



Advent Devotional

**Green Street
Advent Devotional
2019**

December 1, 2019

Matthew 24:36-44

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they 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, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. 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.”

The Church has been celebrating Advent for thousands of years. Many of us find comfort in the familiarity of the season – the traditions, the hymns, the scripture readings anticipating Jesus’ birth. We enter Advent knowing what to expect. It’s somewhat ironic that the message of Advent is to expect the unexpected.

Mary and Joseph received unexpected news from the angels. Jesus, Lord and Savior, was unexpectedly born in a lowly stable. Shepherds on a hillside above Bethlehem had an unexpected visit announcing Jesus’ birth. The wise men found this new king, not in the expected rooms of the palace, but in the humble home of a carpenter. The whole story of Jesus’ birth is one surprise after another. Expect the unexpected!

Jesus reiterated this message to his followers. The Son of Man’s coming will be unexpected. In the midst of their daily lives, their chores and relationships, the Son of Man will

suddenly and unexpectedly appear. Therefore, Jesus tells them, be ready...and expect the unexpected.

Matthew 24 is often read as Jesus' prediction of his second coming – a reminder to the Christian Church to be ready for his return and to expect the unexpected. However, Jesus speaks these words even as he stands in their midst. Is Jesus telling them to keep awake, not in the future, but in the present moment, because the Messiah they hope for has already arrived? Is Jesus telling them, as they live out their daily lives and familiar routines, that the Son of God is, in fact, here among them?

Advent brings many familiar traditions that we love, along with daily activities of the season – shopping, gift wrapping, concerts, baking, sending cards. In the midst of these activities, do we expect to find Jesus? In the midst of this familiar, comfortable season, we are invited to look for Jesus. It's Advent! Expect the unexpected!

Prayer: Dear God, We enter Advent eager for familiar, beloved traditions. Day by day we prepare for Christmas celebrations. Help us in this season to be awake, to keep looking for you, and to expect the unexpected in our faith. Amen.

Rev. Kristin L. White

December 2, 2019

Romans 13:11-14

...now [is] the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers...let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.

Waiting generally has a “don’t know” aspect to it. As we await the birth of the Christ Child, however, we know that it happened. For us, it is an annual remembrance. We believe in the incarnation – God with us in human flesh. We are familiar with the joy of welcoming newborn babies into our midst and the pleasure of watching them grow and develop. Scripture shares with us much of who this child grew up to be.

In today’s reading, Paul reminds the early Christians that the end of the story was yet to come, and he believed that it was coming soon. Yet here we are centuries later, still waiting, as we recite the familiar words of the communion liturgy: “Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.”

This passage from Romans doesn’t suggest that we should just sit around and wait for that great happening. Jesus came, not only to deliver the message of a future in heaven, but to show us how to live and how to be in relationship with God and with one another. In the few words cited above, we are reminded that both actions and attitudes count.

We might ask ourselves during this Advent season what difference His coming has made in our personal lives. Do we do our best to follow where His footsteps lead? Let us hear and respond to the invitation in the words of Phillips Brooks in “O Little Town of Bethlehem” that Christ might be “born in us today.”

Prayer: Dear God, as we remember the story of the Christ Child in the manger we thank You for the love that made it happen. “O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray; cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.” Amen.

Sally Joy

December 3, 2019

Psalm 72:1-7

This is a prayer for God's help to the king of Israel to be able to rule his people with justice and righteousness. The prayer included the many needs of the people such as saving the children, feeding the orphans, helping the widows and those who were sick. Prayers were given for protection for his people from their enemies.

A just king will rule so his people will flourish and prosperity will be abundant. A righteous king continues to have a great influence for generations.

What qualities do we want in our leaders?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, we pray for all our leaders in our homes, first responders, our honorable military, the church and this great nation. Give them wisdom and just decisions to help save the children, house the orphans, comfort the widows, offer relief and respite to the sick. Guide them to the path that will see the land flourish in abundance to provide for God's people. Let them have courage, strength and patience in dealing with the threats to our land and its people so all mankind can come together in His name once more. Amen.

Joyce Maske

December 4, 2019

James 5:7-11

"Be patient brothers, until the Lord's coming."

We are tested everyday with our patience or lack there of. Everything in life has an inner clock and its beginning and end. We are a very impatient species, we want it NOW.

If you try and rush the growth of a crop by accelerating its growth by the use of chemicals you usually get a poor crop, low in flavor and not wanted by anyone.

If we try and force our children to grow up faster by exposing them to more and more mature ideas and suggestions, we get a confused child who skips stages of growth and is ill prepared to deal with the adult world.

Reflection: To every season there is a time and we are always rushing about and not taking in all the love, beauty and things that the Lord has given and will leave the earth an unfulfilled person.

Prayer: Be patient my fellow Christians our normal biological clocks are ticking fast enough. Do not be tempted to speed it up because you will miss out on many of the splendid things the Lord has given to us. Love, laugh, ponder, and use your eyes to see.

Candy Schorr

December 5, 2019

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, who you desire, will come”, says the Lord Almighty. – **Micah 3:1-4**

What is Advent? The dictionary defines advent as “the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event”. In my mind, Advent is all three. It is the arrival of Jesus, the beginning of the new “Church” year, and something that allows us to take stock of where we are in relationship with Jesus.

Advent is a time for us to prepare for the Lord, to remove any barriers keeping us from His goodness. It is important to take a few moments each day to talk with God, however we want. We need to clean out our “house” to make sure it is ready for Christmas day, when the light of love can shine

through us to the whole world, in all we do. Open our hearts, minds, and souls to the magnificence that Jesus is, purify ourselves for His arrival. He will keep us in His loving arms, to protect us from all evils. We only need to speak His name to feel His presence.

So how can we prepare for Jesus? Preparing for Christmas, a celebration of the birth of Jesus, is like preparing to have a child. The first thing a room needs to be modified to create a space for all the items necessary for a baby. We need to create space in our heart to let the Lord be near us and breathe life into our souls.

Next, the house needs to be child-proofed so no injuries occur. We need to pray each day to allow the Lord to help us through any struggles we encounter and give thanks for all our blessings. Each prayer is a sign we are preparing for His arrival.

Before bringing the little one home, a car seat needs to be properly secured in the vehicle to keep the child safe in the event of an accident. We need to seek out the Lord in times of pain, for He will provide comfort.

Finally, a child needs to be guided to do what is right, to help others, and to love all people. Jesus asks that we need be accepting of others without judgement, to provide support when we can, and smile to let them know they are not alone. Such is a way to participate in Advent, the coming of the Christ child.

Prayer: Almighty Lord, help me to prepare my heart for your arrival. Open my eyes that I may clearly see the path you have mapped out for me that I may do your will. Keep me safe along the travels of my life. And when times get difficult, help me to feel you beside me, every step of the way. Amen.

Lori Webber

December 6, 2019

Luke 1:67-75

Then Zechariah, John's father, was filled with the Holy Spirit and told the people a message from God:

"Praise to the Lord God of Israel. He has come to help his people and has given them freedom.

He has given us a powerful Savior from the family of his servant David. This is what he promised through his holy prophets long ago. He will save us from our enemies and from the power of all those who hate us. God said he would show mercy to our fathers, and he remembered his holy agreement. This was the promise he made to our father Abraham, a promise to free us from the power of our enemies, so that we could serve him without fear in a way that is holy and right for as long as we live."

Most of us remember the joy in Mary's song after the angel Gabriel told her that she would bear a son whom she was to call Jesus. She sings praises to God for the great gift that He gave her. Zechariah's song is a bit different. When Zechariah was told he was to be a father and the baby was to be called John, he met the news with doubt and laughter. God punished Zechariah for his disbelief by taking away the power of speech for the nine months that Elizabeth was with child. When John was born, Zechariah asked for a slate and praised God by writing, "His name is John". At that point, Zechariah's power to speak was returned and he sang his praises to the Lord.

God doesn't give up on us! Sometimes He takes His time and delivers a lesson while he is at it.

Zechariah sings his powerful song in praise of God's promises and mercy. He also focuses on the prophecy of John (his son) who will prepare the way for Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, Please help us maintain the faith and love that is gained by Zechariah. Let us trust in your word and know that you will always take care of us. Amen.

Joan Berry

December 7, 2019

Luke 1:76-80

*76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,
77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”
80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.*

In the Bible passage for today, Zechariah speaks of the future of his son, John the Baptist. Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were devoted followers of God. They had grown old together and were childless. Zechariah was a priest and Elizabeth was related to Mary, the mother of Jesus. One day, while in the temple, an angel came to Zechariah. The angel told him that his wife Elizabeth would have a son who would be a great servant of the Lord. The child was to be named John and would grow up to become a prophet. John the Baptist was given a special task, to prepare the way of the Lord, to go before Jesus and prepare people for the Messiah. He gave people “the knowledge of salvation”. He baptized people and taught the forgiveness of sins provided by God’s tender mercy.

Verse 78 compares God's love and mercy to a light shining into a dark world, like a sunrise. The birth of Jesus is like the "rising sun". Jesus comes to shine on those living in darkness. The result of his coming is that he guides us into peace.

During this season of Advent, we spend weeks patiently waiting for the light that will shine in the darkness. As you prepare for Christmas this year, trust in God's love and think of ways you can share that love with others and fill their hearts with the hope that the birth of the Savior brings.

Prayer: Loving God, my hope and trust are in you. Help me to share with others, to do your will, and to bring the light of your message to those who are living in spiritual darkness. May all of our hearts be filled with the hope that comes from you. Amen.

Tammy Roberts

December 8, 2019

Mark 1: 1-8

"And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Mark 1:4

Our Scripture passage today is about John the Baptist. He was a prophet during Jesus' time. He was actually preparing the way for Jesus and urging God's people to repent because Jesus is coming. John was living a simple way of life being a prophet: he wore simple clothes and ate simple food. The story of John the Baptist is close to my heart. John the Baptist is like the pastors, ministers, church workers or missionaries of today. I am a daughter of a woman minister in the Philippines. Allow me to share the story of the life we had. This story is written by my younger sister.

Growing up, HOME has always been where Mama is. You see, being a pastor's kid entails living in one place to another - parsonages, that is. I was born, baptized and raised in UCCP Mabinay, where Mama was assigned the longest. It is where many of my memories as a "churched kid" started. Sunday school, children's choir, daily vacations, church school, learning center, Easter Sunday egg hunting, Thanksgiving, Christmas and the New Year- everything that has food, snacks and games are good memories for a child!.

Also, spiritual milestones were celebrated everywhere: My elder sisters were baptized in UCCP Sibulan, confirmation in UCCP Mabinay and wed at Silliman Church. We are members in all the churches we've been to, so our birthdays are listed in their church bulletins even now. Imagine how many churches are praying for us on our birthdays!

You may say it's quite cumbersome having to move from one neighborhood to the next, adapt to a new congregation, one school to another and getting involved in a new community. It is, yes! Being a pastor's kid might have grown some insecurities, not having Mama around always because of weddings, conferences, burials and what not that require her service as a minister. But it never reached a point where Mama was left doing it by herself. Because yes, while she was busy catering the needs of the church, helping people in the community and making sure others had provisions, we weren't taken for granted. People whose lives were touched by Mama and her ministry gave back. We felt the love, care, warmth and generosity of church members. And no matter how meager her income as a pastor was, we were able to finish our Bachelor Degrees at a prestigious university all because of God's grace.

And so today, we acknowledge the life of the ministers, church workers and missionaries all over the world who are bringing the message of repentance and currently doing John the Baptist's ministry thousands of years ago: preparing the way of the Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Our most loving God, in this Advent season we give you thanks for the likes of John the Baptist today: the church workers, ministers, and missionaries. They are all over the world preaching the message of repentance and salvation through Jesus Christ. We pray that you will bless them and guide them in everything they do. May your Holy Spirit be with them always to strengthen them and inspire them to be steadfast in the ministry you have given. We also pray for their families, especially their children and spouses, please sustain them also in your love. All this we pray, in Jesus name. Amen.

Nharra Lapitan

December 9, 2019

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets. Put all things to the test: keep what is good and avoid every kind of evil.

May the God who gives us peace make you holy in every way and keep your whole being—spirit, soul, and body—free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you will do it, because he is faithful.

I love to walk in the woods in the fall. The colors of the leaves are so pretty as the light filters through the branches. I especially love that time when some leaves are beginning to turn, some are in full color, some have fallen to the ground, and many are somewhere between. As I pass through the scene on my walk, I enjoy shifting my focus in and out, noticing the colors of a particular leaf, or a litter of acorns beneath an oak, or a clump of alders in a low spot, or the majesty of the sweeping high canopy reaching to the sky. There are so many different levels of awareness possible within each moment of grace and beauty. How

delightful it is to be immersed in a world that is so full of beauty and love that it is impossible to take it all in at once.

This is the spirit in which I understand the beginning of this passage. To pray without ceasing does not mean I have to say one long prayer from when I wake up until when I go to bed every day. Rather, it's a continual openness to conversation with God, regardless of which one of us begins the conversation, so that the relationship is never broken off. To me, prayer has many forms, and being in meditative contemplation on a walk in the woods is prayerful. I may pause at a certain moment if I am moved by a scene or a thought or a squirrel to actually verbalize a prayer. But for me, to pray without ceasing is less of an instruction and more of an invitation to live each moment in relationship with God.

This is where I hear Paul's excitement calling to us. His response to being created in love and blessed by the Spirit is to celebrate! He knows the joy and peace that comes from living a life in relationship with God, and he wants that for the people of the church at Thessalonica, too.

Prayer: Holy God, help me to rejoice, pray, and give thanks. Grant me peace and make me holy in every way. Amen.

Henry Berry

December 10, 2019

2 Peter 3:8-15 - The Message

Don't overlook the obvious here, friends. With God, one day is as good as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day. God isn't late with his promise as some measure lateness. He is restraining himself on account of you, holding back the end because he doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change.

But when the day of God's judgement does come, it will be announced like a thief. The sky will collapse with a thunderous bang, everything disintegrating in a huge conflagration, earth and all its works exposed to the scrutiny of judgement.

Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow, do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the day of God, eager for its arrival. The galaxies will burn up and the elements melt down that day - but we'll hardly notice. We'll be looking the other way, ready for the promised new earth, all landscaped with righteousness. So my dear friends, since this is what you have to look forward to, do your best, in purity and peace. Interpret our Master's patient restraint for what it is; salvation.

This message is a prophetic scripture of the second coming of Christ – an Advent message. What appears significant about this passage to me is the day of God will come like a thief. There are several references warning us to be prepared. Matthew 24:43 “be vigilant” Revelation 3:3 “you will not know the hour I will come upon you” and Revelation 16:15 “behold I am coming as a thief”. The Lord is telling us to be prepared for his coming as we do not know the time. Are we prepared? Do we follow His command to love God, the first of all His commandments? He desires a relationship with us. His timing is perfect and His desire for us is to do our best to live our lives in peace, confess our sins and turn to Him. How are we preparing for Advent? For some it's Christmas shopping, decorating our homes, Santa and parties. Do these activities prepare one for the coming of Christ?

In the hymn “Joy to the World”, a verse stands out for me, “let every heart prepare Him room”. Are we like the innkeeper on that first Christmas Day? God is patiently waiting, and His timing is perfect. Are we prepared?

Prayer: Heavenly father, forgive our sinful nature, and may we live lives of gratefulness for your precious gift of Salvation. Amen

Sandy Grady

December 11, 2019

Isaiah 9:2-7 New International Version (NIV)

²The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned. . .

⁶For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

Today's scripture reading is arguably one of the most recognizable scriptures of the Advent Season.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given," heralds the birth of the Christ Child. The prophet Isaiah's message starts in darkness as we are reminded of the wanderings of the Hebrews in the wilderness during the exodus. But from the darkness of the wilderness comes light and hope.

This year I must admit that I am struggling, and I don't believe I'm alone. The turmoil within the United Methodist Church threatens to cloud the joy and indeed the Light that shines from the message of Isaiah. Isaiah was writing in a period of upheaval and darkness but was able to fathom the workings of God's plan in the midst of troubling times. In the last several months I have felt a lot like the Hebrew exiles must have felt wandering in a dark land. I know that God continues to work in and through the church, but I'm discouraged by the rancor, hostility and inflexibility which seems to be displayed within the church. This is when I must step back and ask God to show me the light of Advent and make it part of my daily experience of faith.

We have an Advent wreath in the Webb household and use daily devotions throughout the season in preparation for the Season of Light which is Christmas. Tricia and I hope that this season of Advent may renew the Love of God and the joy of the Christ Child in your homes and the church. Please read anew the message of the prophet and may the light of the Christ Child shine in your homes and the church. Amen.

John Webb

December 12, 2019

**The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 8:22–25
(NRSV)**

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies For by hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if

we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

As I write this, we've just finished up our stewardship series, *Treasure*, and this passage from Romans dovetails nicely with one of the central verses from that series:

Matthew 6:19–21 (LITV)	Romans 8:24–25 (LITV)
	for we were saved by hope,
Do not treasure up for you treasures on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves dig through and steal.	hope being seen is not hope; for what anyone sees, why does he also hope?
But treasure up for you treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves do not dig through and steal.	But if we hope for what we do not see, by patient endurance we eagerly await <i>it</i> .
For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.	

It's two nice reminders in this lead-up to Christmas of where we are better served to focus our attentions: in all the shopping and baking and wish-list making, our earthly treasures—the stuff we can see—isn't what it's all about. I'm not sure I can sum it up any better than Paul: "not only creation groans. We, who have the Spirit as the first of God's gifts, also groan inwardly. We groan as we eagerly wait for our adoption, the freeing of our bodies from sin." Romans 8:23 (GWT)

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us, in this time of chaos, turn to you for our comfort now, as you would have us do in the future. Save us from the struggles of the season as you have saved us from our sin. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Dave Robbin

December 13, 2019

Hebrews 1: 1-4 “.....*God spoke.....*”

When our son was very little, we had invited a friend over for dinner. She was a special friend of the family, and our son had much to say to her. He delighted in having her attention, and she enjoyed listening to him. Both of them reveled in the heartfelt connection, clearly cherishing the moment.

In this Bible passage, the author states that in the past, God spoke to the people through the prophets, and “in these last days” through Jesus. Now we are millennia later, and I wonder how the author would respond if someone were to ask them how God speaks to us in Augusta, right now, in 2019. For myself, I have heard God speak to me through various avenues such as music, meditation, and other people to name a few. God also employs a more direct way to speak to me – from deep within my heart. However, if there is something else occupying my heart, it draws my attention away from God, making it difficult for God to “engage in conversation”. A joy for all of us is that God cherishes having our attention, and relentlessly pursues it.

At times in my life, I have allowed fear to set up camp in my heart and compete with God for space. When I have allowed fear to be the Master of my heart, my actions and words have been less than kind, and the way forward was unclear. When I moved the fear aside (even just for a little while), I felt the loving presence of God move in, and how to proceed was made clear. My words and actions were free to feel and embody God’s loving way.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for all the ways you speak to me! Give me the courage to choose Love over Fear as the master of my heart.

Valerie Gallagher, Lay Leader

December 14, 2019

Galatians 4:4-7

4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. 6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our[a] hearts, crying, "Abba![b] Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.[c]

As I think about this passage the theme of an Advent Study I took part in a few years ago comes to mind." *Active Patience*" which seems a contradiction in terms perhaps but is appropriate for Advent, I think, as we prepare our "Spiritual homes" for the coming of Christ by taking on different Spiritual Disciplines such as: Scripture reading, prayer, fasting, volunteering our time and/or monetary resources to those in need.

Observed with an Advent focus of waiting on the coming of Christ - patiently - or in other words confident of the transforming life for which God sent Christ to us but also actively as we take part in these Spiritual practices in order to grow closer to God.

In God's timing the world in which we live and we ourselves were created for such a time as this to be not just people existing for ourselves but as God's children with the purpose of loving God and being an expression of God's Love for others in our families, friends, co-workers, whoever God places in our lives.

The writer of Galatians reminds us that we, as Believers in Jesus Christ as Savior, born to set us free from the darkness of sin in all its forms, have inherited God's Kingdom thru Faith that one day Christ will return to make all things new and bring us into that inheritance. Advent calls us to Active Patience as we look toward that day,

helping others to also realize God's love and God's Kingdom is for all who turn to God.

As the song goes:

In Your time, in Your time,
You make all thing beautiful in Your time.
Lord, my life to You I bring,
May each song I have to sing,
Be to You a lovely thing, in Your time.

Robin Forbes

December 15, 2019

Luke 1:26-38

She was much perplexed by his words and wondered what sort of greeting this might be. Luke 1:29

I imagine how confusing this announcement from an angel of the Lord God Almighty must have been to this young, teenage, virgin girl. Pregnant and not married. Being pregnant before marriage would bring shame on her and her entire family and her fiancé. How could she possibly explain and who would believe she was really still a virgin. All this because an angel suddenly appeared out of nowhere to deliver this shocking message. And makes it clear that this is God's will for her.

I would like to believe that I would immediately recognize and believe and willingly follow this path God has set out for me. But, as many of you know, God has to hit me upside the head before I listen. While I continue to work on my listening skills at 74, I am still a work in progress.

Adam Hamilton in his teaching series Not a Silent Night, wrote: "Life doesn't go according to our plans. Sometimes it's hard, painful and scary. Yet in the messiness of life, God is at work, bringing blessing out or pain." This is the

message and hope of Christmas. God is at work in each of us and we are never alone.

Prayer: Dear God, you know my heart. You know I often want to say yes to your plans and call...but am stopped by my fears, my earthly concerns, my doubts or my abilities, my not being sure it's really you speaking. Help me let go of those thoughts and things which stop me from hearing and following. Help me be as open and willing as Mary. Amen.

Kathleen Dunford

December 16, 2019

Luke 1:39-45

In those days Mary arose and went into haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, "blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

As we get closer to Christmas and anticipate the coming birth of Christ, I think most people look forward to the good news. It's almost like a new beginning. Although, often times Christmas season can be stressful and maybe a little depressing to some. It is also brings comfort, tradition, family, and community together. I think this time of year is when we really give back to our family and community the most. Whether that is to a church, your neighbor, food bank, and other organizations, I think this time of year is when do feel, think, and do the most giving out of the whole year.

Why do you think that is? Well there could be many reasons, but I think mostly it has to do a lot with tradition and the knowing that the birth of Christ is being anticipated. Now, we know it was kind of a big deal. I mean it was kind of big news back then, although they probably did not know that it is now celebrated everywhere in the world in many different ways. But I wonder what it would be like if we never heard of Jesus's birth? Would there be Christmas? I would probably guess not.

Mary going to see Elizabeth and Zechariah must have a big deal for them, though we do not know why in the verse, we can speculate that it must have been good news. I think Mary became a symbol of hope like Jesus and probably many saw her as a beacon of hope. This is why I think that Christmas is probably that only Holiday that we truly see to celebrate and anticipate until the actual day because of the hope, good news, family, and giving.

Prayer: "Lord, help us hear your good news through our actions and giving. Help those who are hopeless and in need find the beacon of hope that they truly need."

Amen!

Jessa Mitchell

December 17, 2019

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has

brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, even as he said to our fathers.”

Known as Mary’s Magnificat, this bible verse is also Mary’s song and an expression of gratitude towards God. This verse speaks of God lifting up and caring for the most needy as well as bringing down the most powerful. When I read this verse I also think about the ways in which I am “proud” and “rich” and also “humble” and “hungry.” Are there ways we are all “proud and rich” and are there also ways we are “humble and hungry”?

Prayer: As we search for the right path to follow for ourselves and our families please God help us to make choices that bring us to a path that “feeds” us when we are hungry, and “humbles” us when needed. And let us sing our songs of gratitude to God always.

Judy Adams

December 18

Isaiah 12:2-6

Isaiah 12:3 - "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation."

I have been baptized three times, by three different clergymen. Although I don't have memories of my infant baptism as a Catholic, the two ceremonies during my adulthood were joyous and meaningful. Both times, I had gone through periods of spiritual study and renewal. It seemed appropriate to re-dedicate myself to the Lord. It gave me and my family joy to thank God on those occasions, and to sing His praise.

Psalm 51:12-13 says, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.”

I ask God daily to give me boldness to declare my faith and trust in Him, especially to non-believers. I cry when I imagine my unsaved loved ones, and their futures separated from God.

Prayer: May all of God's creations sing His praise and exalt His name. Let us be bold to proclaim our trust in God. Without Him, we will be weak and afraid. With Him, we are given the gift of eternal salvation. Lord, help me to share Your truth with everyone, that You sent Your Son to die for all of our sins. May we celebrate this season of His birth with joy and thanksgiving! Amen

Marianne Tibbetts

December 19, 2019

Philippians 4:4-7 JBPhillips N.T. (1960)

“Good Gifts”

Good gifts vary, but it is the same God who gives. If we make it our aim to be one in the Spirit we will inevitably be at peace with one another. We all belong to one Body of which there is one Spirit just as we all experienced one calling to one Hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Father of us all, who is the one over all the one working through all and the one living in all. Naturally there are different gifts and functions, individual grace is given to us in different ways out of the rich diversity of Christ's giving.

As a S.O.W.E.R. (Servant on wheels ever ready) we had a group leader for every project who we looked to for direction for projects our hosts needed completed. We started our work day with 30 minutes of devotions and prayer. As SOWERS we agreed to disagree and did not discuss doctrine, we concentrated on God's word and listening for the Holy Spirit's direction.

We were able to work as one unit even if we had never met our fellow SOWERS. The results were amazing as God gave each person the gifts and direction for whatever was needed. We made many new friends along the way.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your gifts to each one of us and your availability through Jesus and the Holy Spirit to us so that we might use these gifts for your glory.

Patty Rogers

December 20, 2019

Matthew 2:1-12

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him.”

The wise men were astrologers. They traveled from afar following a star they recognized to be of Great importance. They knew that if they followed it they would find the new born king of the Jews. They came searching for the one who was promised to the Hebrew people long ago. They first stopped in Jerusalem at the palace of the present king. Herod knew nothing of this new king. Frightened, King Herod consulted his prophets and scribes who informed him that if a new king was to be born, it would be in Bethlehem. King Herod told the wise men to follow the star to Bethlehem and to bring back the news of what they had found. They continued to follow the star and stopped at the place where the baby Jesus and his mother Mary were

housed. On bended knees they worshipped and offered gifts to the new baby. In a dream God warned the wise men of Herod's plan to kill the baby. Satisfied with what they had found they headed home taking another route as God had told them to.

This story is one that we are all familiar with, however, it leaves me with lots of questions. Who were these wise men? I assume they were astrologers and men of great knowledge who had traveled from afar. They were probably not Jewish though. Why had they been so interested in finding the new king of the Jews? They observed that a new star that had been placed in the heavens and that it might be of divine importance. How did they know that by following the star it would lead them to the new born King of the Jews? Why had God revealed his divine plan to these men outside the Jewish faith?

This story is a reminder to me that I am not Jewish either and God has led me to follow Jesus. He is the star that God led me to follow. He changed my life and caused me to change my path in life. He adopted me into the family of faith. It is clear that God was the one who also led the wise men to find, worship and honor the new born king and his mother. They found what they had been searching for. They were satisfied and were changed by the new born king. They changed plans and took another path home away from the ways of the present King.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for the world you created and for your divine plan for our lives. Like the star that the wise men followed, help us to keep our eyes on Jesus so that we may be led to a closer relationship with you this advent season.

Sarah Barnum

December 21, 2019

Matthew 1:18-25

As a child I remember sitting around the living room with my grandmother and granddad as my grandmother read the words from Matthew 1:18-25. When my grandmother finished reading she would ask, "What does this scripture mean to you?" I would always reply with, "This scripture reveals for me that there is more to Christmas than mere presents." So as we hear the words from Matthew this advent season may we take a moment to reflect on what the Birth of Christ and the Christmas season truly mean to us in the midst of the chaos that is our daily lives. May the love of Christ and the true meaning of advent be with you and yours on this day and every day.

Chris Thornton

December 22, 2019

John 1:1-5; 9-14

"vs.1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. v.4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. v.8 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. v.14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

As I write these words, it is a beautiful November day. The sun is shining and it's cloudless here. With the light, I can see the forms, movement, and colors of the world around me. God has surrounded me with beauty to see... illuminated by the sun.

As I mull over this John passage, the drama of light is viewed somewhat differently. God, in wisdom, provides us with the light of the Christ for spiritual illumination. Christ, the Word of God, is the light of the world giving wonderful hope to us in the darkness of a sinful and hurting world.

The light of Christ allows me to see beyond that which is dark.

What darkness threatens you? Is there grief burdening you? Do you fight addiction? Are you lonely? Are you aging and losing the strength you always had? Are you worried about the environment? Are people disappointing you? Are you in debt? Are you worried about your church and its future? Are you suffering with illness?

We can celebrate in the darkness because we have light! Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:6). We who “receive Christ, who believe in him, have been given the right to become children of God.” Believing involves a deliberate personal decision and commitment. God’s grace/ God/s gift of Christ is for all! When we accept him and accept his love, he is our light. The light you have been given...Christ’s light... shines, too, in this dark world. So shine!!

How grateful I am that God provides the church to uphold us and support us. The light I have from Christ joins with the light you have from Christ. Together we can be illuminated with Christ’s light and stand in the darkness.

This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine.
This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine.
This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine.
Let it shine. Let it shine. Let it shine.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank- you for the ultimate gift of the Christ who became flesh and dwelt among us. Thank you for the light that shines in darkness. Fill me with your light. May your light shine through me in this dark world.

Tricia Webb

December 23, 2019

Luke 2:1-7

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her first born, a son. She wrapped him in clothes and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available to them.

According to scripture, Joseph (as required by decree) took Mary (who was nine months pregnant and due to deliver at any time) on this 80-90 mile journey. Even if they had a donkey, this was a 9-10 days of hard travel. And when they finally get to Bethlehem, they can't find a decent place to stop, rest and stay. They ended up in what was a first century animal parking garage. People who were traveling would leave their donkeys and sheep in this space while they went to human quarters.

Of course, this is when and where Jesus is born. Here's Mary giving birth to her first born, among animals in a place she probably would not have chosen for herself. I can't imagine how tired, frightened, and painful this whole experience must have been to a 13/14 year old girl. As Adam Hamilton said in the teaching series Not a Silent Night, the night Jesus was born was not a silent night. The picture we have of a blissful, peaceful Mary, cattle gently lowing, a nice clean barn with a clean manger is probably grossly inaccurate. Mary was exhausted from the trip and went through human labor to give birth.

Why would God plan it this way? Hamilton suggests that if all were still, calm, and bright in the world, we wouldn't need Christmas. Jesus came because the world was broken. Jesus was and is God's promise to us that even in the midst of animal dung, smells and noises, even in the midst of no room at the inn, even in the midst of the pains of life, God has and is still at work in our world and our lives.

God wanted and wants us to know that we are loved by the creator of the universe who knows each of us by name.

God is at work in our lives even when we have fears and doubts. The name Jesus means God saves. Such a great gift from our loving and personal God.

Prayer: Holy Giver of life, you know who I am and you know what I need. You never promised that my world would be smooth and peaceful. You never promised that life would be easy. What you promised me is that you will walk with me through the trials I face, that you will never leave me and that in you through Christ, I will have eternal life with you. Thanks be to God who created me, saves me, and sustains me, guiding my steps everyday through every pain and fear. Amen

Kathleen Dunford

December 24

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.”
(Luke 2:10-12)

At this time of year, signs in store windows, ads and catalogues all proclaim good news: if you shop here, you will find a unique treasure, a bargain, the perfect Christmas gift. This can so quickly become our purpose: finding special presents and seeking out sales.

In Luke 2, however, the angels proclaim a different good news: you will find the Messiah. He is a unique treasure, destined for resurrection and bringing our salvation. Never has there been and never will there be one like Jesus. He is better than any bargain, for the grace and hope that he offers are free. He is the perfect gift: God's love, alive in human form. What gift could compare with our Creator's love? May our purpose this Christmas be to seek and find Jesus, God's gift of love and hope.

Prayer: Holy God, you give the best gifts. Thank you for Jesus. I promise to seek Jesus above all else; to look for him every day and not just at Christmas. Help me open my life to him. Forgive me for seeking other things before Jesus. Keep me from being led astray by the dazzle and desires of this world. Help me to patiently guide others to the path of seeking Christ. For your kingdom, your power and your glory are found eternally in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Rev. Kristin L. White

December 25, 2019

Matthew 2 - “Go and Search”

Not long after the star stopped over Bethlehem, the wise ones heard,

Go and search diligently for the child.

It ought to be good news.

Go find the kids and wake them up, its Christmas morning!

Our best selves assume that the search for the child has their welfare in mind.

But we’ve seen so many counter examples just in the past year, let alone in human history.

Even as October headlines proclaimed the death of the Islamic State’s most recent leader, the fine print reminded us of several small children found with him, killed by his suicide vest.

Go and search diligently for the child.....

We saw US border patrols both aid children crossing a wilderness and confine them.

Go and search diligently for the child.....

We’ve seen churches learning to lock doors during worship to protect children, young and old, from random acts of violence.

Go and search diligently for the child.

What is the gift of this day?

In Matthew's account of Jesus' birth, the good news is not the star. It's not the treasure. It's not even the angelic announcement. All of those beloved parts of our Christmas story are signs pointing toward the real good news: a husband who does not punish a surprisingly pregnant young wife, word traveling that God is doing something new in the world, dignitaries who hold their tongues rather than risk the lives of a vulnerable infant, an escape from danger.

The good news is God's entrance into this world under daunting circumstances. It is Love embodied, tears shed, hopes cradled and carried. May your heart be open to that love on this Christmas morning.

Rev. Dr. Karen L. Munson
NEAC District Superintendent, Mid-Maine & Tri-State

