



The Promise Advent 2024

December 1

Jeremiah 33:14-16

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

The anticipation of Jesus Christ began long before his birth. The Bible recounts the prophets of old who proclaimed the coming of a Messiah to people troubled by invasion, deportation, and captivity; kings who waged war over promised lands, chosen people, and a future Savior; and countless followers of God who defected from families and countries with hope of God's pledge. In times of turmoil, who wouldn't cling to a promised Savior?

We cling to this same hope today. Like the Israelites who wandered in the desert and struggled to grasp the future God assured, we too yearn for a savior. Though the years have shifted, the world has not changed. However, unlike the men and women of the Bible, we must not look far to catch sight of our Messiah. God's promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and God's promise of restoration is on its way again.

That's what Advent is about. In this season of waiting for redemption from sin and fear, war and struggle, we remember God's promise, that was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In Advent, we wait for Christ's birth into our world longing for justice and righteousness. We wait in expectation for God's promise to meet us once more. Cling tightly to this promise, my friends!

With the fear of being too cheesy, think about it this way: Jesus Christ is coming to town. The day is surely approaching when we will see the promise of God, made to all people, birthed back into our lives. When that day comes, may we rejoice with thanksgiving!

Dear God, grant us patience in this waiting season. Encourage our hearts to be filled with anticipation of your promise in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Rev. Lex M. Allum

December 2

2 Peter 3:8-9

"But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance."

As we enter the season of Advent, we step into a time of waiting. Sometimes, due to the frenetic pace of life, it is hard to remember what Advent is all about, much less the beauty and the necessity of patience. In a world that often demands immediate results and quick answers, the message of 2 Peter 3:8-9 speaks to a different rhythm that allows us to hear the quiet voice of God.

Peter reminds us that God's understanding of time is vastly different from ours. Our days can seem long, especially when we are yearning for answers to our prayers. Yet, God views time through the lens of eternity. A day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day. He asks us to have patience and to fully accept the promise of His grace.

In the midst of our preparations and celebrations, let us take a moment to pause. Ask yourself: What does it mean to live in a state of hopeful waiting? How can we embody patience in our relationships, extending grace to those around us, just as God extends grace to us? This Advent, may we not only await the coming of Christ but also be instruments of His patience and love.

Dear God, thank you for your patience with me and the grace you ceaselessly extend to me. Help me slow down in this busy season and feel your rhythm so that I may offer grace and patience to others, reflecting your love and desire for all to come to you.

Becky Binks

December 3

2 Samuel 7:22-26a

"Therefore you are great, O Lord God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. Who is like your people, like Israel? Is there another nation on earth whose God went to redeem it as a people, and to make a name for himself, doing great and awesome things for them, by driving out before his people nations and their gods? And you established your people Israel for yourself to be your people for ever; and you, O Lord, became their God. And now, O Lord God, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it for ever; do as you have promised. Thus your name will be magnified for ever in the saying, "The Lord of hosts is God over Israel"; and the house of your servant David will be established before you."

God established a covenant with David for a kingship that would never end. This was a direct foreshadow of Jesus and one of the greatest covenants of the Old Testament. David offered to build God a temple when God had never asked for this. David's disobedience had just resulted in Uzzah's death while transporting the ark. From David's mistakes, God reveals that Jesus wants our obedience more than our sacrifice.

God rebuked David for presuming that He needed David to build him a temple to find His fellowship. Through His Word, He promised the Jews that they could find His fellowship in a temporary structure called the Tabernacle. David should have trusted in God's promise that the Tabernacle was sufficient to find God's fellowship, just as we should accept his covenant with us. Jesus also offers His fellowship through His Word. We do not need to go to an ornate building or travel to a certain place to find His fellowship. If we trust in His Word and seek Him in prayer, we will find Him wherever we are. The Holy Spirit is ever present in us.

God reminded David that He picked David as a lowly shepherd and protected him from his enemies to prepare him for service. Jesus has also called us when we were no one special. He has also provided for us and protected us. Like David, Jesus wants to empower us through humility to serve His Kingdom.

God promised to create an eternal kingdom through David's descendants. Jesus would later be born into the line of David and become the King of Kings. Jesus wants to be our King of Kings. Like David did, Jesus wants us to submit to Him to receive His blessings. David acted with great humility after realizing that he did not deserve God's blessings. From his example, Jesus also wants us to be humble when He blesses us.

David praised God with great gratitude for His blessings. Like David, Jesus wants us to be grateful for His blessings in our lives.

We pray for God to confirm His blessings for His kingdom and not ours. "Thy Kingdom com, Thy will be done." Jesus has also offered us great powers through the Spirit to help others. Like David, Jesus wants us to accept and use His blessings to help others. The Advent season allows us to reflect on our blessings and the promises God gives us for our salvation.

Forgive us when we do not hold you in the highest place in our lives. Empower us with your Holy Spirit to give up all the little things that distract our allegiance to you and interfere with you being the Supreme and Sovereign God in our day to day lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Mike and Suzanne Underwood

December 4

Psalm 90:1-2

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

"Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."

The main purpose of the first four verses of Psalm 90 (a Psalm of Moses) is the ETERNAL nature of God. There is a sharp contrast between the divine permanence of God and the brevity/frailty of human life. The psalmist refers the stability of God -a dwelling place- a place to take refuge, to hide, to seek shelter -a reliable and strong protector. The lives of humans, on the other hand, are short and difficult. Even the longest of human lives is insignificantly brief compared to the eternity of God.

Time! It seems to be a constant problem. We all think we need more of it. Others place demands on us and our time. We place demands on ourselves. So why is it helpful for the psalmist to continue and tell us to "number our days?" At first, this seems to be rather depressing. But numbering our days can also be freeing. If we truly grasp how temporary our lives on this earth are, then it makes no sense to live life focused on what's temporary and fleeting. We shouldn't waste our time on useless, empty activities.

Advent is the **beginning** of the church year. It always falls in December which is the **end** of our calendar year. Psalm 90 gives important instructions on how to end a year and start a new one. It challenges each of us to take a hard look at how we're spending our time.

Dear God, we pray as the psalmist did: "teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Help us stop looking for satisfaction in all the wrong places, and find true peace and satisfaction in your eternal, steadfast love shown to us in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Elaine Shurley

December 5

Luke 1:68-79

'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

What father is not inspired when looking down on his first born child? Zacharias, who speaks this prophecy, must have been especially moved; he and his wife Elizabeth were elderly and had been unable to have any children. But an angel appeared before Zacharias and told him he was going to a father. Logically, Zacharias didn't believe the angel and he was rendered speechless—for the full nine months of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

When his son was born, he agreed with Elizabeth that the son should be named John, contrary to custom. At once, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, his voice returned, and he spoke the verses that are today's lesson.

He starts by praising God for his faithfulness throughout the ages, and for sending a savior. He predicts that his son, known to us as John the Baptist, will "go before the Lord to prepare his ways," and closes with a prayer for peace.

Like Zacharias, may we be inspired again this Christmas, and as Wynona Judd said, make a baby king. And like Jesus, may we grow to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

Creator God, you have been our help in ages past. Now, be our hope in the days to come, so we may, this Christmas and in the new year, learn to be better Christians, to serve others, and to walk with peace and mercy in our hearts and minds.

Cary Donham

December 6

Malachi 3:16-17

Then those who revered the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the LORD and thought on his name. They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them.

This passage gives us a beautiful affirmation of our worth in God's eyes. It calls us to come together to share faith, encourage each other, and discuss how God's goodness strengthens community. We can be reassured that God is attentive and always present with us, His chosen people, especially when we seek to honor Him. Nothing, not even the quiet desires of our hearts, go unnoticed by Him. When we listen to ourselves God will be there pointing the way to our essential selves.

Despite our imperfections, God sees us as treasured and precious and chooses to call us His own. God says, "I will spare them," promising to protect us through fatherly compassion. God gives us a future promise telling us that "on the day when I act" asking us to trust in his timing and ultimate justice.

In moments of personal uncertainty or when life feels overwhelming, this verse can remind us to anchor ourselves in the eternal, unchanging nature of God. It invites us to trust in Him as our refuge and place of rest, no matter what storms may come. God will be there for us as we seek to honor Him in community and in the quiet community of our hearts.

Dear God, grant us the understanding that we are treasured by you and help us to let this belief shape the way we speak and live in our hearts. Grant us compassion to treat others as the treasure you see them as and help us let this belief shape the way we speak and give to others.

Hannah Hammonds

December 7

Luke 9:1-6

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, 'Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.' They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

I travel a lot to visit friends and loved ones and they are gracious enough to open their homes to me. I can't say that I have ever left someone's home or town and felt the need to dust off my feet. But, for those who know me, I would have great difficulty "taking nothing for the journey." That is one reason I choose to drive my car when I travel. I always pack more than I need—clothes, shoes, sweaters, coats, rain gear. There is always a suitcase and an additional bag or two. I have even been known to take my own food and often snack along the way to ensure I stay awake. So, this directive from Jesus would be a difficult task and take much determination and discipline for me to accomplish.

Although I may not 'pack light' when I travel, I can still 'spread the light' of Christ with the people I encounter on my travels. We proclaim His kingdom by our actions, our words, and deeds. Holding a door open for a fellow shopper, thanking the person behind the counter at McDonald's, or donating funds at the Salvation Army kettle. Encouraging your host to watch our Sunday morning service with you or attending church with them while out of town. There are so many ways we can share our faith with those around us. Just as Jesus instructed the twelve, we, too, should proclaim the good news.

Now, while I don't feel I have the power to *heal* the sick, I feel charged with *caring* for the sick. Through this community of faith, there are many opportunities granted us to proclaim the kingdom of God. Visiting those that are homebound or in the hospital. Sending cards or making phone calls to those who have not been in church for a while. Delivering Christmas tins to our special friends in the church. Delivering poinsettias to brighten someone's home. Joining friends to carol to get folks in the spirit of the season. Volunteering at PCM or sending a donation to help the less fortunate. Serving lunch at the community kitchen on Sunday. There are many activities scheduled during this holiday season; all we have to do is be open to participating. Come join us as we care for the sick, just like the twelve.

Dear God, help us to be open to opportunities to care for your people as we share your kingdom with those we meet. Amen.

Chris Krueger

December 8

Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

The church at Philippi was the first Church in Europe, established by the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey around AD 50. Those first converts of the church were Gentiles, and the congregation developed into a predominately Gentile fellowship. Women played an essential role in the life of the church at Philippi. This tells us a lot regarding Paul's opinions regarding ministry. Our scripture today is a letter from Paul and Timothy meant to encourage the church in continuing their struggles.

I find myself encouraged by reading Paul's letter to those early believers. He treats them as equals. This is from a man who began by persecuting the Christians. Now he is their leading supporter. Paul expresses confidence in his hope for the future of this church and of Christianity itself.

During the Advent season we remember the story of a babe born in a stable and placed in a feed trough. We see the admirers who came from afar bringing gifts of prophetic importance. This story of the arrival of our Messiah is complex with movement throughout time from past to present to future.

The Christians in Philippi heard the same story and rejoiced in the child who was born for their sins. Jesus was the man who gave himself willingly for their salvation. And Jesus was the Son of God whose continued presence by way of the Holy Spirit continually supported them.

From the cross Jesus says "Tetelestai" which means that it (his work, his ministry) is completed. He has already done that which he was sent to do. Yet, in the same manner, it is not finished. God is not through with us yet. Paul's letter is one of hope and promise that Jesus who has given all for us is now completing God's task of salvation through us. Advent is a time of remembering the past, living in the present, and rejoicing in the future because of Jesus.

Dear Father God, thank you for loving us enough to give the greatest gift of all, your Son. Continue your love through us as we await the triumphant return of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Help us share this love with those near us. Amen.

Robert Worden

December 9

Isaiah 40:6-11

A voice says, 'Cry out!' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever.

*Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!'*

*See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.*

Isaiah 40:6-11 speaks to us about the fleeting nature of human life and the enduring word of our God. As we journey through Advent, these verses provide a profound reminder of God's unwavering promise of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Verse 6 reveals the transient state of human existence: "All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field." Our lives, our struggles, and even our triumphs can seem so temporary. Yet, in the middle of this realization, we find hope in the enduring word of God, which stands forever (verse 8).

The proclamation in verse 9, "Here is your God!" fills our hearts with anticipation and joy. During Advent, we prepare ourselves for the arrival of Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise. The Advent season is a time to reflect on the profound truth that God, in His infinite love, sent His Son to bring salvation to the world.

Verses 10 and 11 describe God as both a mighty warrior and a gentle shepherd. This duality is perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who came with the power to save and the gentleness to guide and care for His flock. Jesus' birth was the dawn of hope, a demonstration of God's commitment to redeem and restore His creation.

As we light the candles of Advent, let us reflect on this divine promise of salvation. Let us find comfort in knowing that, through Jesus Christ, God's eternal word has been made flesh, dwelling among us to bring grace and truth (John 1:14).

During this season of anticipation, may we embrace the assurance that though our lives are as fleeting as grass, God's love and salvation through Jesus Christ are everlasting. Let us rejoice in the hope and peace that comes from the knowledge that our Savior has come and is coming again.

Bill Lentz

December 10

2 Peter 1:3-7

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature. For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love."

What is *The Promise* in this passage? It seems that Peter is saying we already have everything we need for a good life, however, many of us are not at peace. Why?

Peter is speaking to the Gentiles and exiled Jews who were not considered worthy of God's love. Peter is telling them, with Christianity, God's chosen people include all those who believe in Jesus. All of us have been offered peace and contentment. However, like most things worth having, it requires a bit of effort on our part.

Peter is instructing the new Christians that to receive the promise of divine peace they must sincerely believe in Jesus. He is instructing them to strive to obtain the virtues He taught. To demonstrate their belief they need to clear their minds of worldly matters, do good deeds, gain Christian knowledge, practice self-control, be steadfast and devoted to their faith, and love unconditionally.

This message is relevant in today's culture. With 24-hour news from many different outlets, multiple social media platforms, unlimited reading material and podcasts, and many other sources for information, obtaining the peace seems unachievable. We must have faith, everything will be alright.

Lord, help us to clear our minds of worldly distractions and focus on the gifts you have given us, in order to have peace. Help us to have faith that you are in charge and everything will be alright.

Chris and Randy Janne

December 11

Psalm 126:1-3

A Song of Ascents.

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'
The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.*

Pastor Lex: "Okay, friends, what does Advent mean?"

Children: "I don't know, but it's close."

Pastor Lex: "It sure is. Advent is a time of waiting until Christmas."

Children: "UGH! I *hate* waiting."

Pastor Lex: "Oh? Tell me why you dislike waiting."

Children: "It makes me exhausted."

"Because I'm impatient. I am not patient at all."

Pastor Lex: "Hmm, well who do you think we are waiting for in the season of Advent?"

Children: "Jesus!"

Pastor Lex: "That's right! And who is Jesus?"

Children: "The best guy in the Bible."

"He is a really, really, really nice guy."

Pastor Lex: "Those are both true. What else is Jesus? *Who* is Jesus to us?"

Children: "....."

Pastor Lex: "Let's try another approach. Who comes on Christmas?"

Children: "SANTA!"

Pastor Lex: "Who else?"

Children: "ELVES!"

Pastor Lex: "Okay, anyone else?"

Children: "Family?"

Pastor Lex: "You're missing one. His name starts with a J."

Children: "Jesus!"

Pastor Lex: "That's right, Jesus!"

Children: "It's Jesus' birthday!"

Pastor Lex: "Yup. Why does Jesus come on Christmas?"

Children: "For presents!"

Pastor Lex: "Because Jesus is our Savior."

Children: "Oh, yeah."

Pastor Lex: "What is Advent again? A time of..."

Children: "Waiting!"

*Happy waiting from the children of the church. We hope it is filled with Santa and presents
and elves. Oh, and that really, really, really nice guy, too.*

December 12

Isaiah 12:2-6

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be known in all the earth. Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Growing up in Oklahoma, I remember the summers were hot, dry, and windy. My sister and I often helped with the yardwork or played outside until we were exhausted and thirsty. Flopping under a shade tree, we'd happily grab the garden hose and pass it back and forth, laughing as we "accidentally" splashed each other and drank the cool refreshing water. It revived us and made us laugh with joy.

In Verse 3 Isaiah sings, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." And His cup of salvation is deep, springing up eternally. John 4:13-14 says, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain (spring) of water springing up into everlasting life."

Isn't that a beautiful promise of God's salvation for thirsty, spiritually parched people? Like a cool, refreshing drink of water under the shade tree on a hot day, God's salvation comes to us when we draw the water from the well. Sing for joy, for great is the Holy One!

Our God is always coming to us...in a hymn, in a prayer, in a stable, in a cup of salvation.

*Dear Lord, you are my stronghold and my defense. I will trust and not be afraid. You came to earth to seek and save people who are lost and spiritually thirsty. I rejoice to draw water from the wells of your salvation. Come, Lord Jesus, come.
Amen.*

Jacque Dale

December 13

2 Corinthians 9:12-15

*...for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you.
Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

When God created us, he gave everyone their own gifts. We are extremely lucky to be given these talents and as Christians we are called to use our skills to be of service to others. Being of service to others does not mean doing one specific thing. This service could be inviting someone to church, holding the door for someone, buying someone's drink for them at a coffee shop, donating to charities, and so much more. While the services we perform can be very different they are all for one thing; to help others and spread God's spirit. Along with the services benefiting others they also benefit God. When we perform these acts of service it is one way of spreading God's love and kindness. By spreading his love and kindness we are showing him we are so thankful for him that we want to spread his spirit to others so they can experience it.

Often times people are intimidated to be of service to others and God. Many people might think they do not have enough money, their talents and skills are not good enough, or the things they offer will not matter or are ineffective. This is not true. God created each and every one of us by hand and gave us gifts we have for a reason. Whether your service is giving a hundred dollars, giving ten dollars, cleaning up after an event, or simply smiling at someone, God notices. God appreciates every service the same and no matter what the service is, it still benefits God and his people, spreads his love, and gives thanks to him.

Dear God, help us to be of service in any way we can. Help us to know that the gifts we offer are incredible and our services will benefit you and your people. Thank you for the gifts you have given us. Amen.

Lucy LeBuhn

December 14

Amos 9:11-12, 14-15

On that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the Lord who does this.

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the Lord your God.

In the first nine chapters of the Book of Amos, God condemns the government's oppression of the poor and elite-society's injustice toward the disadvantaged in 8th century BCE Israel.

At that time, the government and the powerful were prosperous. But that prosperity led to gross inequities between urban elites and the poor. God commanded that "justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." **Amos 5:24**. In defiance of God's commandment, according to Amos, Israeli society was neither just nor righteous.

God was angry that wealthy landowners caused small farmers to suffer a loss of liberty and property through the manipulation of debt and credit while purporting to be God's devoted religious followers. Amos' prophecy was that God would destroy Israel and its neighbors.

Shortly after Amos' prophecy, the Assyrians devastated and destroyed Israel. Fortunately for us, Amos' prophecy ends on a hopeful and joyful note that foretells the coming of Christ.

In **Chapter 9:11-12 & 14-15**, Amos prophesizes that after its destruction, God would rebuild and restore Israel and "all the nations who are called by my name." Matthew begins by calling Jesus the son of David, indicating his royal origin, and the son of Abraham, indicating he was an Israelite.

As Christians, we believe Jesus is the fulfillment of Amos' prophecy. As John's Gospel states, Jesus is the light of the world. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it...the true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." **John 1:5, 8**

Because Jesus came into the world, we as Christians believe that love and goodness will prevail and are forever. We hope and believe that while there is grief, tragedy, and hatred in the world, they are temporary. That is our salvation.

On a personal note, we spent most of the last 35 years in Paducah and at First Presbyterian Church with our children. Our family is thankful to our Church and the community for all we received. When they were grown, our children moved away from Paducah. They have now begun their own families. In October, we moved to St. Louis to be with our daughter's family that now includes two of our grandchildren. Because of this new opportunity, Amos' hopeful and joyful prophecy of a new beginning has a special meaning to our family this Christmas season. We wish everyone a Merry Christmas.

Dear God, thank you for giving us the gift of hope and new beginnings. We know that in times of trouble and hardship, you are with us. Because of your gift and promise, goodness and remembrance are forever while grief and tragedy are temporary. Amen.

Tim & Margaret Kaltenbach

December 15

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

How can one rejoice in times of great darkness? During the season of Advent in 2021, a destructive tornado ripped through western Kentucky. How could people possibly find a reason to rejoice? At the moment of the tornado, and the immediate weeks following the event, there seemed little reason for rejoicing.

Yet, amongst the devastation, people still gathered together to worship, knowing the Lord was among those gathered. Whether in a church sanctuary or a parking lot surrounded by piles of tornado debris, people gathered to give thanks. Giving thanks and taking time to rejoice for the blessings provided by the Lord. Yes, even making time to sing songs of the holiday season.

No matter the situation, we sometimes forget to stop and offer thanks for what has been provided each day. Pausing to:

- Stop
- Rejoice
- Give thanks
- Sing

In the busy days ahead, may each of us find that time to pause among the hecticness of the season to offer our thanks as we journey toward the birth of the babe in Bethlehem. To offer our thanks for the silver linings that many times come during times of darkness in our lives. What have been your silver linings in the storms of life?

Ever-present God, we pause this day to rejoice for all you have provided. When we have thought you to be far removed, you have always been present to us, and for that, we rejoice and give thanks this day. Amen.

Don & Renie Barger

December 16

Isaiah 11:1-3a

A shoot shall come out from the stump 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.

Isaiah's prophecy about the coming of the Messiah leads me to reflect on God's overwhelming and enduring compassion for humanity. He loves us so much that he promises us salvation through His Son. Reading this scripture prompts deep gratitude to God for gifting us with Jesus; it also evokes a sense of anticipation and joy. During this Advent season, as we await the birth of Christ with eagerness and longing, I am reminded of our beloved carol, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" as it mirrors Isaiah's foretelling of our Savior's birth.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

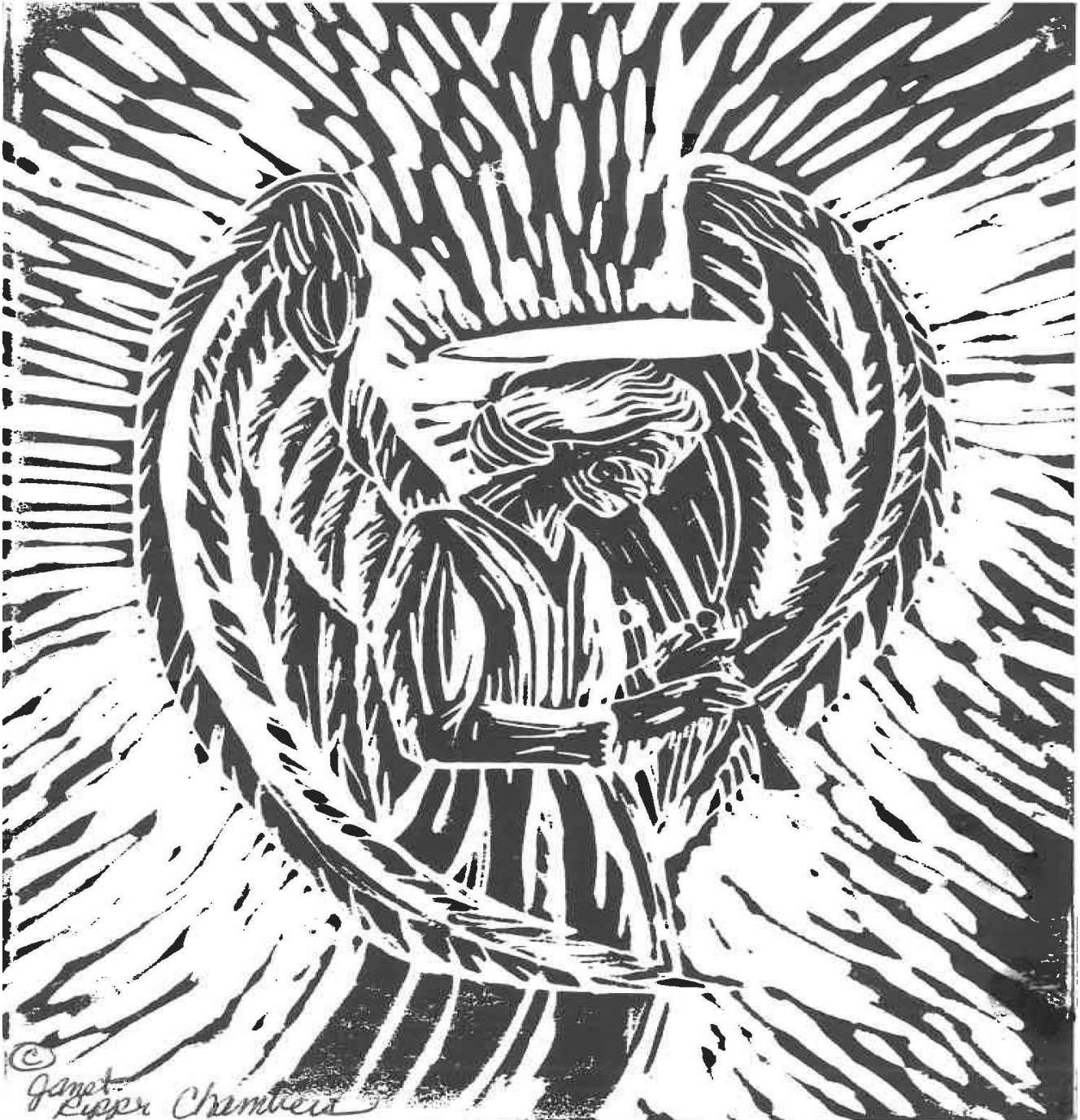
Dear God, Thank you for the wonder and joy of the Advent season. Let us rejoice in Your promise of salvation through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jennifer Johnson

December 17

Isaiah 11:3b-5

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.



December 18

Isaiah 11:6-9

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.

During the season of Advent, we celebrate God's promise of salvation gifted to us through the birth of Jesus Christ. We celebrate Jesus's birth while waiting expectantly for his return. Yet, waiting is a passive verb. It does not connote action. On first glance, Isaiah's peaceable kingdom appears passive too. As utterly ridiculous and implausible as it seems that the wolf and the lamb would live in harmony together, we are asked to trust that Isaiah's vision will materialize into a world where there is peace and communion among all living things. He makes it seem easy, like it just happens with the wave of a magic wand. However, on further introspection, one notes the herculean effort it takes to view and navigate situations, behaviors, and others with new eyes. God calls us to be compassionate: to *act* with passion, looking *with* the eyes of another. Compassion is an action verb. It requires great intentionality, great connection, and great faith.

One of my favorite things to do before my daughter died was to pile all the kids on the bed together and watch animal videos. Inevitably, Ellie would commentate and create a hilarious narrative about each animal and its antics. Of course, we never witnessed a leopard living with a kid or a lion eating straw like an ox, but we did see some surprise friendships among cats and birds, dogs and dolphins, elephants and sheep...you get the idea. So what is the attraction to the animal videos or why even mention it? Underlying the laughter, they give us hope. The animals somehow beat the odds of a cruel world and unite against all adversity. If animals can override their instinct to not harm, how might humans do the same? What does it look like to not hurt or destroy? What would it look like to think differently? Through Isaiah, it seems God nudges us to examine the power differential between the proverbial lion and the lamb and how we think of and use power with one another.

How can that power be reinterpreted in Christ's love through forgiveness, kindness, and compassion? Our words, actions, and decisions create ripple effects in our private lives, communities, and the world. We have a choice about the knowledge we choose to cover the Earth and the way we treat all God's creations. There is significant action behind Isaiah's description of the unexpected reversal of a world that lives in harmony, connectivity, and community with all living things. Change results by collaborative action. Time after time, God turns tragedies upside down. He turns death into life and tragic accidents into deepening faith. Perhaps, Isaiah's hope is a call to action through recognition that God uses the unexpected to carry out his plan by making the impossible, possible?

Dear God, Source of all light and harmony, you call us to be peacemakers. As you did with the lion with the lamb, cast aside our differences so we may celebrate our similarities as your creations. As your disciples, grant us the ability to bridge the divide through small acts of kindness and compassion as a cumulative effort to facilitate lasting peace in your Kingdom.

Amen.

Erin Coale

December 19

Jeremiah 31:31-33

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

A New Covenant

The prophet Jeremiah preached to the people of God throughout his long life, both before their captivity in Babylon and during their suffering there. Here in these verses Jeremiah tells of a coming new relationship with God, reminding people of the promises made to Moses, promises that were written in stone and declared to be from everlasting to everlasting. Although God's people both then and now often forget, neglect or break God's law, God is loving and merciful and does not abandon them.

This same God, who freed people enslaved in Egypt and who brought captives back from Babylon, sent Jesus the Son, whose coming we now celebrate. His birth, life, death and resurrection is that new covenant, a covenant Jesus tells his disciples to remember at the Last Supper.

Is it not miraculous that the promise God made so long ago to Moses which gave hope to the psalmist and to the prophet is offered again to us by Christ himself? The gift of God for the people of God.

As we approach the last week of Advent with minds cluttered with "to-do" lists: last gifts to purchase and wrap, company to entertain, and programs and parties to attend, may we keep foremost in our hearts the words that the angels sang in Bethlehem...

Glory to God

Peace on Earth

Goodwill to All

Gracious God, grant that we may hold your words inscribed on our hearts throughout the coming days. Amen.

Anne McNeilly

December 20

Isaiah 42:10-13

Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the end of the earth! Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the coastlands and their inhabitants. Let the desert and its towns lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the tops of the mountains. Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare his praise in the coastlands. The Lord goes forth like a soldier, like a warrior he stirs up his fury; he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against his foes.

Isaiah sees the restoration of Israel, their return from captivity to a prosperous nation, and the rebuilt city of Jerusalem. His prophecies serve further to help the people look forward to the coming of the Messiah and his everlasting kingdom of justice, righteousness, and salvation. Like Israel has been a suffering servant of God, so too will the Messiah be a suffering servant for All people, including Gentiles. For the righteous, God is preparing a place where all will be eternal joy and peace.

As we honor Advent and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, who brings us hope, love, joy, peace and salvation; let us all lift our voices to praise God who gave us the greatest gift of all. What better reason to lift our voices in praise than for the one who was born to save us all from our sins. You all know music is a big part of our lives and there are so many beautiful, meaningful anthems and hymns written praising God. I don't know if you've ever felt the word and melody deep inside of you, but you make a connection to the listener. God is always listening. Let us sing praises to God during this meaningful, thankful time.

Lord, help us to sing praises for the gift of Hope you have given us.

Corky & Nancy Bloodworth

December 21

Psalm 80:1-7

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. O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

There are times during this earthly journey when life treats us badly. There are bad days and unfortunately, bad lives. Bad lives beyond any earthly control. Ever. For some of us on our life's path, the journey becomes a struggle. A tough struggle. And difficult to explain or to accept.

When times are difficult, for a day, or for years, we reach out to God for help. Or for relief. Or for explanation. Or for deliverance from the misery. Sometimes the plea is not answered.

The author of Psalm 80 is speaking of a difficult journey and crying out directly to God: "4. O Jehovah God of hosts, How long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of they people?" The plea is for help: "stir up thy might, and come to save us. 3. Turn us again, O God; And cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." This ancient plea and the events that we witness today remind us that as we travel our path in life—comfortable or uncomfortable—each of us has—or sees—needs beyond the reach of worldly help. We will each wonder why these needs are unmet. I wonder every day. Not about my needs, but the needs of so many people in this earthly place. Why are their needs not met? Why are we swept into—or with—the evil?

Psalm 80 does not answer the question posed above. It instead reminds me that the question, like the suffering of so many, is age old.

In this time of Advent, I am reminded that salvation is promised. We, like the psalmist, can only wait. Just as Jesus waited for his promised salvation during the last days of his earthly journey. Amen.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, help us to carry the burdens of our lives and of our fellow travelers. Help us accept the burdens of this life which we are unable to bear or to touch. Make us ever mindful that salvation awaits. Amen.

Jim & Linda Gould

December 22

Colossians 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Have you ever received the perfect gift? That thing you so badly wanted but never told anyone? The giver of this perfect gift knows you so well, there was no need to ask about your wish.

Jesus is not a creation of God. Jesus is with God, ruling over all of creation. Nothing exists apart from Jesus. God created the whole universe and all that is in it through him and for him. Jesus made the invisible God visible when he came to earth, lived a human life, and died a human death. And the world was reconciled to God through Jesus's resurrection.

Jesus is like that perfect gift. To know Jesus is to know God.

As we anticipate the birth of Jesus, God please help us not to focus on perfect gifts but on the perfect gift, Jesus, because He is Lord of all creation. Amen.

Viola Blackwell

December 23

Luke 1:39-45

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Micah 5:3-5 says, "Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth...For now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace."

The promise of the coming of the Messiah was foretold to the elderly priest, Zechariah, by the angel, Gabriel. His wife, Elizabeth, was unable to conceive due to her advanced age. The angel Gabriel spoke to him in the temple that Elizabeth would conceive and have a son whose name would be John (John the Baptist). John would prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ.

In verse 39, Mary, now pregnant with Jesus, came to visit Elizabeth who was 6 months pregnant at that time. Mary invoked Elizabeth's name when she was greeted at the door by a servant of the household. Elizabeth was immediately filled with the Holy Spirit when she heard Mary's voice and the child in her womb kicked for joy upon learning that the mother of our Savior was here in the house of Zechariah. Elizabeth greeted Mary saying, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear." The Holy Spirit, the Great Communicator, came down from Heaven and proclaimed the Promise to them that a child will be born who will redeem us all. The people of Zechariah's village were skeptical of Elizabeth's pregnancy until the boy, John, was born. We as Christians are sometimes skeptics until the Holy Spirit speaks to us. This is one of God's promises, a miracle birth.

Today, we too long for a sign, a vision, or some communication that will reinforce our faith in the coming of Christ during the Advent season. God promises us that Jesus' coming will fulfill the prophecy of His virgin birth, life, and death where our sins are forgiven and, like Jesus, we will be resurrected and take our place with the angels. Like Elizabeth and Mary, I feel the joy and the humility of the Advent season when we celebrate and honor the birth of our Lord.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the promise of the birth of your Son, Jesus. Let us rejoice in it and be glad!

James & Kristina Thorsby

December 24

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Paul's letter to Titus is known as a pastoral letter, as at the time of the letter, Paul has dispatched Titus to the island of Crete to "set in order things that are wanting." In these verses Paul reminds Titus and us of Jesus's teaching that there is good in ourselves and others, despite our being bombarded daily with "ungodliness and worldly passions" through social media, television, and stories of war, famine, and unrest. In other words, there is good news and hope through God's grace. God's grace is available to all people, believers and non-believers alike, not just those who look, talk, or dress like us. And it is a gift, not a reward to be earned. By accepting this gift, we say "No," to "ungodliness and worldly passions." Instead, we offer our thanks by living "upright and godly lives," and by following the example and teachings of God's son Jesus, whose birth we celebrate tomorrow. So as we await the birth of our savior, let us fashion ourselves in the image of the Lord by putting our trust in him and living a life worthy of his praise.

Dear God, as we think back to the bleak stable of the first Christmas, with the baby Jesus lying in a manger, let us will ourselves to honor his birth, life, death and resurrection by doing justice, loving kindness, walking humbly with our God and thereby making our world a better place.

First Presbyterian Church Choir

December 25

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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 for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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: to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" 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." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your blessings, including your Son.

*During this time of the year we are reminded of our most rewarding gift-Jesus' birth
– and with his birth our gift of eternal life.*

With your gift of salvation, our lives are blessed with hope, forgiveness and love.

Amen.

Bill & Stacey Hadley, Emma & Emerson Martin, Hayden & Harper Hadley

