons encouraged them to take Lay Speakers' classes and through those classes, others helped them find their way to us.

Look around your church and see what potential you can find. Pray for God's eyes to see the person that He has begun the good work in today.

Prayer: Dear Lord help us to see others with open eyes. May we see in them the love and compassion that will allow them to do your good work.

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THINKING OF YOU

Scripture: Luke 3:1-6 | Sunday, December 9, 2018

Recently I opened a piece of Dove chocolate, the foil wrapper had a message inside.

T. Thinking

O. Of

Y. You

I started thinking; How often do we tell someone I will be thinking of you. In that moment we of course will fulfill the task. But what happens in half an hour when something else takes over our attention. Do we continue to Think Of You, as we have promised. Or do we in our humanity forget the promise and go on with our lives. Yes, we will continue to think of that person, but not to the exclusion of everything else. In this passage of scripture God is demonstrating how he thinks of us. John was bringing the news of the One following him, the One who would bring us everlasting life. God always Thinks Of You. In his master plan he thinks of each of us every minute of the day. God is with us all the time. He has a plan for our salvation. He has provided a way for everlasting life. He has been Thinking Of You, before anyone else ever knew you were going to exist. In this advent season we need to remember to think of the One who thinks of us. We need to thank him for making a way for us to have everlasting life with him. Thank Him because he was Thinking Of You.

Prayer: Thank you God for always thinking of me. I know you have a plan for my life. I pray that my heart will be open to fulfilling Your plan for me. In Your name. Amen

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I REMEMBER

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14-20 | Monday, December 10, 2018

I remember. I remember in the months following the births of our sons, holding them, and marveling over them. They were tiny and new and miraculous. I remember standing and rocking them, swaying on my feet, and singing to them, overwhelmed with the love I felt for each of them.

If you've held a newborn, I imagine you can understand and relate to this. When they are so small and so new, they are innocent and amazing. We hold them close and sing over them in joy.

The book of Zephaniah is set in the time of King Josiah of Judah. Josiah was king of Judah just before the invasions by the Babylonians that ultimately caused the fall of Judah and the exile to Babylon. The words of Zephaniah are prophecies meant to warn the people of Judah of coming judgment and consequences. Zephaniah 1:17b says, "because they have sinned against the Lord, their blood shall be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung." Read the book, but be warned that it is not very pleasant.

It is a book of judgment against Judah, but at the very end, in the verses of our reading today, it is as if God says, "I remember."

*"[The Lord] will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival."
(Zephaniah 5:17b)*

What is grace? I think this verse is an example of what grace is. Even though God knows – and completely understands – the wickedness and disloyalty of his people, God remembers that they are his. God remembers what it was like to create these children in his own image. God remembers how much God loves us – the people of Judah and us. That memory of love is so much stronger than anything else.

As you move through Advent, remember: The Lord rejoices over you with gladness. The Lord renews you with his love. The Lord exults over you with loud singing, As if it were the day of your birth.

And when you are angry or upset or disappointed with someone else, remember these words. The Lord rejoices over ALL of us with singing – yes, even that person.

Remember that, as God remembers us.

Prayer: Creating, loving, sustaining God, remember your love of us. Recreate us daily in your own image so that we can see others as you see them, and remember the love you have for our neighbors and for us. In your son's name we prayer together, Amen.

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SING UNTO THE LORD

Scripture: Isaiah 12: 2-6 | Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Isaiah 12:5 Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth

God's people have always sung at times of joy. It is a natural response to our inner soul and emotions. We WV Mountaineer fans know the song "Country Roads" by heart. It has become our song of pride for our team and love for our home state. It is known not only within the state but is associated with WV around the world. It is our rallying battle cry. It brings West Virginians together in times of triumph as well as times of grief and distress.

The prophet is rallying God's people together in this passage of scripture. He is encouraging the people to remember all that God has done for them and to break out in song of thanksgiving. DON'T FORGET! "Proclaim God's deeds among the peoples;" This was the reminder of the past and the prophecy to what God would still do. But they had to trust God would continue to care for them regardless of conditions in their lives.

During this Advent season, take time to ponder the parallels of the Jewish trials during Isaiah's time with the trials of God's people today. He is still in control today but we have to trust Him to lead us to Him. Now, "Shout and sing for joy, city of Zion, and West Virginia, and the United States, and the World because the holy one of Israel is great among you".

Prayer: Dear Lord, Hear us today as we raise our voices in thanksgiving and joy for what you have done for us. May we see goodness in everything and everyone around us. Amen.

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BE GOD'S CHILDREN

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-7 | Wednesday, December 12, 2018

This short passage is one of my favorite scriptures. It is familiar to all of us and is often quoted in sermon and song. In Theatre West Virginia's production of "Hatfields and McCoys", author Billy Edd Wheeler has Preacher Hatfield use part of verse 7 in his effort to redeem the clan leader. This scripture is very comforting and very inspiring; yet for me it's a little troubling and a bit challenging.

Paul says to rejoice always! He tells us to be anxious about nothing! Who can follow these instructions? I love the words. I love the sentiment. But I know that I fall short on both counts. There are times when I don't feel like rejoicing. There are moments when I feel anxious. Now a brief reflection on my last two statements reveals my problem: I used the word "feel".

Paul is not telling us how to feel. That's an emotional thing we can't always control. He's telling us how to act. I should speak as if I know that good (God) will prevail. I should avoid worry, because worry is a substitute for action. I should pray, not to inform God about my needs, as though God relies on me as a news source, but because prayer reminds me that God cares for me.

I must be gentle, because I trust God, then the peace of God, which I will never understand (and may not always feel), will guard my heart and my mind. I will prevail by trusting God, for God is not a distant being; God is the giver and sustainer of my life, and God is near.

One of the best things about this season is the constant stream of reminders that God cares enough about us to come dwell among us as one of us. God is truly near, because God has lived as a human and the Holy Spirit (God) continues to live in us and among us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to rejoice always and not be anxious, so that Your love will be reflected through us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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ARE WE WAITING EXPECTANTLY AND BEING READY?

Scripture: Luke 3:7-18 | Thursday, December 13, 2018

John came out of the wilderness baptizing those coming to him. There had not been a prophet in Israel for more than 400 hundred years. It was widely believed that when the Messiah came prophecy would return (Joel 2:28, 29 and Malachi 3:1, 4:5) When John burst on the scene, the people were excited. He was obviously a great prophet, and they were sure that the eagerly awaited age of the Messiah had come. Some, in fact, thought John himself was the Messiah. John spoke like the prophets of old, saying that the people must turn from their sin to avoid punishment and turn to God to experience his mercy and approval. This is a message for all times and places, but John spoke it with particular urgency - he was preparing the people for the coming Messiah.

John warned of impending judgement by comparing those who refuse to live for God to chaff, the useless outer husk of the grain. By contrast he compared those who repent and reform their lives to the nourishing wheat itself. The winnowing fork was a pitchfork use to toss wheat so that the kernels would separate from the blades. Those who refuse to be used by God will be discarded because they have no value in furthering God's work. Those who repent and believe however, hold great value in God's eyes, because they are beginning a new life of productive service for him.

As we come to this Advent Season and await again to celebrate the coming of Jesus. may we remember that we are called to his service and willingly offer ourselves to Him as a gift - as His coming is our gift of salvation - the greatest gift!

Prayer: Father God who knows our hearts and calls us to his service - we are present and awaiting expectantly. We praise you for who you are in our lives and for giving us a way to be your children. Forgive us for not always being obedient children and not always seeing the needs of others. Give us a desire to be a people who care deeply for those around us and being more loving. In the name of Jesus the Christ we pray.
Amen

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PEACE

Scripture: Micah 5:2-5a | Friday, December 14, 2018

“Peace be with you....and also with you.” How many times have you said this to another person during a worship service? We are asking for God’s peace to be present in the lives of our friends and families.

This second week of Advent is centered around Peace. In this reading from the Old Testament, the Prophet Micah is talking about peace. A time when the Messiah would be born from the house of David, a Savior who would bring Peace to the whole world. In the Jewish faith that One person, will lead the government, establish law and bring spiritual redemption. He will be born at Bethlehem. This Savior would come in final Victory. And this Savior is Christ the One who brings peace and salvation to all believers. This Shepherd will bring all of his flock together. As we celebrate the coming of Christ during Advent let the Peace of Christ be the focus of our prayers and thoughts. We remember the Peace and Salvation that Christ brings into our lives.

“God didn’t send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:17 (CEB)

“Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7 (CEB)

One last thought. Advent is for all, the lost and those that need Peace in their life. A Peace that only a belief, a faith, in Christ can bring.

Prayer: Peace be with you! During this time of Advent let us focus on living peacefully with our neighbors. In Jesus name, Amen.

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BLESSED

Scripture: Luke 1: 47-55 | Saturday, December 15, 2018

Blessed has become a Facebook meme and “feeling blessed” makes regular appearances in the posts. People treat images or post pictures of themselves enjoying a delicious meal or a great vacation, or a shopping spree at a favorite store. Blessed has come to mean living a life of privilege and comfort. Using the term has become a way of celebrating those moments when everything is going well and all seems right with the world—or at least one’s own little corner of it.

The blessedness Mary celebrated stands in stark contrast to our culture’s attitude. By our standards she does not look blessed at all. God has chosen her to be the Mother of the Messiah, but in practical terms what does that mean for her? She is from a poor family, a peasant girl from a small village. Friends see her as a disgrace as she is unmarried and pregnant.

Being the Mother of the Messiah became a mixed blessing. As she would watch her son be rejected, shamed and crucified. Despite all this, Mary praised God for honoring her.

Mary sings about God who saves not just souls, but embodies people. God fills the hungry not only with food, but with hope. Mary’s Lord lifts the lowly up, granting them dignity and honor. He also gives each who will believe a seat at the table and a voice in the conversation. Both in Mary’s song and Jesus’ ministry, we see the God who loves us as we are but does not leave us as we are.

Mary’s song magnifies the Savior for His love that will make creation whole. God’s saving judgment is for all of us. It brings us down from the pride that fills us until we can’t see either God or neighbor. It brings us from the shame that distorts our world view and convinces us that no one, not even God, could love us.

Mary experienced God’s blessing. Her blessing, like ours, is a cross-shaped blessing, “a condition of complete simplicity,” bringing true freedom, the priceless gift of God’s salvation.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for blessing us. Continue to love us and remind us that you will always be there for us as we go along on our journey with you. Thank you for Mary and for blessing her as she stood by her son. Teach us to be like Mary and always stand by us as we do your will. In Jesus Name, Amen.

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GOD'S WILL

Scripture: Hebrews 10:5-10 | Sunday, December 16, 2018

Hebrews 10:7, Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God.'

I have come to do Your will. Who's will do you think this scripture is talking about? For me its talking about God's will. How many times have we run from the will of God? Running is something I'm good at, and I don't mean on a treadmill. Running is much easier than doing God's will. At least I let my mind tell me that and I listen to my mind and not my heart. There are times when I feel that tug on my heart and I ignore it. That isn't what we are to do. As an example getting up and talking in front of people isn't something I do. I would rather be seen and not heard. That comes from my childhood. We are all affected by our childhood experiences, some are good and some are bad. I know God continues to work through me in many ways. There have been times when I have felt God telling me I needed to do something and I ignored His will. If we have ignored God's will long enough he may stop dealing with us and move on to someone else. We always need to listen to that voice in the back of our minds telling us to do something, or that gentle tug on our hearts. It just might be God's will.

Prayer: Lord help us to always listen to your will Lord and not ours. Open our ears so we may hear your still small voice. Help us to know that gentle tug on our hearts when you are doing the pulling. Amen

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BE STILL
Monday, December 17, 2018

Scripture: Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God!"

Our Granddaughter, Chelsea, is pregnant with our first great grand-child. We eagerly await Landen's birth. The anticipation can sometimes feel overwhelming but the arrival of a most marvelous blessing in the birth of a child is worth it all.

Thinking about Chelsea and her pregnancy reminds me of the "pregnant pauses" in my life when I take time to sit with God in silence and meditation. Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God!"

First, these pregnant pauses are filled with expectation and anticipation. God's voice is heard and His will revealed apart from the hustle and bustle of life. His still small voice is not drowned out by the world but made clear in the silent attentiveness. Similar to physical birth, a delivery of blessings is found in relationship with my Heavenly Father.

Secondly, "new" is birthed. Newborn babies arrive as unique individuals, personal fingerprints, footprints, facial features, and personalities. So it is with pregnant pauses. New ideas are birthed and a renewed spirit of connectedness to the one who created the world. One of my favorite songs is "Hymn of Promise". The chorus speaks to my life's journey "Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see". Pregnant pauses are an incubator for God to reveal to me what He alone can see.

I can image Mary, the chosen one, listening in pregnant pauses as she enjoyed the movement of Jesus inside her womb. In holy reverence Mary waits for the blessing of new life-unrevealed until His season-something only God can see!

Prayer: Lord, help me to plan for pregnant pauses in my life. To trust you for renewed spirit and enriched relationship with you, Almighty God. In Jesus name, Amen.

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A GREAT LIGHT

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2-7 | Tuesday, December 18, 2018

“A child is born to us, a son is given to us...” (v. 6a) As I read these words I was reminded of the birth of my two great grandsons, one a little over a year ago and the other just two weeks ago at the time of this writing.

A son was given to my grandson and a son was given to my granddaughter. How precious are these little ones. Oh, the joy of little ones coming into a family. They are like a great light, a shining light to the family even before we know what they will do, what they will become as they grow. They have increased the joy in the families.

I can hear the sounds of ecstasy that were uttered from parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and others as they saw the babies. All the oohs and ahhs! Even the sounds of crying were joyful. The excitement was beyond words at times as we celebrated and welcomed these two new little ones.

Unfortunately, times will not always be happy; we will not always be singing songs of praise. There will be times of darkness, times when the light will not shine because of troubles, sickness, hurt, despair, sorrow.

But there is one who is THE Great Light, the one who was born to bring light to the world even when we are in darkness, in distressing times. We celebrate His birth during this Advent season and we welcome Him anew.

Despite the joy we receive with the birth of children, there is nothing to compare to the birth of Jesus Christ, THE Great Light of the world, and what He means to us when we accept Him into our life.

Is He your Great Light today? Are you celebrating His birth and welcoming Him into your life with even more elation than we do our earthly children?

Prayer: Thank you God for the gift of your Son. Prepare our hearts to receive your free gift. Amen.

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ANTICIPATION

Scripture: Psalm 96 | Wednesday, December 19, 2018

Psalm 96 is only 13 verses long. It only takes 1 min. to read it. Go ahead and take that minute to read each verse out loud. Give full voice to the exclamation points. WOW! A lot of things are happening here: praising, singing, exalting, worshipping, declaring, rejoicing. But, amidst all these actions I experience joy as I read this Psalm. Verse 12 says, “sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes...”. I also feel a greater sense of anticipation during Advent.

Go back to the 1970's. Carly Simon had a hit song, “ANTICIPATION”. Key in on the chorus: an-ti-ci-pation, an-ti-ci-pa-a-tion, is making me wait, keeping me wa-ai-ai-ai-aiting. Now hear the chorus playing in the background of a commercial for Heinz ketchup. “Anticipation” as the thick, rich, delicious ketchup, oh so slowly, travels down the bottle. “An-ti-ci-pa-a-tion” as the ketchup finally drops onto the hamburger.

All of this building up to the slogan, “The taste that’s worth the wait.” And the look of pure joy when the actor bites into the burger.

That’s the joy of waiting. That’s how I feel during Advent. The Joy of anticipating the arrival of the Christ child. Each day as we wait we can still move forward toward Christ (Just like the ketchup moves through the bottle). Each day can be filled with a rich appreciation for what God does for us (Just like the rich, delicious ketchup does for the burger). “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Psalm 34:8). And believe me, the coming of Christ is definitely worth the wait.

Prayer: Oh what joy we share as we move closer to you, Lord. What joy we experience as we feel you move closer to us. THANK YOU, GOD! Amen.

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ARE WE READY?

Scripture: Titus 2: 11-14 | Thursday, December 20, 2018

Honestly, I had forgotten about this little book until I was asked by Rich Shaffer to write the devotion for today. I had to locate the book, this short pastoral letter, finding it after 2 Timothy and before Philemon. It's a brief letter written to Titus serving in Crete, from Paul probably while in a Roman prison.

Maybe not like you, but I wondered, what does this have to do with Advent? When I don't know or understand, I have to dig deeper, which causes me to learn.

In our reading Paul tells Titus “for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “no” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

Advent is a time of preparation, a time set aside to get ready for the coming of Christ, as a babe in the manger and as Lord and Savior at the Second Coming.

That is what we read here, “for the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men”. It came to the shepherds on the night of His birth, it came to the disciples, it came to Paul and it comes to us. That free gift of salvation comes to us when we humble our heart and ask Jesus to dwell within us. We change as we allow the Holy Spirit to have dominion over our lives. This new path is called discipleship. Are you ready and willing? With God's help, I am.

Prayer: Thank you Father for sending your Son, Jesus as a ransom for my sin. Allow the Holy Spirit to continue a work in me to further your kingdom. Amen.

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WELCOME?

Scripture: Luke 2: 1-20 | Friday, December 21, 2018

What is there to say that hasn't been said? We hear this passage every Christmas and then put it away for another year. What more can be said? The Romans (like any government) demands more in taxes; an 8-month-pregnant girl and her significant-other goes walking and riding a donkey a distance equal from Morgantown to Flatwoods, can't even get a room at the Super 8; gives birth in a stable (like a taxi back-seat?). But then what's all this about angels coming to those low-life shepherds? That's got to be a misprint. Those rich guys and governors should be told first about any big news, shouldn't they?

It's a little disjointed reading this passage on my back porch with the crickets and frogs filling the evening with song. The leaves are still on the trees but soon I'll be raking, mulching and blowing them. And when Winter Solstice rolls around and you are reading this we all may be shoveling snow. But this is a story for all seasons. To those who have read or heard it every year it's a comforting, well-worn passage that brings to mind past seasons of joy and (maybe) pain. For some of us so blest as to have seen the actual places, it brings to mind the rolling fields where the shepherds reclined in the moonlight watching their sheep and those steep, rocky paths that take one from Nazareth to Bethlehem. To those unfamiliar with the story it may sound like the first paragraph (above): incredulous, crazy. It may be long ago but it's also today. A solid man of honor and hard work obeys the government that wants more in taxes. He cares for his significant other in the best way he can, offering all he has. Others work the night because they have to work. It's their duty and livelihood. Into this live-and-work-a-day-world comes a loving and mighty God with celebration and promise for a new world order: God's world order.

Read this passage again, like it's the first time. Hard, isn't it? But it's worth sharing, isn't it?

Prayer: Father, through the Holy Spirit bring these things to our minds and memories. Nudge us to remember that Joseph, Mary and the shepherds were ordinary people, like us. Bring into our lives the wonder and glory of your Word and your presence this Advent Season so that we are prepared to meet the Christ Child in the humble surroundings of the common people and stable. In the name of Jesus we pray, AMEN.

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THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

Scripture: Isaiah 52:7-10 | Saturday, December 22, 2018

“Two shopping days until Christmas.” When I was growing up the front page of our local newspapers each day from the day after Thanksgiving until Christmas Eve displayed a box containing such a countdown. Since our school allowed us to play card games during recess as long as we didn’t use traditional playing cards with suits of hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades because of their association with gambling, my friends and I would clip each day’s “shopping days until Christmas” reminders and glue them to 3x5 index cards to make our own homemade decks of cards, with our suits being the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Mansfield News-Journal, the Sandusky Register, and the Toledo Blade, the names of the newspapers to which our parents subscribed.

Eventually, with the demise of the “blue laws” that banned Sunday shopping, the “shopping days until Christmas” reminders were replaced by merely “days until Christmas” reminders but our practice of making homemade playing cards continued.

Meanwhile in the 1950s and 1960s Christmas shoppers were surrounded by recorded Christmas carols, vocal versions with the words included. Now in the 2010s Christmas carols may have been replaced in many stores by “songs of the season” such as “All I Want for Christmas is You” and “Grandma Got Run over by a Reindeer”. There is still a recognition in our culture that this is a special time of the year linked in some way to the mysterious birth of a baby whose birth was announced by angels, a star, who was visited by shepherds and astrologers.

We as Christians are blessed to be those who are keepers of the “reason for the season” and to be those who have “beautiful feet” as we bring good news and good tidings. We are to proclaim the message of peace and salvation.

In Romans 10, Paul quotes from today’s reading from Isaiah 52 and reminds us from a post-Christmas, post-Easter perspective of the importance of this task in Advent and at all times.

Prayer: O GOD, we pray for willingness, courage, and wisdom to share the significance of Advent with others during this holy season, In the name of your Son, the “reason for the season,” we pray. Amen.

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SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG
Scripture: Psalm 33 | Sunday, December 23, 2018

Psalm 98:1 Sing to the Lord a new song because he has done wonderful things.

Sing praises to the LORD! In all we say and do, we need to shout our praises to the one who makes all things possible. During times of great joy, it is very simple to shout praises to God. In times of struggle, it can be difficult to shout those praises. Every day, God blesses us through answered and unanswered prayers. We have to remember it is God's time and not our own. Have you ever gotten stuck in traffic behind a slow driver wishing they would get out of your way? As you travel down the road, you see an accident. That could have been you. Did you stop to thank God for your safety? Did you say a little prayer for the people involved in the accident? That's shouting praises to God!

When life hands you lemons and you feel down and out, do you thank God? Probably not. This is a time when it is very difficult to praise God let alone think positively. You can change your mood simply by listening to your favorite type of music, watching a funny movie or just making yourself be around positive influences. Have you ever been listening to the radio when that one song comes on, you begin to sing and maybe even shed a tear. That's praising God. Sing to the top of your lungs and cry all you want.

God is in the good days as well as the bad days. He holds you up when you feel like falling down. Stand strong and know God is there for you and with you. He understands anger and frustration and holds our hand while we struggle through it. Stand strong and sing to the KING!

Prayer: Gracious and Loving God, Thank you God for your healing power. Guide us through the struggles of life as we remember you are always with us. Remind us that we are stronger than we know when we put you first in everything we say and do. Thank you God for loving us just the way we are. In Jesus Name, Amen

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WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

Scripture: Hebrews 1: 1-4 | Monday, December 24, 2018

Nothing can capture for me the beauty of Christmas better than carols. They are able to set the atmosphere -- the crowded inn, the great star, shepherds in the field, sudden glory of the heavenly hosts, the sleeping babe and the wondering hearts that came to worship Jesus. One carol we sing at Christmas asks the question, What child is this, who, laid to rest; On Mary's lap, is sleeping? And the chorus answers, This, this is Christ the King. I am sure the shepherds asked the same question: "What Child is this?" The verses from Hebrews 1:1-4 answers the question, "What Child is this?" The declaration of Hebrews 1:1-4 is the phrase "God spoke" to man. In times past he spoke by the prophets but now "he has spoken to us by a Son." That answers the question "What Child is this?" Is this Baby, the complete Word of God to mankind? "but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." The most wonderful thing the Christmas story brings before us is that Baby who lies in Mary's arms, is the One who created the universe. "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by the word of his power." That is amazing. The good news of Christmas is that every one of us who has found Christ and who follows him finds that He has the power to cleanse us. Now, that is the greatest message of all. "...having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs." The angels sang praises to the shepherds that night. Christmas is the opportunity for love to break out in our families and we can be the loving creatures God made. That is why Christmas is associated with warmth, love, and joy.

Prayer: Lord, we hope the gratitude of our hearts will express what it means to have the Son of God born in our hearts as he was born in the stable at Bethlehem. Amen.

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A PERFECT SON

Scripture: John 1:1-14 | Christmas Day, December 25, 2018

Luke 2:7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Who can remember the birth of their first child? I can. My son who is now in his 20's was born "perfect", or at least I thought so as many mothers do. When he turned 3, I found out he had Autism. That diagnosis crushed me. I thought "what did I do wrong?" I must have eaten the wrong thing. I didn't drink enough milk. I was young and didn't know any better. After reading every book I could find, I became more educated on Autism and found out, I did nothing wrong. It wasn't my fault. I have now had Tim in my life for the last 23 years and I wouldn't change anything. He is "perfect", just the way God made him. I wouldn't change anything about him. God gave him to me to protect, care for, and guide in a Christian walk with God. God gave the responsibility of Jesus to Mary. I can see Mary as a young scared girl wanting to do God's will. Mary protected Jesus, cared for him and looked out for him, just like we all look out for our children. The only difference is Jesus is the Son of God. This Christmas let us all remember the children in the world who do not have support, love or guidance. As Christians it is our responsibility to let them know the love of Jesus and to tell them that God loves them just the way they have been created. They are "perfect in God's eyes.

Prayer: Lord at this Advent season let us all remember the true meaning of Christmas. Help us to show the world Your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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