

Darkness...Light



Advent 2019 Devotions
written by
Marion Center Area Congregations

About this collection...

In 2014, several congregations of the Marion Center Area Ministerium created a collection of devotions for the season of Advent to share voices and perspectives as we all prepare for the coming of Christ. The collection was so well received over the past few years that we wanted to come together again to make available a new collection of voices from our brothers and sisters in Christ across the Marion Center area, all helping us to turn our focus onto the coming of Christ, both as we celebrate Christmas, and as we look ahead to the coming of Jesus in victory and the new creation.

The passages in these devotions are quite likely ones you are already hearing on Sunday mornings throughout the season of Advent. They are taken from what is known as the Revised Common Lectionary, a pattern for selecting Scripture readings through the church year in a cycle of three years. So you will see in these pages a variety of kinds of biblical books—prophets and psalms, epistles and stories. And hopefully they will fit with the Good News being shared on Sunday mornings across our community as well.

We pray that this season and these devotions are a blessing for your own faith and your own faith journey. And we give thanks to all who have offered their voices to this collection. This year we are excited to have members from seven congregations contributing.

Devotions for this booklet have come from voices in these congregations:

Creekside United Methodist Church

Grove Chapel Lutheran Church

Harmony Grove Lutheran Church

Marion Center First United Methodist Church

New Life Lutheran Church

Plumville Presbyterian Church

Presbyterian Church of Marion

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Promises

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. —Ephesians 5:8

Darkness...light.

Frequently the Bible displays this dichotomy. I think it is more than simply illustrative. It is the truth. Without Jesus, there is darkness. For those of us that remember what it was like to be without him, the shadows are steeped in our memories.

But almost 2000 years ago, a light broke through into the world. A people that had been walking in darkness now had a light to go by. The birth of a baby shown forth in dazzling display. The Light had come. But, still. We have choices. Be in darkness...or walk as children of light.

It is always a joy when I read through these short devotional essays written by brothers and sisters in our area churches. A joy because the light shines through in every one of them – thank you all for your contributions. And may your engagement with this Advent devotional be a help seeing the light more clearly. And I pray that your walk, as we celebrate the coming of the Light, be one that shines brightly!

Pastor Chris Enoch
Presbyterian Church of Marion

Day 1 - December 1

*O house of Jacob, come,
let us walk in the light of the LORD!*

Isaiah 2:5

We may find that we often stumble in the darkness, groping and searching in the shadows of our uncertainty and waning faith for understanding, wisdom, hope, truth, warmth, goodness, love, and the illumination of the loving grace and light of eternal glory radiated by God. It is the walking by faith in Him that will uphold and sustain us as we accost the darkness of the world and battle against spiritual bankruptcy. Time and again, we are compelled to bathe in the radiance of God's light. Time and again, we are beckoned to awake and arise to the dawn of compassion where the rays of God's deliverance are emanated through the glowing reflection of our Savior in our lives.

All are invited to experience God's glory. From the darkness - a Scrooge emerges, enveloping hands and hearts of others and sharing in the brimming warmth of the season. Let us walk together.

Kristen Mabon
Creekside UMC

Day 2 - December 2

Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Matthew 24:42-44

When a woman is expecting a child, she begins to make plans. She plans out what room she will convert into a nursery, where she will get her crib, and what kind of crib she will get. She purchases receiving blankets, onesies, diapers, sleepers, and outfits. Her friends and family might have a baby shower to help her prepare for the baby's needs.

In many cases, she does not know exactly when the baby will be born. She has a due date, but the baby could be born on any day around that date. She could be going about her normal, everyday routine and suddenly find that the baby is coming.

We know from the scriptures that Jesus is coming soon, but we do not know the day or the time. We will likely be going about our daily routines – going to work, making dinner, watching TV -- like “those in the days before the flood who were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away...” (Matt 24:38-39a).

Like the expectant woman, we should be preparing for Jesus' coming by preparing our hearts through prayer, confession, the study of the scriptures, and continually focusing on Jesus in our thoughts and in our actions. We can also accept the help of those God sent to guide us – pastors, parents, and Sunday School teachers.

For, He *is* coming again!

Shelby Lemmon
New Life Lutheran Church

Day 3 - December 3

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

Psalm 122:1

Without the birth of the babe, we Gentile Believers would not be able to accept the invitation: "Let us go to the house of the Lord." (Psalm 122:1)

How thankful we must be for the coming of our Savior born to Mary that night in Bethlehem so long ago.

How thankful are we that God, our Heavenly Father, provided the opportunity for eternal life through his Son, Jesus Christ. "Jesus was baptized...and as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" (Luke 3:21, 22)

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights...the tempter came to him." (Matthew 4:1-3a) "Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4:10)

Jesus, who returned to Galilee to witness to his disciples and teach them about their heavenly Father in whose house "are many rooms" (John 14:2a), died for our sins. Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice so that those who believe his message will go from this life to "the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122:1b) and "dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:6b)

Nancy Laird
Presbyterian Church of Marion

Day 4 - December 4

n days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples 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. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah 2:2-4

The High Mountain of the Lord

God's prophet Isaiah lived in Jerusalem in part of the 8th Century B.C. Isaiah warned of the sins being committed by Judah's people who didn't keep their trust in God to protect them from Assyria's invasion. A city that was once faithful would be destroyed and all would be judged. Those who repented would be saved along with Jerusalem. Many would go to the high mountain of the Lord.

In the book of Genesis Chapter 33:28-29 God blessed Jacob and changed his name to Israel. And from Israel came many kings and nations. Israel journeyed into Bethel with his household making an altar to God's blessing. Rachel his beloved second wife died after giving birth to their second son, Benjamin. Joseph was their first child. Rachel was buried in Bethlehem on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Jacob put a stone upon her grave...which the pillar still stands. Upon this rock of the God of Jacob the Christian church is built. The temple stands before all, and it is our covenant with God and his promise to us.

Through the lineage of Benjamin came the root of Jesse and the great King David. And through David's lineage came Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Joseph, the husband of Mary and Father of Baby Jesus came from the lineage of Rachel's first born son Joseph. Through this humble baby's birth, God's Holy Temple was built. In the Glory of Christ's majesty, a light so bright in that little manger of soft yellow straw and animals in awe is a wonder of all beauty.

Upon the great mountain that Isaiah speaks of there will be a light after the coming of the Lord where there will be peace among nations. The Baby Jesus has arrived in the stable, and we as the shepherds of old bow before him.

Bonnie Jean Polito Battick
Harmony Grove Lutheran Church

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Day 5 - December 5

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers.

Romans 13:11

We celebrate two things at Advent: We look back on, and remember the birth of Christ; and we look ahead to His return. And even though the day of His return is getting closer all the time, the fact is that it has been longer than anyone, including Paul, ever expected.

So maybe we've lost our sense of urgency. Maybe our thoughts are elsewhere. It's hard enough for us to be ready for something when we know exactly what time it's coming. Aren't we usually running late for the airport, the dentist's office or Sunday School?

Paul tells us to wake up, be alert. Former Pittsburgh Pirates broadcaster Bob Prince often talked about the "Hidden Vigorish". Vigorish can refer to a gambler's odds of predicting the outcome of an event he may be betting on. Prince described hidden vigorish as the idea that if something has happened several times in a row, such as a team on a winning streak, that they were coming closer to losing. Or if a player hadn't had a hit in several at bats, that he was coming closer to getting a hit.

Paul says that since Jesus hasn't returned yet (and he wrote this 2000 years ago), that the day is closer now than it has ever been.

Paul is talking to Christians when he reminds us to wake from our slumber. He doesn't have to convince us Christ will return. But a little nudge doesn't hurt!

Randy Stear
Plumville Presbyterian Church

Day 6 - December 6

...the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Romans 13:12-14

Advent is a time of preparation. It's about preparing our hearts for the coming of Christ, both in the manger and at the end of time. As I was thinking about Advent and preparing for Christ's coming the song "Be Prepared" from *The Lion King* came to mind. Though sung by Scar, the villain in the movie, I believe the lyrics can apply to preparing for the coming of Jesus.

"It's clear from your vacant expressions / The lights are not all on upstairs / But we're taking kings and successions / Even you can't be caught unawares! / So prepare for the chance of a lifetime / Be prepared for sensational news / A shining new era / is tiptoeing nearer..."

Christ's birth turned the world upside down. Heaven came to earth and life has never been the same since. Jesus taught us how we are to live according to his kingdom principles. Are we living into that new way of life? Have we put aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light? The light of the world is coming again! Are we ready? Will we be prepared? If not, let us take this season to prepare for the coming of a new king and a new kind of kingdom.

Pastor Erica Wellner
Marion Center UMC

Day 7 - December 7

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.' This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."'

Matthew 3:1-3

Expectation is a strong belief that something will happen. Matthew writes that in 'those days' John the Baptist had an expectation and he proclaimed it. John the Baptist also had a clear command for them --- REPENT. Does this message still ring true in 'these days'? Absolutely, it does! John referenced the prophet, Isaiah, to give credence to his message. John urged the people to confess their sins and live for God as it was good news for those that listened but terrible news to those who refused to listen and thus cut themselves off from their only hope. We are called to the same proclamation, expectation, and command. We can prepare people by explaining their need for forgiveness, demonstrating Christ's teaching by our conduct, and telling them how Christ can give their lives meaning. We can "make straight paths for him" by correcting misconceptions that might hinder people from approaching Christ. How are you helping those around you to welcome Jesus?

Rev. Jackie Greene
GAP Ministry
Marion Center Ministerium Member

Day 8 - December 8

[John the Baptizer said:] 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'

Matthew 3:11

This is a very powerful verse, John the Baptist knew that although he was preaching about and baptizing in the name of repentance, he could only do so much. All baptized members of a church are ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but we are all limited, there is someone more powerful than us; and that is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. It is through Jesus Christ that we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

As we go through this Christmas season, attending parties, being together with friends and family, giving and receiving gifts, enjoying favorite foods, and any other Christmas traditions we have...may we remember why we are celebrating. The parties are fun, giving and receiving gifts is fun, enjoying our favorite foods is fun, but it doesn't last. Celebrating the birth of Jesus, having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior...those last forever. I know this is a cliché, but Jesus IS the reason for the season, let's celebrate Him.

Rev. Becky Edwards
Creekside/Tanoma UMC

Day 9 - December 9

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice.

Psalm 72:1-2

All my life long, I've been disappointed with leaders.

Some were people I pinned my hopes on, only to be let down when they did not live up to their ideals. Others, you could just see were trouble right from the start. I have learned over four decades to prepare for disappointment in chosen leaders.

And to be very honest, so did ancient Israel. Read through the books of Kings or Chronicles and you'll see a lot of failure to live up to God's vision of justice and mercy, plenty of crooked ambition, and just plain idolatry.

But blessedly—even stubbornly--the people of God would not give up hope in a future king who would actually rule with righteousness and compassion, and without a hint of scandal (even David couldn't live up to that bar).

That is our Advent hope, too: that, for all the disappointments in the dustbin of history, the One we name King of Kings and Lord of Lords really is God's rightful ruler, and that in a homeless baby laid in a trough and forced to seek refuge from a corrupt and terrible ruler (Herod), we are given the One who brings true justice and genuine mercy.

Jesus, our Christ, is worth being stubbornly hopeful for.

Pastor Stephen Bond
New Life Lutheran Church

Day 10 - December 10

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

Isaiah 11:1-5

The fruit of everlasting life sent to spread the gospel of God not only by his words but by his actions; Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves and most of all to love God with all our hearts, minds and souls. He gave us many examples to live by throughout the Bible. He feared God out of reverence to him; recognizing that He is the Creator of all creations. Jesus had a tongue sharper than a two-edged sword and when he spoke, he defeated the evil around him. He surrounded himself in the righteousness and faithfulness of God. He was born to save us from our sinful nature, this fruit of the Spirit branching out to all who will accept him to be grafted onto the tree of life and sustained by the Holy Spirit giving praises to God in the name of Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit born of the virgin Mary...

Donna Kanouff
Presbyterian Church of Marion

Day 11 - December 11

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9

How Time Flies

This has been a very eventful year. Who would have thought our beautiful little church would be nearly destroyed by an arsonist.

Isaiah had to be a messenger to the people of Judah as in Isaiah Chapter 11 verses 6-9.

Even though the nation forced the Lord's discipline, salvation would come. There will be a reign of peace and security. This can only be realized in the return of the Messiah to establish the Kingdom of God. In God's peaceful kingdom natural enemies will become companions. In the coming Kingdom a youngster will be able to lead wild animals.

What a great day that will be. God will make himself known throughout the earth, and all will be well.

Blessings and Peace

Myrna Orr
Harmony Grove Lutheran Church

Day 12 - December 12

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Roman 15:4-6

Hope. VERB: to look forward to with desire and reasonable confidence. NOUN: the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best.

Without the Hope of Christ Jesus, what else is there. Without the Hope that was born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago, what else would we have? That Hope (feeling) came to give us Hope (confidence in what is to come). This Christmas, let us glorify God together and thank Him for sending us that Hope. Let us together, lift each other up. Let us together glorify God. Let us together, love our fellow man. Let us together spread that Hope to the world.

Amanda Marshall
Plumville Presbyterian Church

Day 13 - December 13

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name';

Romans 15:7-9

For 15 years I have been a volunteer at Pine Grove, ministering to hundreds of men from teenagers to those much older. As I look back on my life, I recall when there were not many instances of interaction with the diversity of those I've met, men of all ages who came seeking for more in their lives than they have had in the past. It's so exciting to see God working in their lives. I have told many that I know that someone is praying for them. "How do you know?" is the usual response I get. My answer is always, "Because I see God's working in your life. Please let him or her know what you're doing so they know their prayers are being answered." At the recent volunteer recognition dinner, someone said to me, "a guard had shared that he heard many inmates sharing with their families during visitations how God had helped them." How that inspires us who follow the instructions to visit those in prison.

As more men are being released, I hope you will open your hearts and churches to welcome them. My heart has been thrilled, warmed and encouraged by those men who want a new life of walking with the Lord.

Please pray for Pine Grove also. There are over 1000 youth and adults there. Most are not practicing Christians. God is at work there, but your prayers can bring miracles. We can bring light to the lost.

Marie Stumpf
Marion Center UMC

Day 14 - December 14

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

God is always gifting me. When I read this verse, I see His gift of joy, peace, believing, and hope. The vehicle that gives me these gifts is the Holy Spirit. Many times, I don't feel hope in my life. I get bogged down by the daily grind; when I stop and become quiet, I can hear, see, and feel the hope that is God. When I rest and listen, I recognize that He is the hope and I know that it will all be accomplished.

The hardest part is to stop, breathe, and listen to God. May we take time in our busyness this season, to stop and experience the hope of God.

Colleen McIntosh
Creekside UMC

Day 15 - December 15

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith for ever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

Psalm 146:5-7a

When I went to write this year's devotional piece, instead of going to my usual Lutheran Study Bible, I went to the stack of books that included old hymnals, other reference books, and one of Mom's bibles. While my intent was to go directly to Psalm 146, I found myself flipping through and finding bookmarkers, newspaper clippings, birth announcements, and even a funeral bulletin. These things in themselves didn't make me happy, but what this said to me was that everything brought Mom back to the Word. If she thought that it was important enough to keep it, then it was important enough to keep it where in a place where she would see it again. When my page turning finally brought me to Psalm 146, in the margin of that chapter was Mom's handwriting "Trust in the Lord". That's where her hope stayed, in the Lord who made heaven and earth – and that helps ME be happy. So, in this advent season, be happy to prepare your hearts for the birth of our Savior, whether it be following years of traditions or new adventures – but definitely with the deep seeded hope in God.

Darla DeCarlo
New Life Lutheran Church

Day 16 - December 16

The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 146:7b-10

To LOVE God, we must KNOW Him. The LORD is mentioned five times in this short passage, each time telling us something about God.

1. He is an Emancipator. Do you need to be set free from drugs, alcohol, lust, gossip, control, or spiritual bondage? Believed the culture's lies? He can set you free from this evil world.
2. He is the Illuminator. Scripture tells how Jesus gave sight to the blind. Blindness was a common ailment in the East. The bright sun and blowing sand contributed to a disproportional amount of eye issues. God not only cures physical blindness but spiritual blindness. He opens the very soul of the believer. "I was blind but now I see."
3. He is our Comforter. Are you weighed down with bereavement, the burdens of life, or a wayward child this holiday season? He is present to comfort you.
4. God is the Rewarder. He loves the righteous and rejoices over them. He lets them speak to Him, and He speaks to them in return through a variety of ways.
5. He is the Preserver. Are you a stranger to the Gospel, fatherless or a widow? He invites you to come under the shadow and shelter of His wings.

Not only does God actively love His children and provide for them, but he "turns the way of the wicked upside down."

To know Him is to love Him. Review these 5 attributes of God often.

Resourced from a sermon by C.H. Spurgeon, February 11, 1994.

Bob & Jennie Henry
Presbyterian Church of Marion

Day 17 - December 17

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.'

Isaiah 35:1-4

As someone who spent a lot of time in and around the deserts of the southwest as a youth, this passage immediately launched a flood of memories. Memories of a barren desert land that, after a few scant winter rains, literally explode in bloom in the spring. Bloom, frankly, that is unmatched anywhere else in the world.

As Isaiah puts it, *"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing."*

The coming of the Christ child has had a similar effect on the world. Without him there was nothing but wilderness and dry land; with him, there remains a never ending supply of living water. Without him, life is barren. With him, life can bloom and flourish. Without him, life is fragile. With him, life is filled with glory. Without him, life's struggles and fears overwhelm and win out; with him, life's struggles and fears are made surmountable. And in the midst of those struggles and fears, we hear Isaiah's voice calling.... *"Be strong, do not fear!...He will come and save you."*

Rejoice and bloom large this Christmas!

Pastor Chris Enoch
Presbyterian Church of Marion

Day 18 - December 18

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Isaiah 35:5-10

Did you ever notice that no matter what folks get for Christmas, it is usually never enough? The following year they come up with something different that they want. Kids are especially guilty of this but I think adults are almost as bad. If someone gives you something, you expect that the next time they might give you something bigger or worth more than the original gift. Greed seems to abide in us all, whether we admit it or not. Our wants are never fully satiated. It's like Chinese food. An hour after you eat it, you are hungry again. Get a big gift, and very soon you need a garage to put it in.

Isaiah sees an end to this inability to ever be filled completely. The "ransomed of the Lord", will want for nothing. They will be filled and they will need no garage to put it in. Those who are physically imperfect, will be made whole and all creation will be at peace. There will be no desolation or empty areas. All will be perfect and we will want no more because our wants have been taken away by being in God's presence. This is the day I pray for.

Amen, Isaiah. What you said!!

Think of that on Christmas Eve, as you gaze at your lawn, waiting for the sleigh and reindeer.

Casey Moore
Plumville Presbyterian Church

Day 19 - December 19

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'

Matthew 11:2-6

In Mathew 11: 2 - 6 we find John in prison, probably as a result of John's outspoken criticism of Herod. While in prison John hears of the works of Jesus but has doubts as to whether Jesus is actually the much-awaited Messiah. John asks some of his disciples, who must have been able to visit the prison, to go to Jesus and ask if he is the Messiah. The answer from Jesus is key to this passage. Jesus does not proclaim to be the Messiah. Instead he instructs the disciples to go back to John and tell him what they have actually seen. The answer is based on observable facts, not just words.

We can apply this to our day to day lives. When we have doubts about something, it is best to consider facts and deeds when making up our mind. Something which is merely proclaimed may be hollow and not express true feelings or intent. Deeds, however, are true and what really represents a person's soul.

In Mathew Jesus confirms that he is the Messiah and offers his blessing to all who accept.

Tom Shadle
Marion Center UMC

Day 20 - December 20

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

James 5:7-8

Patience, I believe this is something we all struggle with. We live in a society where we are always in a rush. We expect things to happen in a split second and if it doesn't, we become upset. What happened to enjoying the waiting period? What happened to being content with life?

The Christmas season is often one of the worst times of the year for patience. We want to cross everything off of our list, so therefore, we are in a rush. I'm going to challenge all of you this Christmas season to work on patience. The greatest gift is about to be given to us. So, I ask you again, do you have the patience to wait? "Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."

Lord, I pray that during this Advent season and beyond, we will carry patience with us. Amen.

Alyssa Battick
Creekside UMC

Day 21 - December 21

*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before
Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might,
and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine,
that we may be saved.*

Psalm 80:1-3

The plea of the psalmist resounds through the ages, praying for God to restore His fallen people in northern Israel and to lift up the light of His countenance and save them.

An apt description of the situation in our world today, with so many turning away from the source of all creation to try to make their own way through this temporary home on earth.

We stand by, listening and watching as the acts of hate and violence invade our lives, feeling helpless in the midst. How can we combat the evil we see around us?

We can let God's light shine through us to others, so they can see His grace and goodness in a humble servant. One human can't change the world, but God can. Maybe we can help.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Yvonne Learn
New Life Lutheran Church

Day 22 - December 22

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

Isaiah 7:10-16

What's in a name? The challenging task of picking a name for a child can be daunting. Many couples spend a great deal of time deciding on the perfect name that will be with their child for his whole life. Many can't make that decision until the child arrives. Mary and Joseph did not have to worry about selecting a name as God had already selected the name and sent the angel to announce that the babe should be called Immanuel. It means "God is with us." What an incredible gift to have Christ walk with us here on earth. He loved us enough to humble Himself to experience all that we do and came to be among us, to understand the trials and temptations that we have. We never have to walk alone. Just as the expectant parents are so excited to welcome and name their new child, no wonder that angels sang their heavenly praises for Immanuel, God is with us.

Lorrie Gallo
Presbyterian Church of Marion

Day 23 - December 23

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.'

Matthew 1:18-23

Poor Joseph. An unfaithful partner was not part of the plan. But after all the anger and the sense of betrayal calmed, he was still a righteous man. And obviously a kind one. No public scene - just a quiet parting of the ways. It was not an easy decision but the door was now closed to what he saw as his marital future. And then, just as he had made his peace with it all, an angel appears and asks him to take on a mind-boggling responsibility for a simple carpenter. He was going to rear the child who would save his people. And then the angel speaks to us as much as to Joseph when he says: "Do not be afraid". A short time later, the shepherds receive the same angelic message and Jesus repeats it over and over in the course of his ministry. This season, if we sit quietly and just LISTEN for a moment, God still speaks the same words to us today. There truly is nothing to fear but fear itself. When we sit in the Light of His presence, the colossal problem we feared the most in the dark is just fog that burns away. God has a plan. He's got you every time. Your plan was good but His is better. Trust Him. Robert Frost would have been proud of Joseph. Two roads diverged and Joseph courageously took the one less traveled by and that truly made all the difference. It changed the course of history.

Sonya Stewart
Grove Chapel Lutheran Church

Day 24 - December 24

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:2-7

Darkness. All around us we see darkness. We see hatred, drugs, broken homes, racism, war, starvation and so many other forms of darkness. When we find ourselves in literal darkness, there is nothing more reassuring than light. And amid all the darkness in our world, we have a light that brings reassurance above any other. In the birth of a small baby, we receive a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. We see so many lights around us, especially this time of year – hundreds of them on one Christmas tree. As we gaze at the many lights around us may our thoughts be focused on Christ, the Light of the world, and be reminded that Jesus came to bring peace and joy and that through him, all darkness is gone. In this season of hope and beyond, let the Light of Christ shine through you!

Sandy Gandolfi
Plumville Presbyterian Church

Day 25 - December 25

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

John 1:1-5

The Word Became Flesh

Christmas- “The season of Light.” The “L” is capitalized on purpose. A lower case “l” wouldn't be appropriate because it represents the ordinary and temporal. Streets, eaves of houses, lawn decorations, interiors of homes, churches and businesses shine with illumination- colorful, flashy, rotating, white or multicolored, catawampus with strings of lights. Beautiful and breathtaking, especially against a snowy background. But after the “season to be jolly” is over, so are the holiday light shows. Light is overtaken by darkness.

Over 2000 years ago, a child was born in the dark shadows of a stable. Like us, the baby would have to walk in darkness his entire life. The child, a boy, however, came to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy: God would give His Son- The Word- to us. Even before the earth's creation, He was with God. All things- sun, moon, water, air, plants, animals, and humans- exist because of His Touch. God sent Him, His Son, to us to be as human as we are. But the Word (Jesus) possessed something we only can strive for: Light and Life.. Unextinguishable. Unconquerable. Eternal. These He offers freely to us if we step out of the darkness and into His Light.

Jane Smith
Marion Center UMC