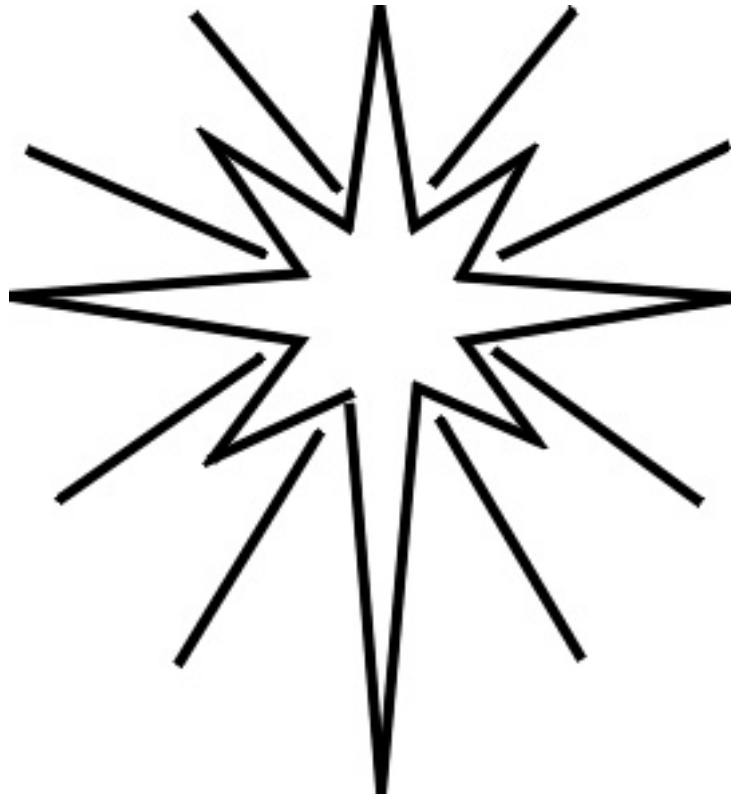


# Advent Devotional



St. Andrews Presbyterian Church  
2017

Dear Reader,

Welcome, to this advent devotional filled with words, thoughts, hopes and prayers from 43 different voices out of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church. It is our hope that the scriptures given and the reflections offered, allow you to draw nearer to Christ, as we prepare to remember the day when God first came down to be near to us.

Thank you to Rick Borger and Rob Cochran for taking on this project and bringing it together, in such good time. Thank you to all who offered a reflection and shared a piece of your heart and your faith. It is truly a wonderful gift that you have given.

May all that is shared here, be a gift that continues to give and continues to lead us all toward the Christ child.

*O come, O come Emmanuel. O God be with us in this year and every year. Amen.*

In the hope and peace of Jesus Christ,

*Pastor Robín*

Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, can be a very hurried and yet wonder-filled time as we make plans to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Whether your days are rushed with planning, baking, shopping or perhaps a cloud of loss and sadness has overshadowed all sense of joy, we invite you to pause each day and open this devotional. Be drawn into the Word, the scriptures chosen for each day in Advent. Open your heart to the words of devotion, carefully chosen by members of this congregation, and shared with you. Lean on the words of prayer that end each day. Feel strengthened and loved as we wait, prepare our hearts, and make room for the Christ Child each day in this season.

**THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE**



Submitted by Panka Peelen

Sunday November 26th  
Isaiah 2:1-5  
Romans 13:11-14

*Come let us go up the mountain of the LORD, to the house of Jacob; That He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths... Come let us walk in the light of LORD!*  
Isaiah 2:3,5

*“Now is the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believer; The night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay down the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”*  
Romans 13:11-12

How much time I spend every day walking in my own way! I forget that our purpose and our joy is to live for Jesus, to seek His way, to follow His path, to glorify Him in all things and not seek glory for myself. I forget that this is Life. I forget that this is the Life I truly desire. I forget that only His Life is the source of all hope, all joy, and all peace. When I read these verses I realize that mostly I am sleepwalking in the dark instead of walking in the light of the Lord.

So as we enter Advent, a season of longing expectation and preparation for welcoming the Savior, how can we learn to lay down the works of darkness and put on the armor of light? How can we learn to walk in His path? How can we have a quiet center in the midst of this busy and dark culture? Advent is not a time of celebration. Advent is a time of doing the hard work in preparation for the celebration. Are we ready for this?

During Advent I'm going to go up to the mountain of the Lord and ask Him to teach me His ways that I may walk in His path. I'm going to beseech the Lord by praying, "Teach me your way that I may walk in your path". Whenever I find myself walking in the dark, I will pray this scripture. Whenever it's not clear what to do, I will pray "Teach me your way that I may walk in your path" I will just pray "Teach me Your way that I may walk in Your path." All the time. Would you like to join me in this? Let us walk in His path together.

Prayer:

*Lord Teach me your ways that I may walk in your path. Wake me from sleep. Help me to walk in the light of the Lord. Strengthen me to lay down the works of darkness and put on the armor of light this day and forevermore. Amen.*

Submitted by Gayle Reilly

Monday November 27th  
Isaiah 1:10-20

*“Stop doing wrong, learn to do right. Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, Plead the case of the widow.”*  
Isaiah 1:16-17

This scripture details the sin and trampling of God's court in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Pretty nasty! Imagine God's horror as he watched his people turn from his word to the point that he says,

"Stop doing wrong, learn to do right."

Wow! Get your act together. It is only in learning to help the poor, encouraging others, and protecting children, that we can understand the love of God. In other words, be good, spread kindness and generosity to others. Take your love of Christ, and pour it out for others to see. If you are willing and obedient in following Christ's pathway, one day, you will walk in the light of the Lord.

Prayer

*Dear Father,  
Help us to help each other. May we help the needy, feed and care for children, and spread kindness and a generous spirit to all who may need it. Amen.*

Submitted by Lisa Meyer

Tuesday November 28th  
1 Thessalonians 2: 1-12

*“For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”*

1 Thessalonians 2: 11-12

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes about the purpose of his visit: to share the gospel, even in the midst of great opposition. He explains that they weren't doing so for personal profit, deception, or to impress others. He explains how they came with a God's message of love, with passion to share the good news with all.

As apostles, he compares them with a loving mother and an ever-encouraging father, determined to preach the message so it's heard and guiding the population to live their lives to God's glory. Paul impresses upon them that they are there out of love, to move them forward, truly and continually towards lives worthy of God.

Today, our church leaders provide this continual encouragement to live better lives as true Christians. From Sunday morning sermons and regular bible studies to congregation-generated Advent messages and outreaching mission work, the message is a loving pressure to rise up and “live lives worthy of God.”

Prayer:

*May we receive a loving push this day and always make a more conscious effort to be the people Jesus has called and leads us to be. Amen.*

Submitted by Betsy Sensenig

Wednesday November 29th  
Isaiah 2:1-4

*“The Future House of God*

*1 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.*

*2 In days to come*

*the mountain of the Lord’s house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
all the nations shall stream to it.*

*3 Many peoples shall come and say,  
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.”*

*For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.*

*4 He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.”*

Isaiah 2:1-4

Some believe that the Upper Room where Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples was situated on top of Mt Zion, just outside the walls of Jerusalem. The old city of Jerusalem is quite small, one third of a square mile in total. And Mount Zion is little more than a hill. Isaiah 2 paints a very different picture. The passage tell us “In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as on the highest of the mountains.” So when Jesus comes again, will we be celebrating communion where he did before but at 29,000 feet? Christmas can be a hectic time. We have so much to do, and so little time to do it. Sometimes it feels as if we are climbing up an immense mountain. But we know that it is worth it. Celebrating with family and friends is worth it. Contributing to the betterment of others is worth it, being taught about God’s ways and God’s paths are worth it. Celebrating that little baby in the manger, the fact that Immanuel, God is with us is worth it.

*Prayer: Let us pray ... Lord, the celebration of communion helps us to realize that true knowledge, true wisdom, true instruction comes by being in communion with You. Lord help us to know that it is only by allowing You to be in control of our lives that heaven is recognized on earth. It is only by allowing You to help us daily that the mountains are raised up and the rough places are made a plain. In our families, in our church, in our community and in our nation, help us to beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks by acknowledging Your sacrifice and by recognizing and commemorating the baby in the manger. Amen.*

Submitted by Troy Morgan



Thursday Nov 30th  
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

*“Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.”*

Psalm 80, verse 19

I don't like to be lost. It is a strange thing to be lost – disconnected, disoriented, and uncertain. We can be lost in physical space or in emotional turmoil.

Psalm 80 speaks of the Israelites struggling with being lost and wandering in the wilderness. But it's more than a lack of directions. There's sorrow from being disconnected from God's will and purpose. This separation from God seems to be a greater loss than the empty desert around them.

Yet, there is hope! God loves us. In times when we feel lost, we have the comfort of God's powerful, restorative love for us. May we be reminded that God is ready to restore us always.

Prayer:

*When we are lost, restore us, O Lord.*

*When disaster strikes, restore us, O Lord.*

*When sadness overwhelms, restore us, O Lord.*

*When we have wandered from you, restore us, O Lord.*

*Praise to the Lord, our light and our guide.*

*Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

Submitted by Bill Mulligan

Friday December 1st  
Psalm 80:1-7; 17-19

Psalm 80 is about a group of broken people calling out to God, that he would restore them. In the midst of their hardships, they know God is there, and it is through Him that they might be restored.

Our world is deeply hurting. People are dying, friendships are ending, families are broken, people are broken – we are broken. Every time an act of violence happens, it leaves me uttering the words, “restore us”, “mend us”, “help us”, and “heal us”.

This Christmas season, let’s ask God to restore us. We need to shine God’s light through our actions and our words. Ask God to use you this Christmas to bring someone else joy. Spread the love of Jesus, to everyone we encounter this season.

Prayer:

*Lord in the midst of this worlds chaos be with us! Allow us to share the love and joy of this season. Allow us to look to the coming of your son for our peace. Amen.*

Submitted by Melynda Cochran

Saturday December 2nd  
Micah 2: 1-13

*“A Promise for the Remnant of Israel  
12 I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob,  
I will gather the survivors of Israel;  
I will set them together  
like sheep in a fold,  
like a flock in its pasture;  
it will resound with people.  
The one who breaks out will go up before them;  
they will break through and pass the gate,  
going out by it.  
Their king will pass on before them,  
the Lord at their head.”  
Micah 2: 12-13*

A weathered remnant of tartan discovered beneath centuries of fallen forest leaves. Perhaps, ripped stalking a stag or torn in a clan conflict. Maybe it was intentionally hidden when any display of tartans was banned.

Quilts of square primary colors on a black background flap in the breeze on a clothes line. The visual “Song of a People”; the Amish.

“Granny Square” afghans born of necessity to use leftover bits of yarn. The tattered tartan; a remnant of cloth once whole. The quilt and afghan; remnants stitched or knit and become whole again.

Micah 2: verse 12-13 is titled “A Promise for the Remnant of Israel.” This remnant describes a people left over from exile, famine, slavery and persecution. A ragged band faithful to God’s promises and waiting for the fulfillment of those promises.

We are present day remnants of God’s New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Alone we are tattered rags and loose strings with no hope. Stitched, knit, or woven together by the body and blood of Christ is the firm foundation of the Church and its community of believers.

Prayer:

*Dear Lord, Your ancient remnant remained faithful toward your promises. Help us, who live in the fulfillment of Jesus’s birth, life, sacrifice, and resurrection, stay true to their faithfulness and perseverance. In Christ’s name. Amen*

Submitted by Rosemary Birt

Sunday December 3rd  
Mark 13: 24-37

Mark 13:32 (NIV) “*But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*”

*Are you ready for ....?*

How many times during the month of December are we asked, “so, are you ready for Christmas?” Often during Advent, we focus on the coming of the Christ Child and the Miracle of Christmas. And yet, we ought to look beyond that to Jesus’ return. This very important fact is frequently overlooked in our everyday lives and at times, in the teachings of the church itself. And yet, Jesus himself spoke of this many times. In today’s reading from the Gospel of Mark, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man and indicates how he will return (v. 26), but not when (v. 32). And He clearly cautions us to be ready at all times (v. 33).

For centuries, scholars of the Word and others in various times and places have tried to predict with pinpoint accuracy the date and time of Jesus’ return. Some have died as a result of their belief in such predictions. But how foolish this is; Jesus said that not even He knows the time or date.

So we are called to always be ready; ready for His glorious appearing but also ready to give an accounting of what we have done with what talents and resources we have been given. We are told to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8 NIV). Are we doing this? Are we ready? Are you ready... not for Christmas, but for Jesus return? He is coming soon... “Come Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22.20 NIV).

Prayer:

*Lord as we reflect on the reason for this season, help us remember your promised return. May we live to please you and always be ready for your coming.*

Submitted by Karen Dielmann

Monday December 4th  
Micah 4:1-5

*“4 But every man will sit under his own vines  
and under his own fig tree,  
and no one will make him afraid,  
for the Lord Almighty has spoken.”*  
Micah 4:4 (NIV)

The full passage begins with the phrase “In the last days” which suggests a period when God will reign over his perfect kingdom. Today with massive numbers of people moving to a safer place or seeking a better life, this perfect kingdom seems hard to imagine.

For Micah, this best life is sitting in your own space, outside, under your own tree or vine unafraid of threats from your enemies.

What would this peaceful existence look like for us? An early morning walk, enjoying the birds’ songs and the sparkling sun-filled sky? The joy of family and friends around? A caring God to walk with us always? Then, imagine this peaceful scene all over the earth.

Prayer:

*Holy Lord, grant us such global security. Until then, Let us care for one another until Your peaceful world becomes a reality. Amen.*

Submitted by Judy Borger

Tuesday December 5th  
Psalm 79  
Micah 4: 6-13  
Revelation 18: 1-10

The common thread running through today's passages is that of oppression and calls to the Lord for deliverance. Throughout the Old and New Testaments - and even into Revelation - we find stories of Israelites and Christians suffering persecution and crying to God for help. How can we reconcile these emotions with the merriment of the Christmas season – the exchanging of gifts and celebrations of the birth of Christ? One connection to keep in mind is that Christ was sent to redeem his people. Through the joy of the Christmas season, it is easy to forget that Jesus was sent to address the shortcomings of humankind – our sinfulness. Jesus delivers the ultimate redemption.

Prayer:

*Lord, you have delivered your people in the past. Lord, we seek deliverance today. Lord, we trust that you will deliver us in the future.*

Submitted by Peelen Family

Wednesday December 6th  
Micah 5:1-5

*“4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,  
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth;”*

Micah 5:4

This verse suggests to me that Jesus is supplying all needs and wants to the people of Earth. Good and bad is offered, but he tries to keep the bad away from his people. He also supplies confidence and assures them of peace and prosperity till the end of time.

Prayer:

*Dear Lord, please keep everybody safe during holiday travel and make sure we all enjoy the time we get with our families and friends. Please keep everybody warm if needed, and let the food nourish our minds and souls. Amen.*

Submitted by Joshua Sauerwein

Thursday December 7th  
1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

*"...so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,"* 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7

Everywhere we go we are an example to the people around us. Whether we realize it or not, people are always watching us. Even when we think no one sees us, our children see everything. People on the street, our fellow drivers on our commute to work and even people online see how we react to situations as they occur. What kind of example are we?

In the reading today, Paul commended the people for following the example of Paul, Silas and Timothy. The people had learned from observing them how to be witnesses for Jesus. We are to follow Jesus' example of how to live. It has been said that we, as Christians, may be the only bible some people will ever read. Let us try to follow the example of Jesus as we go about our daily lives.

Prayer:

*Dear Heavenly Father, please help me to remember that I am an example to the world around me and I am being observed even when I don't think anyone is around. Help me to present a Godly example to those I encounter today. Amen.*

Submitted by Ken Gries



Friday December 8th  
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

*“Love and faithfulness meet together;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.  
Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,  
and righteousness looks down from heaven.”*

Psalm 85: 1-2 (TNIV):

Ours is hardly a serene and perfect world. A brief time spent watching the Weather Channel, reading the headlines of a major newspaper or listening to the local news of the day on radio quickly reveals the violence and the destructiveness that attend our every moment. Earthquake, blizzard and hurricane; political threat and international confrontation; civil unrest and public distrust at home or abroad command our attention nearly every day. And so it has been throughout human history almost from the beginning.

Yet humankind has always dreamed of living in a perfect world. We recall Eden before the Fall; the psalmist sings a beautiful love song to the ideal world; the prophets speak of what is to come when we heed the word of God; Jesus comes among us to proclaim salvation for those who follow him, and he is raised from the dead to assure the faithful of eternal life.

During this season of Advent we prepare once again for the promised coming of Christ, singing “Come, thou long-expected Jesus...” and sharing with each other “the Peace of Christ, which passes all understanding.” May we continue so to sing and so to share in all the seasons of the year and in all the seasons of our lives, and may our words and actions embody the song of the psalmist and the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

*Heavenly Father, cleanse us of our ugliness, rid us of our inhumanity, bring us humbly into the Kingdom which you have prepared and over which your Son reigns now and forever.*  
Amen.

Submitted by Rick Borger

Saturday December 9th  
Mark 11:27-33

Mark 11:29-30 “29 *Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 30 Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me.”*

Earlier in Chapter 11 of Mark, Jesus had cleansed the temple, overturning the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. Jesus spoke clearly saying, “Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?” The Pharisees heard this and knew of the other things that Jesus had done. But, already knowing the answer, they ask him, “Who gave you this authority to do these things?” They wanted Jesus to say out loud that He was the Son of God.

But Jesus wanted them to say it out loud. Jesus’ question to Jewish Leaders puts them in a difficult position. The Pharisees were not able to answer the question that Jesus asked without causing harm to themselves. Their lie, “We do not know”, demonstrates their willingness to turn on the scriptures that they were supposed to be carrying out.

Have we ever turned on what we know as true and right in order to keep the crowd from turning on us? Have we ever played innocent for our own gain? As we continue through Advent let us remember to keep true to God’s word.

Prayer:

*Dear Heavenly Father, may we always be willing to declare your presence in our lives. Prepare our hearts for the coming of your son, Jesus. Amen*

Submitted by Robin Gries

Sunday December 10th  
Luke 21:25-33

A prayer by William Barclay / Westminster John Knox Press

“O God, this day we thank you for your Book.

For those who wrote it, for those who lived so close to you, so that you could speak to them and so give them a message for their day and for ours;

We thank you, O God.

For those who translated it into our own languages, often at the cost of blood and sweat and agony and death, so that your word can speak to us in the tongue we know;

We thank you, O God.

For scholars who devoted and consecrated study and toil has opened the meaning of your Book to others;

We thank you, O God.

For those who print it and publish it, and for the great Bible Societies whose work makes it possible for the poorest of people all over the world to possess your word;

We thank you, O God.

For its thrilling stories of high and gallant adventure;

For its poetry which lingers forever in the memory of men and women;

For its teaching about how to live and how to act and how to speak;

For its record of human thoughts about you and about our blessed Lord;

For its comfort in sorrow, for its guidance in perplexity, for its hope in despair;

Above all else, for its picture of Jesus;

We thank you, O God.

Make us at all times

Constant in reading it;

Glad to listen to it;

Eager to study it;

Retentive to remember it;

Resolute to obey it.

And so grant that in searching the Scriptures we may find life for ourselves and for others; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.”

Submitted by Carol Schiller

Monday December 11th  
Psalm 27

As a child, “Advent” to me was a calendar with a chocolate treat behind a door opened each day to December 25th and the curiosity of what gift may be under the tree selected from one of the toy pages from the *Sears & Roebuck* catalog that I had thoughtfully dog eared as suggestions for my parents. Fast forward from childhood to an adult. Life’s experiences, joys, challenges, successes and hardships bring the anticipation of “Advent gifts” to a new definition that has little to do with chocolates or a catalog.

In the readings for today, David had life experiences of joy, challenge, success, hardship and was seeking a gift from God.

*“I’m asking God for one thing, only one thing:  
To live with him in his house my whole life long.  
I’ll contemplate his beauty; I’ll study at his feet.  
That’s the only quiet, secure place in a noisy world,  
The perfect getaway, far from the buzz of traffic.”*  
Psalm 27: 4-5 (The Message)

This passage is so relevant for this Advent season. David stated that life was busy and noisy. In today’s society, the Christmas season is absolutely no exception! David knew that that with God, he could find quiet, peace and eternal life. With 2 weeks until Christmas, use David’s song to rest in the presence of the Holy Spirit, seek the quiet and peace God offers to us and give thanks for the reason we anticipate the “Advent gift” of the birth of a baby, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer:  
*Heavenly Father, come to me in this noisy world and bring me your peace, let me see your beauty through all the lights and glitter and help me be ever mindful of the gift given to us in the birth and death of Jesus. Amen*

Submitted by Kim Risko

Tuesday December 12th  
Acts 11:1-18

“ . . . *who was I that I should withstand God?*” Acts 11:17

Sometimes Christians are like little babies swaddled in warm blankets, warm and cozy in their *religion*. Our *religion* IS important. We take great pride in the journey of our forefathers, and the doctrines handed down through the ages. They are scriptural and true. But as we once again come to the manger to welcome the Christ child, may we also welcome the message he brings with new enlightenment, with a broader vision. *Religion* in form and practice is man-made, Christianity is a relationship with Jesus Christ!

The message Christ brings is for everyone – Jew or gentile! May we step out of our comfort zone equipped with the Holy Spirit - for we are to be his hands and feet in a hurting world. WAIT – WATCH – LISTEN! The vision will come! You may be led to unexpected places and to walk with the most surprising people, but don't let differences cause you to miss the joy of sharing God's love. You don't need eloquent words or to be a biblical scholar. St. Francis said, “Preach the gospel everywhere you go. Use words when you have to.” And in *those times*, the Spirit will lead us. Again, WAIT – WATCH – LISTEN. Who are we that we should withstand God's calling. We will be called if we are truly listening, just as Peter was, at just the right time, to just the right person who God has been preparing for our arrival!

Prayer:

*Lord, may we be open to your calling – that as your hands and feet, we may bring the good news that “God has granted repentance unto life!” Amen*

Submitted by Karen Regester

Tuesday December 13th  
Psalm 27

Faith gives you confidence to “Ask on behalf of others”  
Faith gives you trust that “God is with you always”

Triumphant Song of Confidence of David:

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.  
Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; Wait for the LORD!  
Psalm 27 (v 13, 14)*

When our grandsons were young, a highlight of the Christmas season was a journey to the farm - complete with hayride, carol-sing, and hot chocolate. The conclusion, of course, was a visit to Santa in the barn!!!

The most heartwarming and memorable Santa-visit occurred when Davis was 5 and Jason was 7. Davis, still Santa-shy, needed big brother Jason’s courage to visit with Santa. Confidently, Jason, listed every one of Davis’ wishes. When Santa asked Jason for his list – he responded “whatever you think is best” -- paraphrasing a favorite song!!

What goodness!! What courage!! What a joyful Christmas!!

Prayer:

*Lord – May we always see your goodness in the land of the living so that we may ‘step-out in confidence’ with courage to support and care for ALL our Brothers and Sisters in need. Amen.*

Submitted by Lynn Phillips

Thursday December 14th  
Psalm 126

*"1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.  
2 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."  
3 The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.  
4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.  
5 May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.  
6 Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves."  
Psalm 126 (NRSV)*

I remember as a kid the anticipation that would come with the Christmas season. Christmas day was the highlight of the anticipation, but there was also the chance of snow, Christmas music, days off from school, and evening drives through the neighbor looking at Christmas lights. These things made for a magical time as a child and further built on the anticipation of Christmas Day! As I grew up though these traditions changed and faded with time. Traditions that I cherished fell to the wayside and Christmas itself changed. The season never lost the Hope of Christ, it just became different.

In 2011 I had my first Christmas as a father and in this I noticed a change in me. The traditions that I had enjoyed as a child, the ones that had faded to time became important again. As Ray grew and Adelyn later came into our lives, traditions from both my childhood and Mel's childhood became important and found new life in our family. In Psalm 126:1 (NRSV) the psalmist wrote *"1When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream."* Take a moment to consider what God is doing in your lives and see what parts of your life he would like to restore this season, and then take a further moment and dare to dream!

Prayer:

*Lord, in this season allow us to see new your movements of restoration in our lives. Gives us the boldness to dream of your kingdom and how we can work to glorify your kingdom! To you Lord is all the praise honor and glory forever and ever, Amen!*

Submitted by Rob Cochran

Friday December 15th  
Philippians 3:12-16

These words were written by Paul while he was in prison and has just indicated his joy with his life in Christ despite his circumstances.

*“I don’t mean to say I am perfect. I haven’t learned all I should even yet, but I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear brothers, I am still not all I should be but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing. Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead. I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us. I hope all of you who are mature Christians will see eye-to-eye with me on these things, and if you disagree on some point, I believe that God will make it plain to you— if you fully obey the truth you have.”*

Philippians 3: 12-16 (The Living Bible Version)

Humility, direction, dedication and growth.

We regularly confess our shortcomings and it is humbling to think that Paul still felt he came up short of meeting his Christian potential. But dwelling on the past does not let us grow and each day presents new opportunities. We are blessed to live in the love and grace of Christ that allows us to look forward to an eternity as part of that love. As we are in our time of preparation for the celebration of God’s gift to us we should remember Paul’s ambition to “be all that Christ saved me for and wants me to be”.

The words of “Joy to the World” keep coming to mind. This hymn was written by Isaac Watts who was the son of a minister and later a minister himself. He authored many hymns after he complained to his father that he disliked the worship songs they had previously been singing and was challenged to improve upon them. What a great example of moving forward inspired by Christian love that has benefitted countless others! What blessings does Christ have planned for our future? How can we touch others with his love?

Prayer:

*Dear Lord, I know that I have not reached my full potential yet. Thank you for being patient with me. May my heart in this season and always receive you with joy and “prepare room for you”. Help me to grow in your love and achieve the purposes you have in mind for me to share your love with others.*

Submitted by Penny Samuelson



Saturday December 16th  
Habakkuk 3:13-19

*“yet I will rejoice in the Lord;  
I will exult in the God of my salvation.”*  
Habakkuk 3:18 (NRSV)

A prayer or song from the prophet Habakkuk

As I read through chapter three of the prophet Habakkuk, I could feel the angst and frustration of a man who saw a world around him that had a strong presence of God. There were troubles, wars, natural disasters and many happenings that caused the prophet to note the undeniable judgment and yet awesome mercy of an all-powerful God.

The scripture ends in a way that despite all the misery, the tone is hopeful and filled with promise and faith. The prophet states that through all his troubles, “I will rejoice in the Lord, I will exult in the God of my salvation.” He looks at his life and makes the choice to trust in God and all that He provides. His faith is not shaken.

This particular scripture was inspiring and I could hear the hopeful lyrics of a familiar praise song “We Won’t be Shaken” play over again in my mind.

*“This world has nothing for me, This life is not my own  
I know you go before me, and I am not alone*

*Whatever will come our way, Through fire or pouring rain  
No we won’t be shaken.  
Whatever tomorrow brings, Together we’ll rise and sing  
That we won’t be shaken.*

*We will trust in you, we will not be moved.  
We will trust in you, and we won’t be shaken.”*

Prayer:

*Gracious God, in times of trouble, pain and great sorrow, may we trust in You to be guiding our lives with promise and hope. We praise you and thank you for this life and for the life of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen*

Lyrics by Building 429, a Christian recording group,  
whose name is derived from Ephesians 4:29\

Submitted by Perry Latshaw

Sunday December 17th  
Isaiah 61:1-4

*Isaiah 61:1-4...He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners,...to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those to grieve....to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair...*

As I read these words from Isaiah, my attention is drawn to the contrasts in them. In another text from today's lectionary, Psalm 126, we read these words, "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping..., will return with songs of joy." In worship we confess to not worshipping God's true self, but who we wish him to be. Instead of seeking to do what God blesses, we ask blessing on what we do. Contrasts can provide interest, such as a wall painted a different color than the other walls in a room. Contrasts, such as in political styles, can cause conflicts. Some contrasts just confuse us, such as weather that changes from hot to cold, sometimes overnight.

To me, the contrasts in today's readings bring a promise. This promise is in the coming of our Lord. Jesus quoted these words in Luke 4, "...*He has sent me ...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" We may not be prisoners, or mourning at the moment, but we have been brokenhearted, and we have wept, for ourselves, for and with others. These words remind us that God is forgiving and not only wishes favor for us, but promises it.

Prayer:

*Dear God, we thank you for your many promises of favor, promises of love, and especially, during this Advent season, your promise of hope. May we live to bring favor, love, and hope to this world. Amen.*

Submitted by Maggie Beatty

Monday December 18th  
1 Kings 18:1–18

We learn in the book of I Kings that Elijah was the first in a long line of important prophets that God sent to Israel and Judah. Israel, the northern kingdom had kings who were wicked, actually leading the people into worshipping pagan gods. Elijah confronted the king and told him of a power far greater than any pagan god-the Lord God of Israel.

Elijah's singled minded commitment to God shocks and challenges us. He was sent to confront, not comfort, and he spoke God's word to a king who often rejected his message. It is interesting to think about the amazing miracles God accomplished through Elijah, but we should focus on the relationship they shared. All that happened in Elijah's life began with the same miracle that is available to us- he responded to the miracle of being able to know God. Even today, God often speaks through the gentle and obvious rather than the spectacular. God has work for us to do even when we feel fear and failure. Although we might wish to do amazing things for God, we should instead focus on developing a relationship with Him. The real miracle of Elijah's life was his very personal relationship with God. That miracle is also available to us.

Prayer:

*Father help us to know you better. We know you speak to us frequently in persistent whispers rather than in shouts. Help us to respond to those whispers as we work to spread your word to the world around us. Amen.*

Submitted by Glenn and Mev Royer

Tuesday December 19th  
Acts 3:17-4:4

*“...so that your sins may be wiped out, 20 so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, 21 who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.”*

Acts 3:19b-21 (NRSV)

In this reading, we find many Jews waiting for God’s promise of a Messiah for many years. Waiting wasn’t easy for the Jews and it isn’t easy for us today.

“To everyone who’s lost someone they love long before it was their time, you feel like the days you had were not enough when you said goodbye,  
For the marriage that’s struggling just to hang on and lost all their faith in love,  
For the ones who can’t break the addictions and chains, remember you are not alone in your shame & your suffering,  
To the widow who suffers from being alone, wiping tears from her eyes,  
For the children around the world without a home, say a prayer tonight,  
There is hope for the helpless,  
Rest for the weary,  
Love for the broken heart,  
And there is grace and forgiveness, mercy and healing,  
HE will meet you wherever you are.  
Cry out to Jesus!”

“2005 Consuming Fire Music, Admin by EMI Christian Music Publishing”

Prayer:

*Dear God, I know that to have the Holy Spirit hear me, I must be willing to ASK and WAIT!  
Amen*

Submitted by Bob & Marianne Kopp

Wednesday December 20th  
Malachi 3:16-4:6

*“Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.” Malachi 4:5-6*

As my niece Grace grows, I cannot help but smile as she turns toward me. I cannot help but wave as she crawls away going for that elusively fascinating purse by the front door. But, the greatest joy is watching her parents, my Sister and Brother-in-law. They so carefully watch her, even as they give her the space she needs to explore. As she goes farther and farther, they wait patiently for that moment when she turns back around looking for her mom, for her dad. As she catches sight, her face lights up, she squeals and her mom, her dad, cannot help but run and engulf her in a huge hug.

*He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents.* These are the very last words in the Old Testament. The last words before 400 years of prophetic silence, about parents and children turning toward one another. I cannot help but think, in this Advent season that God patiently waits for what every parent longs for, that moment when the child turns back, looking and catching sight of the one they know, the one they love, the one they belong with. No matter how far we may be, no matter how long the silence has lingered, may we turn back to God, our heavenly parent, who is always ready to meet us with boundless love.

Prayer:

*Loving God, you sent Jesus to show all of us, all your children; how to look, how to know, how to find you. I am turning back Lord! Come surround me with your love! Amen.*

Submitted by Pastor Robin Reilly

Thursday Dec3mber 21st  
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26  
2 Samuel 6:1-11  
Hebrews 1:1-4

When one delves into these readings, the commonality between all three is this: God's power is more amazing, more unfathomable, and more terrifying than we could ever imagine.

Psalm 89 praises God as one who makes and keeps covenants. The Lord chose David to lead Israel into greatness, to fight and win battles that seemed impossible. It is also through David's line (also Abraham's) that the promised Messiah comes.

The Messiah is more than just a deliverer, however; the Messiah is God's *Son*, described in Hebrews 1:3 as "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being." While we can never truly understand God, we catch a glimpse of Him in Jesus's words and deeds.

Yet, the generous God revealed in Jesus seems utterly different from the vengeful God described in 2 Samuel:6. We must realize that Uzzah's death results not from recklessness on God's part, but from the simple fact that God is being what He must be: *Holy. Other-worldly. Divine.* (And, frankly, worthy of a more prestigious mode of transport than an ox-cart.) He is our Father, in all senses of the word. He holds us in tenderness, but demands our respect.

Prayer:

*Father God, we are thankful that you are multi-faceted and complex. You wield unspeakable power, yet, in Jesus, you became a vulnerable little baby. Help us learn to retain our own imprint of your glory, and to share the best of ourselves with a world that so desperately needs hope. Amen.*

Submitted by Beck Lister

Friday December 22nd  
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

*“I will establish your descendants forever,  
and build your throne for all generations.”*  
Psalm 89:4 (NRSV)

The 89<sup>th</sup> Psalm begins by praising God for His everlasting love and faithfulness, but quickly turns to the nub of the psalmist’s concern; has God forgotten His covenant with David, wherein He promised David an heir who would reign on his throne forever? With the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC the Davidic dynasty appears to have ended with God’s promise unfulfilled. Nonetheless, the psalmist importunes God not to forget his covenant.

A common theme linking the important covenants is that of “one who is to come” who will be a blessing to all peoples of the earth and will sit on David’s throne forever. The Psalms and prophets detail the attributes of this ideal king, building the Messianic hope of Israel. We know from New Testament teaching that the heir to David’s throne is Jesus.

It is now Christmas time and our thoughts turn to the birth of our Savior. So silent, so humble was the advent of the Messiah! Long awaited and expected; yet totally overlooked in the crowded city of Bethlehem.

Christians are also called to be “expectant” for the second advent of the Christ. In Matthew 25:1-13, Jesus encourages us to be vigilant and ready, lamps trimmed, oil jars filled. Let our hearts be prepared and let us be ready because no man knows the day or hour of His return.

Prayer:

*All Mighty, God, we thank thee for thy everlasting love and kindness and ask that you prepare us, each, for your Kingdom. And while we occupy, guide and direct us that we might be your faithful servants, willing to do that which you have already given us the power to do. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Submitted by Lewis E. Sauerwein

Saturday December 23rd  
Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

When we consider or discuss faith it is often a reflection of our own faith, faith in God, in our families, in a product etc. Have you ever stopped though and considered the faithfulness of God? Throughout all of scripture we see that God is always on the move in some way through the prophets, kings, nations, and the people. He is moving in such a way as to reveal himself whether it is at the height of our ability to follow and worship, or entering into rebellion against Him.

Christmas offers us a moment to reflect on God's faithfulness to us. We have waited for so long anticipating the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Jesus who is the greatest gift of love and faithfulness from God. In Psalm 89:3-4 gives us an insight into how God made a promise and of this faithfulness to fulfill this promise. Take a moment then and consider the beauty that God has given us His word and remains faithful to us!

Prayer:

*Lord we thank you for the promise that you have made to us your people. Allow us to walk in faith and trust that you have us in your hands in all things. Amen*

Submitted by EPYC



Sunday December 24th  
Luke 1:46-55

*“For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed” Luke 1:28 (NRSV).*

This verse is taken from Mary’s song shortly after she finds out that she is pregnant. It is a beautiful and simple statement made by Mary revealing her humility in face of such a task as carrying and giving birth to the Son of God. I imagine that as the contractions of birth first set in, in the midst of searching for a place to stay and only finding a manger, that Mary would have looked back to this moment of praise. The she would have remembered that it is God who has ordained these things. That she would in humility seen the shepherds as they approached and recognized that the child she bore was not the Son of God on His thrown, but Emanuel God with us, lying in manger.

God with us, Emanuel, born into this world through God’s hand and the humility of one of His faithful servant. This is one of the amazing miracles of Christmas, that through God’s work Mary was humble enough to carry the Son of God into this world so that he one day He would be high and lifted for the salvation of this world. Mary is blessed, blessed that she was given this charge and today we are blessed because of her. So, as we wait for dawn to usher in Christmas, let us reflect on the humility and grace of Mary. And let us look eagerly to the dawn where we will find Emanuel laying in manger, born to us.

Prayer:

*With eager hearts, we await the coming of Christmas and the celebration of God with us. May we have humility in our approach to You, knowing that You came for us out of love. Bless this night of eager anticipation with the grace to know that you are coming. Bless this night that we may know of your love that has come for us. Amen.*

Submitted by Rob Cochran



Submitted by Matthew Peelen