You Belong Here

ADVENT Lutheran CHURCH

1700 Irby Lane, Murfressboro, TN 37127

2026 Advent Devotional

By the Disciples of Advent Lutheran Church



As we enter this sacred season of Advent—a time of waiting, watching, and preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ—we are delighted to share *Advent Lutheran Church's Second Annual Advent Devotional*, written by our own disciples.

This collection of reflections, prayers, and insights represents the voices and faith journeys of our community. Each devotion is a glimpse into how God is at work among us—stirring hope, deepening peace, kindling joy, and growing love. Together,these writings remind us that Advent is not only about waiting for the birth of Jesus long ago, but also about recognizing his presence here and now, in our lives, our church, and our world.

At Advent Lutheran, our faith is lived out through worship, service, and active engagement in the wider community. Through ministries that care for neighbors in need, partnerships that strengthen local organizations, and outreach that brings comfort and hope, we seek to be the hands and feet of Christ. These devotions reflect that same spirit—rooted in love and reaching outward in compassion.

As you read and reflect, may you be encouraged and inspired by the faith of your fellow disciples. May these devotions draw you closer to the One who comes to bring light into the darkness, and may your Advent be filled with holy anticipation and renewed hope.

Come, Lord Jesus.

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Sunday, November 29

By Tim Wegmeyer

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
3 Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
4 O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
5 You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
6 You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.
7 Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
17 But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
18 Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Waiting is rarely passive. More often, it feels like holding your breath in a quiet room. In Psalm 80, Israel is caught in a long, painful season of silence, begging the Shepherd of Israel to finally "shine forth" into their darkness. Notice how the psalmist's plea grows more urgent with every stanza. In verse 3, we hear the psalmist call out "O God" and in verse 7 "O God of hosts" and then in verse 19 "O Lord God of hosts". You can almost feel the speaker's insistence in their voice increasing. The longer the darkness lasts, the more specific and determined their faith becomes. They do not let the delay silence their prayers. Instead, they press closer to the only One capable of bringing the dawn.

We all find ourselves in "in-between" seasons—waiting for a medical answer, a reconciled relationship, or a sense of direction when the path ahead feels hidden. When relief feels slow, it is tempting to pull back and stop asking. Psalm 80 invites us to do the exact opposite. Active waiting means bringing our growing urgency straight to God, trusting that He hears us even before the light breaks through. Today, instead of retreating into quiet resignation, let your longing fuel your prayer: *Lord God of hosts, restore us, and let Your face shine on us once again.*

Monday, November 30

By Leigh Ann Maxwell

Micah 4:1-5 The Mountain of the Lord

1 In days to come
the mountain of the Lord's temple
shall be established as the highest of the mountains
and shall be raised up above the hills.
Peoples shall stream to it,
2 and many nations shall come and say:
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
3 He shall judge between many peoples
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;
neither shall they learn war any more;
4 but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid,
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.
5 For all the peoples walk,
each in the name of its god,
but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God
forever and ever.

I particularly love the description in this passage of all nations coming together to settle disputes.
He will pass judgment between many peoples while turning them away from war.
Everyone will walk in the Lord's path.
While many nations may walk in the name of their own gods, we will all walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

Tuesday, December 1

By Pati Ferrie

Psalm 79 - How Long, O Lord?

1 O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in the ruins. 2 They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the heavens for food, the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth. 3 They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them. 4 We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us. 5 How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire? 6 Our out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call upon your name! 7 For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation. 8 Do not remember against us our former iniquities; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low. 9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake! 10 Why should the nations say, Where is their God? Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes! 11 Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power, preserve those doomed to die! 12 Return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors the taunts with which they have taunted you, O Lord! 13 But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

As I reflect on personal growth, I recognize how temptation, anger, harsh words, and apathy can pull me away from the person I want to become. Acknowledging these struggles is not easy, but it gives me a place to begin. I cannot change the choices I have already made, but I can take responsibility for them and choose a different response today. Perseverance means continuing that effort even when progress is slow
or I fall short. I want to practice patience, speak with greater care, and stay engaged rather than turn away. Growth does not require perfection; it asks me to learn from my mistakes and keep moving forward with purpose. I know, that God sent Jesus to die on the cross, so I may receive forgiveness.

Wednesday, December 2

By Catherine Burnette

Luke 21:34-38

34 *"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation*
and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you
unexpectedly, 35 *like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of*
the whole earth. 36 *Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the*
strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before
the Son of Man."
37 *Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out*
and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. 38 *And all the*
people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

The countdown to Christmas has begun, and it is easy to get swept up in baking cookies, decorating, wrapping gifts, and spending time with loved ones. Amid it all, we should take time to prepare our hearts and minds to joyfully celebrate Christ's coming.

A virgin birth, a guiding star, a humble stable, angels announcing good news, attentive shepherds, and wise men bearing gifts: these events reveal the true meaning of Christmas.

Thursday, December 3

By Richard Bates

Hosea 6:1-6

1 “Come, let us return to the Lord,
for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
he has struck down, and he will bind us up.
2 After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.
3 Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord;
his appearing is as sure as the dawn;
he will come to us like the showers,
like the spring rains that water the earth.”
4 What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?
Your love is like a morning cloud,
like the dew that goes away early.
5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;
I have killed them by the words of my mouth,
and my judgment goes forth as the light.
6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea speaks to a situation of chaos. The prophet begs his listeners to return to the Lord. He asks his followers to not be “like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.” (v. 4) Instead, Hosea asks those who will listen to show “steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” (v. 6) What does it mean to show steadfast love? First, showing steadfast love means showing up for worship. This doesn’t mean that we show up for church when we are sick, or on vacation, or when the entire family is visiting from out of town. It simply means that we show up. Second, what happens when we show up for worship? We get to see everybody. People ask us, “how are you?” We share the peace of the Lord be with you always. We hear the word of the Lord in preaching and receive the Lord’s forgiveness during Holy Communion. Third, when we all show up for worship we can truly say, “Come, let us return to the Lord.” (v. 1)

Friday, December 4

By Matt Lively

Psalm 85:2, 8-13

2 You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their sin. Selah
8 Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
9 Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
10 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
11 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
12 The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
13 Righteousness will go before him
and will make a path for his steps.

"I will listen to what God the Lord says."
We live surrounded by voices competing for our attention. News. Social media. Political leaders. Commentators. Friends. Fear. Anger.
Before deciding what we should think about everything happening around us, Scripture invites us to ask:
"Lord, what are You saying?"
Sometimes discipleship begins not with speaking louder, but becoming quiet enough to hear God.
Psalm 85 says God "promises peace to his people."
That doesn't mean Christians ignore evil or refuse to confront injustice. Verse 10 specifically joins **righteousness and peace**.
We don't have to choose between truth and grace.
We don't have to choose between conviction and compassion.
We can stand firmly for what is right while treating people with dignity.
And that begins closer to home than international affairs. It may mean refusing to participate in hateful conversations. Forgiving someone. Repairing a damaged relationship. Listening before responding. Helping someone who is struggling.
We may not be able to bring peace to the entire world today, but we can bring the peace of Christ into the part of the world God has placed in front of us.

Saturday, December 5

By Lynette Porter

Ezekiel 36:24-28

Ezekiel 36:24-28

[24] I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. [25] I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. [27] I will put my spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. [28] Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

In Ezekiel 36:24–28, God makes a tender, transformative promise: *"I will gather you… I will cleanse you… I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you."* For me, these verses are a reminder that God's renewal is both an inward transformation and an invitation into belonging. He gathers me from the places I've wandered, not to scold me, but to bring me back home. He washes away all of my old burdens, patterns, and regrets. And then He does what only He can – He replaces my tired, stubborn heart with a heart that can feel and trust again.

But He doesn't stop there. God places His own Spirit within me so that I can walk in His ways - not out of duty - but out of desire. His Spirit becomes my guide, my strength, and the quiet assurance that I am never alone.

The promise ends with a covenant of belonging: *"You will live in the land I gave your ancestors… you will be My people, and I will be your God."*

This is God's steady heartbeat toward restoration, renewal, and relationship. Today, we can rest in this truth—God delights in making us new, leading us forward, and calling us His own. Nothing about our past disqualifies us from His promise. He is still the God who gathers, cleanses, renews, and stays.

Sunday, December 6

By Brandon Stuart

Mark 1:1-8 Getting Ready for Jesus

1 The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.
2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way,
3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight,’ ”
4 so John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

John the Baptist calls people to turn back to God, and he promises that Jesus will give them the Holy Spirit. As I read this passage, and thought about getting ready for Jesus, I’m reminded of how important it is to name what is wrong or what I’ve done wrong in my actions. This passage also pushes me to think about how I can open up more space in my life for him. During such a busy time in the retail world, it’s important for me to pause and take the time to remember what matters most. For me, Making more time to ask for forgiveness, pray and time to do his work stands out as what I’m called to do this holiday season. I pray that everyone can pause and take time to open up more time for Jesus this holiday season.

Monday, December 7

By Lori Sultzer

Psalm 27

[1] The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?
[2] When evildoers assail me
to devour my flesh—
my adversaries and foes—
they shall stumble and fall.
[3] Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.
[4] One thing I asked of the Lord;
this I seek:
to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.
[5] For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.
[6] Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.
[7] Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!
[8] "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, do I seek.
[9] Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.
Do not cast me off; do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!
[10] If my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will take me up.
[11] Teach me your way, O Lord,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.
[12] Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

[13] I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.
[14] Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!

Psalm 27 reminds me that I don't have to be afraid because God is always with me. No matter what challenges I face, what worries weigh on my heart, or how uncertain life may seem, I can put my trust in Him. God is my light, my strength, and my safe place. He gives me courage when I feel weak and peace when I feel overwhelmed. I may not always know what lies ahead, but I
know I don't have to face it alone. I just need to have faith, trust in His plan, and remember that He will never leave me.
My takeaway: Don't let fear take over. Trust God, be patient, stay strong, and remember that He is always by my side

Tuesday, December 8

By Jacqueline Hofferth

Psalm 27

In Christian traditions, Psalm 27 is often read or sung as a source of comfort during times of anxiety, grief or spiritual waiting. This is why I find solace in it. I am a worrier. I worry about everything and anything. How am I still standing with everything there is to worry about in the world today you may ask? Okay, maybe you don't ask, but believe me I ask myself this question often. I have two answers for you; God and my daily anxiety medication. If this is also you, I just want you to know that faith and medication are not enemies. You can trust God wholeheartedly and still need help managing the worries that life brings. One does not diminish the other.

Psalm 27 starts "The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?"

I love how Psalm 27 begins—just as we should begin each day, with focus not on our problems, and the crises going on in our world but on the character of God.

When crisis hits, I tend to hyper-focus on the threat. I count my enemies, replay the bad news, and calculate the worst-case scenarios. I am sure that I am not alone and that some of you do these things too. Not David, he takes a completely different approach to audit the size of his God rather than the size of his problems.

David uses three powerful names for God: **Light** for his darkness, **Salvation** for his helplessness, and a **Stronghold** for his vulnerability. Notice that David doesn't say God *gives* light or *provides* a stronghold; he says God *is* those things. Our security is not found in a change of circumstances, but in the unshakeable presence of our God. When God fills your horizon, your fears lose their power to paralyze you.

What is the "army" currently besieging your mind or life? How does shifting your focus to who God is change the scale of that threat?

David doesn't deny the existence of darkness; he reminds himself who his light is. That is such an important distinction. Sometimes faith doesn't immediately remove our worries, answer our questions, or change our circumstances. Sometimes faith simply gives us somewhere to stand while we walk through them.

Perhaps the greatest lesson for those of us who worry is that we don't have to solve every problem before we can experience peace. We can bring our worries to God, one at a time, and remember that we were never meant to carry the weight of the world on our shoulders.

"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" –Psalm 27:14

Sometimes waiting is the hardest part, especially for a worrier. But waiting doesn't mean God has forgotten us.

A thought to carry into tomorrow:

I may not know what tomorrow holds. I may not be able to control what happens in the world around me. I may still have anxious thoughts. But I know who holds me, who walks beside me, and where my strength comes from.

And today, that is enough.

Amen.

Wednesday, December 9

By Pastor Dawn Bennett

Luke 1:5-7

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who be-
longed to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of
Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both of them were righteous before God, living
blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. 7 But they
had no children because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

When I think about Zechariah's visit from the angel and the wonderful news he and Elizabeth are going to receive about having a child, it brings to mind all the times when those of us who are parents receive that news; when those of us who want to be parents, have tried for so long, awaiting that news; and also, the sometimes all-too-often but yet equally surprising news of miscarriage, I'm reminded that science and Spirit work so miraculously together. As Christians we believe all things come from God, including science. Childbirth is a miracle in and of itself. The human body has capabilities that we often cannot wrap our minds around and rarely understand the extent to which miracles happen in our bodies. During this season of Advent where many are hoping, awaiting news of miracles, waiting saving grace, hoping for visits from angels, and processing anticipatory grief and joy, I am also reminded of the immense love that God has for all of us.

John's gospel speaks of how God so loved the world and saw it fit to bring Jesus to us. Luke's gospel is more tender-hearted in that the story of visiting angels and miraculous signs and wonders feed our spirit in a way that kindles all sorts of feelings. Wherever you are today, know that God sees you, God loves you, God hears your prayers, and God is witness to your hopes and dreams. In this season of Advent, I encourage you to take time for quiet reflection and open conversation with the many angels– spiritual and human – who will come through your days and nights in the coming weeks. May the Peace of Christ be with you.

Thursday, December 10

By David Anderson

Habakkuk 2:1-5

1 I will stand at my watchpost
and station myself on the rampart;
I will keep watch to see what he will say to me
and what he will answer concerning my complaint.
2 Then the Lord answered me and said:
Write the vision;
make it plain on tablets,
so that a runner may read it.
3 For there is still a vision for the appointed time;
it speaks of the end and does not lie.
If it seems to tarry, wait for it;
it will surely come; it will not delay.
4 Look at the proud!
Their spirit is not right in them,
but the righteous live by their faithfulness.
5 Moreover, wealth is treacherous;
the arrogant do not endure.
They open their throats wide as Sheol;
like Death they never have enough.
They gather all nations for themselves
and collect all peoples as their own.

The oracles that the Hebrew prophet Habakkuk saw probably date to about 605-604 BCE, just before the invasion of the Babylonian armies.

First, we should always be alert to see, and hear, what God will say to us, and moreover, what plans God has for us. We may not get an immediate answer, or the answer we had hoped for, but God will give us the right answer in his own time.

Secondly, we should live by our faith in the sense that we should trust in God's promises through Jesus for eternal life. We should not be like the proud or arrogant, but rather live as God has directed us.

Dear God, Please help us to listen carefully for your directives and to live our lives accordingly. Amen

Friday, December 11

By Pati Ferrie

Philippians 3:12-16 Christians have their home in heaven.

12 I am not saying that I have already reached that place in my life. I have not yet completely become the person that God wants me to be. But I am trying very hard to reach that place. That was Christ's purpose when he first chose me to belong to him. 13 My Christian friends, I do not think that I have reached that place yet. But this is what I do. I do not think about past things that have already happened. Instead, I try hard to reach the things that are still in front. 14 I am like a runner who wants to reach the end of the race. I run straight towards that place, so that I can win God's gift. Because I belong to Christ Jesus, God has called me to live with him in heaven. That is God's gift to me at the end of my life. 15 All of us should agree to live like that, if we properly understand God's message. If you think differently about some of these things, God will show you clearly what is right. 16 But we should continue to live in the way that we already know is right.

Some of my thoughts in regard to these versus are; do not worry about the past. It is done and in the past. Look at our current life. Yes, it is chaotic and we maybe running too fast! We need to keep our eyes and our focus on God and what is right in the world. We need to continue to do what is right in God's eyes. Spread Love, Spread Kindness, Spread Joy and Laughter. I fully trust if we are on the wrong path, God will show us what is right.



Sunday December 12

By Keila Wegmeyer

Habakkuk 3:13-19

“This chapter in Habakkuk exhibits the two parts of Christian love: Christ’s love of us, and our love of the Lord.
Though Habakkuk 3 isn’t referencing the Easter story since it was written beforehand, I was able to find many connections between the verses and Jesus’s actions and experiences through the week of Easter. Verse 13 begins with the deliverance of the people and the saving of the anointed one. Habakkuk is referencing the promise and protection that God has provided Israel numerous times, but I found that it’s extremely similar to the way God blessed us with Jesus and saved Him on the third day. The next sentence describes the stripping of the enemies power, which for Habakkuk would have most likely been stripping the power of the Chaldeans are Babylonians. However, I found that it seems extremely similar to the way God stripped Satan of his power through the death of Jesus, though death, ironically, was the biggest strength that Satan had against God and his creation. The difference was Jesus’s death and sacrifice came from a place of deep love for humanity and Satan’s deliverance of death sprouts from malice. These connections show how God has been blessing us in the same way for centuries, proving his everlasting love for us.
While the beginning of this reading shows God’s love for humanity, the second half exhibits the kind of love we have for the Lord. Verses 16 and 17 describe fears and troubles of life, though they may not be the same exact struggles we face today. Many people in Murfreesboro, Tennessee don’t complain about their failed olive crop, many people regularly don’t receive results they hoped for. Despite the dreariness, Habakkuk follows the statements of despair with “yet.” He says “yet I will wait patiently” and “yet I will rejoice in the Lord.” Here is where you can see Habakkuk’s true devotion to God. These declarations are the perfect representations of the love we need to have towards Christ because they show how we need to have unwavering love and faith for the Lord in the same way He loves and puts faith into us.
Christianity is a two-way love that’s been present since the beginning of time, carrying us through trials and joys, pauses and advances, weakness and determination. The symbiotic relationship we share with God has interceded persecution from sin, and it will continue to do so forever.”

Monday, December 13

By Carter Elliott

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this
is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise
prophecies, 21 but test everything; hold fast to what is good; 22 abstain from every form
of evil.
23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul
and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The
one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians approaches its close with a medley of joy, peace, and hope. In preparing the farewell, he also acknowledges a greeting to come in Christ Jesus, the harbinger of love and light. Paul's caution to "hold fast to what is good" ties in with the general hope of the passage--no matter how evil the world can get and how cruel people can be at times, the Giver of Salvation is at hand.

Tuesday, December 14

By Jack Nelson

Psalm 125 A Song of Ascents.

1 Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved but abides forever.
2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the Lord surrounds his people
from this time on and forevermore.
3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
so that the righteous might not stretch out
their hands to do wrong.
4 Do good, O Lord, to those who are good
and to those who are upright in their hearts.
5 But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways,
the Lord will lead away with evildoers.
Peace be upon Israel!

This Psalm is a Song of Ascents, traditionally sung by Jews on their way to Jerusalem, which sits on high ground. But in a broader sense, it speaks to the idea that the Lord guides and protects those who follow his teaching, and not just going to the Holy City. This is true during life's entire journey: God is always there. Every day, everywhere we go, whether the journey be easy or hard, so long as we trust in the Lord. Steadfast faith, standing like a mountain, will always be rewarded.

The last verses are a prayer and a warning. The good will be rewarded, evil doers punished. Doing good can be hard, and even the upright in heart struggle against all the temptations in our modern society. The Lord is still there, His protection never wavering..

The last line calls for Peace upon Israel. That is just as appropriate now as it was 3,000 years ago.

Wednesday, December 15

By Joanne Jobe

Acts 3:17--4:4

*17 “And now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also
your rulers. 18 In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets,
that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins
may be wiped out, 20 so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the
Lord and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, 21 who must
remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago
through his holy prophets. 22 Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you
from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you.
23 And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted
out of the people.’ 24 And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and
those after him, also predicted these days. 25 You are the descendants of the
prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham,
‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ 26 When God
raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you
from your wicked ways.”*

During this season of preparing for Christmas, the secular thinking of Christmas many times seem to take a front row . . . . all the talk of Santa and the North Pole and the elves and the reindeer seem to find more air time than the Christ child. And in our world where we have full awareness that not all people are Christians, do we choose to speak of the birth of Jesus loudly and boldly just like Peter and John spoke of Jesus and the resurrection? Perhaps . . . . . but we also can perhaps take time to share about peace on earth, about helping the lonely and about bringing the gift of a love to others in a more general sense. We can even share our birth of Jesus story with general good will surrounding peace, the sacrifices Mary and Joseph made in accepting their fate and the wonder of new birth above and beyond our Christian belief. There is wonder in the story whether you are Christian or not. AND, just perhaps, others of different faiths can also share beautiful stories within their faith experience that also inspire wonder - in a broader sense than we have ever experienced wonder . . . . because their faith experience widens the world that God created for us all.

And if we choose to tell our stories in the ways suggested above, will we still run the risk of "disturbing others?" (Acts 4:2) Yes, some will be disturbed because we aren't boldly sharing that peace on earth only comes from Jesus. But do we also run the risk that "many who heard the message believed?"(Acts 4:4) Yes, when we consider the height and breadth of our world and broaden our shared stories with universal truths, we give glory to our God that created us all, and perhaps more people will believe the message. I encourage being like Peter and John.

Thursday, December 16

By Vicki Vermillion

Mark 9:9-13

*9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what
they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 So they kept the
matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. 11 Then
they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 12 He said to
them, "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about
the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with con-
tempt? 13 But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they
pleased, as it is written about him."*

Jesus took Peter, James and John with him to be witnesses to his transfiguration. As they walked down from the mountain where this occurred to rejoin the other disciples they were told by Jesus not to tell anyone what they had seen until "the Son of Man had risen from the dead." So the three disciples got into a big discussion about what "rising from the dead" meant because they had no clue Jesus meant it literally. Jesus goes on to tell them that the Son of Man must "suffer much and be rejected" after the coming of Elijah which is often thought to refer to the coming of John the Baptist.

Jesus is called both the Son of God and the Son of Man because he was both. Advent is the season where we focus on him coming to us as both the Son of God and the Son of Man. Just as the Creed says: "Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead." Conceived by the Holy Spirit = Son of God. Born of the virgin Mary = Son of Man. **Suffered** under Pontius Pilate, **died** and was buried, **rose again from the dead**. How thankful we are for the Son of Man who rose from the dead!

Friday, December 17

By Vicki Vermillion

2 Samuel 6:1-11

1 David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. 2 David and all
the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark
of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the
cherubim. 3 They carried the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house
of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driv-
ing the new cart 4 with the ark of God, and Ahio went in front of the ark. 5 David and all
the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and
lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.
6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out his hand to
the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen lurched. 7 The anger of the Lord was
kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him there, and he died there beside the ark of
God. 8 David was angry because the Lord had burst forth with an outburst upon Uz-
zah, so that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day. 9 David was afraid of the Lord that
day; he said, "How can the ark of the Lord come into my care?" 10 So David was un-
willing to take the ark of the Lord into his care in the city of David; instead, David took
it to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. 11 The ark of the Lord remained in the house
of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his
household.

In this passage from 2 Samuel, King David is moving the ark of the covenant from Baalah of Judah to the City of David which is a fortress which became the foundation of the city of Jerusalem. Verse 2 describes the ark as "the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark." The ark was so holy it was forbidden to touch it – when it was moved special poles inserted in carrying rings were used to lift it. David was moving it by carrying it on a new ox-cart and as they moved "the oxen stumbled." This is often believed to mean the ark was jostled and slid. A man, Uzzah son of Abinadab, who was walking beside the cart reached up and "took hold of the arc", presumably to keep it from falling. Regardless of why he touched it, Uzzah was struck dead on the spot by God for his "irreverent act."
David was angry at God for killing Uzzah but he was also afraid of what God might do if they continued to move the ark and so he left it in the house of a man named Obed-Edom the Gittite "and the Lord blessed him and his entire household."
There are several things that hit me in this passage but the one of the strongest is that regardless of why the ark was housed with Obed-Edom he was blessed along with everyone who lived with him and everything he had. He welcomed God and was blessed. Advent represents the coming of God in the body of Jesus and our opportunity to welcome him into our homes and hearts. And if we do, if we welcome God, we will be blessed – not necessarily physically but our hearts will be lifted up and made glad.

Saturday, December 18

By Kristi Rainwater

Hebrews 1:5-14

5 For to which of the angels did God ever say,
“You are my Son;
today I have begotten you”?
Or again,
“I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son”?
6 And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,
“Let all God’s angels worship him.”
7 Of the angels he says,
“He makes his angels winds
and his servants flames of fire.”
8 But of the Son he says,
“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
and the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom.
9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”
10 And,
“In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
11 they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;
12 like a cloak you will roll them up,
and like clothing they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will never end.”
13 And to which of the angels has he ever said,
“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?
14 Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

This Passage from Hebrews, means to me that Jesus Christ is Superior over the angels . It is clear that God commands all angels and everyone to worship Jesus as the firstborn. God has his son at his right hand and we are to serve his son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is superior to us all.

Sunday, December 19

By Vicki Vermillion

John 7:40-52

40 When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, “This is really the prophet.”
41 Others said, “This is the Messiah.” But some asked, “Surely the Messiah does not
come from Galilee, does he? 42 Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is de-
scended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?” 43 So
there was a division in the crowd because of him. 44 Some of them wanted to arrest
him, but no one laid hands on him.
45 Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked
them, “Why did you not arrest him?” 46 The police answered, “Never has anyone spo-
ken like this!” 47 Then the Pharisees replied, “Surely you have not been deceived, too,
have you? 48 Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49 But
this crowd, which does not know the law, they are accursed.” 50 Nicodemus, who had
gone to Jesus before and who was one of them, asked, 51 “Our law does not judge
people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?”
52 They replied, “Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will
see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.”

In this chapter of John, the Pharisees had sent temple guards to arrest Jesus as he spoke and taught at the Feast of the Tabernacles. The people who heard Jesus were debating whether or not he could be the Messiah because the Messiah was supposed to come from Bethlehem, David’s hometown, and Jesus was known to have grown up in Nazareth, a town in Galilee. The guards did not arrest Jesus. No one ever spoke the way this man does, they reported to the Pharisees. The Pharisees responded, You mean he has deceived you also? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? Nicodemus, a Pharisee who had privately talked with Jesus earlier, asked “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?” The other Pharisees rebutted Nicodemus, “Are you from Galilee too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.”

So much weight is placed on the Messiah being a descendant of David. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both contain genealogies of Jesus showing is a descendant of David. Both books also describe the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the city of David. Without investigating Jesus’ background or birthplace, the Pharisees assumed that because he grew up in Nazareth, in Galilee, that he had been born there and because of that they discounted him as the Messiah.

In this Advent season, let us be sure to search out the truth of Jesus and accept our Messiah, our Savior, based on his reality and not on assumptions we have made without studying him thoroughly and carefully. Let our hearts be open to him and not make the mistakes of the Pharisees!

Monday, December 20

By Pastor Dawn Bennett

Luke 1:27-38

27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The caption for this text is "*The Birth of Jesus Foretold*." I invite you to take the caption into your spirit, substituting your own name. *Selah*. What bubbles up for you? in terms of how your life has been foretold?
In the sixth month, God sent an angel to visit Mary and to inform her of the changes that were happening in her life and the beautiful future that was planned for her. Each of us has a beautiful future, filled with many changes. In a long ago scripture from the book of Jeremiah, the Prophet was feeling small and unable to fulfill the shoes God had ordained for him. The Lord responded, "*I knew you before I formed you*." That is true for each of us. God has not planned every single minute, of every single hour, of every single day, of every single year of our lives because, by God's grace, the gift of free will allows us to make our own choices, trusting that God is with us wherever we decide to roam. Be that as it may, you were foretold and there is a story, a good story, that has followed you all the days of your life thus far. As you continue journeying to the manger, I encourage you to seek out wisdom and guidance from the angels who surround you and the Tabernacle of your Spirit, knowing that the Lady Wisdom accompanies you. And wherever you are today, trust and believe that,"*nothing is impossible with God*."

Tuesday, December 21

By Kristi Rainwater

Hebrews 9:1-14

1 Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. 2 For a tent was constructed, the first one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence; this is called the holy place. 3 Behind the second curtain was a tent called the holy of holies. 4 In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the cover of the ark. Of these things we cannot speak now in detail.

6 These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties, 7 but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people. 8 By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing. 9 This is a symbol of the present time, indicating that gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper 10 but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right.

11 But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), 12 he entered once for all into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

In this passage, Jesus entered as a perfect figure. Not made by human hands. Jesus enters the sanctuary with his own blood to secure redemption. Offering blood for himself and errors of the people.

Wednesday, December 22

By Pastor Dawn Bennett

Zephaniah 3:8-13

8 Therefore wait for me, says the Lord,
for the day when I arise as a witness.
For my decision is to gather nations,
to assemble kingdoms,
to pour out upon them my indignation,
all the heat of my anger,
for in the fire of my passion
all the earth shall be consumed.
9 At that time I will change the speech of the peoples
to a pure speech,
that all of them may call on the name of the Lord
and serve him with one accord.
10 From beyond the rivers of Cush
my suppliants, my scattered ones,
shall bring my offering.
11 On that day you shall not be put to shame
because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me;
for then I will remove from your midst
your proudly exultant ones,
and you shall no longer be haughty
in my holy mountain.
12 For I will leave in the midst of you
a people humble and lowly.
They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord—
13 the remnant of Israel;
they shall do no wrong
and utter no lies,
nor shall a deceitful tongue
be found in their mouths.
Then they will pasture and lie down,
and no one shall make them afraid.

At first glance, reading about God's fiery judgment in Zephaniah 3:8-13 might seem like an unexpected way to celebrate the holidays, yet that fire is actually the greatest news imaginable — it clears away every trace of pride, shame, and division so people from everywhere can unite in pure joy! Right at the center of this celebration is verse 12, where God promises to preserve a "meek and humble" people who joyfully put their trust in the Holy One, a picture that comes alive on the very first Christmas morning. Instead of arriving with royal fanfare, Jesus burst onto the scene as a sweet baby in a messy manger, bringing the brightest good news to humble shepherds and ordinary families, like ours. That is the sheer delight of Christmas: we don't have to strive, pretend, or have it all together to be loved by God, because we get to trade our worries for fearless peace and celebrate alongside a humble, joyful family that finds all its hope in Jesus!

Wednesday, December 23

By Pati Ferrie

Zephaniah 3:14-20 A Song of Joy

14 Sing and shout for joy, people of Israel! Rejoice with all your heart, Jerusalem!
15 The Lord has stopped your punishment; he has removed all your enemies. The Lord, the king of Israel, is with you; there is no reason now to be afraid.
16 The Time is coming when they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not be afraid, city of Zion! Do not let your hands hang limp!
17 The Lord your God is with you; his power gives you victory. The Lord will take delight in you, and in his love he will give you new life. He will sing and be joyful over you,
18 as joyful people at a festival." The Lord says, "I have ended the threat of doom and taken away your disgrace.
19 The time is coming! I will punish your oppressors; I will rescue all the lame and bring the exiles home. I will turn their shame to honor, and all the world will praise them.
20 The time is coming! I will bring the scattered people home; I will make you famous throughout the world and make you prosperous once again" The Lord has spoken.

Zephaniah 3 shows how God's justice and love work together to give the world hope.

This passage spoke to me in several ways. It reminds me that the Lord is always with us, so we need not be afraid. Its message of justice gives me hope that he will punish all the world's oppressors amid today's challenges. Above all, it speaks of hope and joy. I try to share joy every day, choosing to focus on the many positive things rather than the negative events around us. That hope and joy bring out the song in

Wednesday, December 24

By Deb Boland

Isaiah 9:2-7 ~ New Living Translation

*1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be
registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor
of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the
town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because
he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with
Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were
there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn
son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was
no place in the guest room.*

*8 Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch
over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory
of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them,
"Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people:
11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.
12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in
a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,
praising God and saying,*

*14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"*

*15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one
another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which
the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and
Joseph and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known
what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what
the shepherds told them, 19 and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in
her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had
heard and seen, just as it had been told them.*

Have you ever had one of those days—or even months of your life—when everything just feels a little dark? Maybe things aren't going the way you hoped, you're worried about what comes next, or you just need a little reassurance that things will be okay. Isaiah reminds us that even when life feels dark or heavy there is always hope. Isaiah tells us about a great light shining in the darkness and the promise of a child who will bring peace, love, and hope to the world. That baby is Jesus!

We all have moments when we could use a little more light in our lives. The good news is that we don't have to look far. Jesus is with us in the everyday moments—in our struggles, our celebrations, our worries, and our joys. We just have to remember to let that light shine.

Thursday, December 25

By Pastor Dawn Bennett

Luke 2:1-20

*1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be
registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor
of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the
town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because
he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with
Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were
there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn
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a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,
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*14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
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the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and
Joseph and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known
what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what
the shepherds told them, 19 and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in
her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had
heard and seen, just as it had been told them.*

I've been a Charlie Brown fan my whole life. No matter the time of year, or how old I get, each time I read Luke 2 — this particular Christmas passage — I can only hear Linus in that sweet, tender, humble voice. It brings me peace. This year, and maybe this year in particular, when all the world feels ablaze, reading this Luke 2 passage and hearing it in Linus's voice, helps me grab a hold of the flame of love, peace, joy, and hope that is in Christ. In an act of radical self-care, I encourage you to either watch *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, listen to Linus on any YouTube video you can find, or at the bare minimum, allow the Vince Guaraldi Trio to help you reminisce of all the glad tidings the birth of Christ brings.

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