



ADVENT GUIDE
2021

Welcome to Advent!

God has given us this season of Advent as a way to remember His work in the world and in our lives.

Advent comes from the Latin word *ventus* which means “coming.” This Latin word is the translation of the Greek word *parousia* which is commonly used to refer to the Second Coming of Christ in the New Testament. This is the two-fold perspective and purpose of Advent: 1) to prepare and anticipate the coming of the babe, Jesus, heir of David’s throne and promised Messiah, 2) to be on alert for the Second Coming of the Son of God, Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Over the next several weeks, you will be guided to recall what God has already done for you in Jesus Christ, as well as look forward to what He will continue to do in you and through you.

May God bless this journey of Advent!





HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is meant to be a tool to direct your thoughts and prayers. For some, this guide will serve as your primary way of connecting with God's Word each day. For others, it will simply be added in to the devotional patterns that are already present. For many, a daily time of Bible reading and prayer is private. This guide can be used in private, but it is intended to be experienced in community. Gather with your family, spouse, friends, neighbors, small groups, classmates, community, or coworkers and work through the guide communally. Though not necessary, we believe it's the best way to experience Advent.

Each day, you will read Scripture, a brief devotional thought, and be encouraged to respond in prayer. You are free to take as long as you need, and don't get discouraged if you have younger children who seem distracted. Be flexible and positive. It's not as important that you "get through the material," as much as you let the "material get through you."

In the appendix of this guide, you will also find several liturgies that can be used during the Advent season. These readings are simply meant to augment the variety of experiences many of us have during the Holiday season. We pray that their poetry would bless you should you choose to use them. Also, there is a Scripture Reading Guide for the 12 Days of Christmas following Christmas Day. Traditionally, what we know from the song, "The 12 Days of Christmas," comes out of a historical practice of Christians for centuries leading up to a day called Epiphany. Feel free to use this portion of the appendix following the season of Advent to help you maintain daily Bible engagement.

THE ADVENT CANDLES (Optional)

There are traditionally four candles associated with Advent. They serve as reminders of the season of the longing we experience during Advent. Three of the four are purple in color - the color of mourning. Lighting the purple candles reminds us of how dire our situation really is without a Savior. There is one pink candle - this candle is lit towards the end of Advent during the week we are to think on and anticipate joy. Pink is a color of relief from the monotony and grief of the purple candles. Each Sunday of Advent, we encourage you to light the candle for that week along with the candles of the previous weeks as you go through the devotion for that day. In some traditions, a fifth candle, a white candle, is used only on Christmas Day.



HOPE

Sunday - November 28

Read: John 1:14-17

In the first 18 verses of his gospel, John makes it clear that he intends to prove that Jesus was no ordinary man. In fact in these short verses he lays the groundwork for his goal of demonstrating in the rest of his gospel that Jesus is indeed God.

After affirming that Jesus is the creator and that nothing exists that he has not made, John wants his readers to understand just what kind of God/man/creator it is that has entered our world to redeem us. Two times in three verses he describes Jesus as being full of “grace and truth” (vs. 14 and 17).

There is a strong possibility that John is referencing Exodus 34:6 which says, “Then the Lord passed by in front of him (Moses) and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth.’” Among other things, God wanted Moses to know that He was a God of grace and truth. Now the attributes of God in the Old Testament are used to describe Jesus in John’s gospel. John says, “Out of his (Jesus) fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.” Grace is seen in the revelation of God in the Old Testament, and now grace and truth are present in the person of Jesus in the New Testament.

Jesus was full of grace. He welcomed sinners and tax collectors and ate with them. The religious leaders and even disciples were amazed as he extended his grace and forgiveness to unexpected people like a Samaritan woman, a Roman soldier, a Phoenician woman, a woman caught in the act of adultery, as well as a thief who was crucified by his side. Most importantly, he announced grace for us when he revealed that God loved us so much that He sent his son and that if we would believe in him, we would receive eternal life.

But Jesus was also full of truth. He condemned many of the religious leaders of his day for being liars and hypocrites. He truthfully addressed the issue of sin and its consequences. He also stated in the very verse that followed his promise of eternal life to those who believed in him that if people did not believe, they would be condemned. He was also truthful about the cost of discipleship, calling those who would be his disciples to take up their cross daily and follow him, demanding everything from his followers, even their very lives.

Jesus came from the Father full of grace and truth. But he didn’t come simply to give us an example of grace and truth. He came to save us in grace and truth. It’s only after we’ve been saved and made right with God that God says, “Now that I have saved you through Jesus, you need to know that I have saved you to look like Jesus.” The motivation to be full of grace and truth is not because we need to earn God’s favor, but because being a follower of Jesus Christ means we look like the one we follow. May we make that commitment this holiday season!

PRAYER

O Jesus, help us to look like You. By Your Word and Your Spirit, point out the things that don’t reflect Your grace and truth. Help us to confess those things, affirm Your forgiveness, and request the grace to change. May this all be so that our lives can glorify You.

Ed Holt



HOPE

Monday - November 29

Read: John 1:4-9

Every year, we take the time as a family to hang ornaments on the Christmas tree. When we are finished, we turn off all the lights in the house, pile onto the couch, and look at the tree. It is one of my favorite traditions of the Christmas season. It is so calm and beautiful. I love how, when all of the other lights are off, you can't help but stare at the twinkling lights on the tree. In the midst of the dark room, the lights that normally would seem so minimal are so bright. They shine throughout the deep darkness, and no matter where you are in the room, your eyes are drawn to them. When I look at these lights, I can't help but think about the light of the world: Jesus.

John 1:4-9 says:

“In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”

Jesus is the true light of the world. He is light and life that shines in the darkness. In this world, there is so much darkness. Whether that's sickness, death, lost jobs, divorce, hardships, or so many other things we experience in life, the world is full of darkness. When we lose focus we can begin to feel like the darkness is closing in on us and that is all there is.

The advent season provides us with the perfect opportunity to sit down and refocus. This season, we are reminded so much of the light that Jesus is. Just like my family sitting on the couch looking at the lights on the tree, when we sit and focus on Christ, we can't take our eyes off Him. It takes intentional time looking for the light in the midst of the darkness. It takes time where we sit still, without the distractions of the busy world, and focus on only the light.

PRAYER

Take some time today to pray and ask for God to help you refocus on the light that He offers to You in Jesus.

Lexie Stevenson



HOPE

Tuesday - November 30

Read: Isaiah 60:1-5

I love parades. I love watching parades and I love marching in them. There's something about parades that brings about unique feelings of anticipation.

From childhood, I've loved that anticipation. The anticipation that starts when you know the day of the parade is approaching, that a town-wide celebration is near. How it builds as you arrive and strive to find the best place to view each and every sight and then stand and await the first sign that the parade is about to start. An anticipation that continues as each band, group, car or float first comes into sight, then moves steadily toward you and past you, with another one coming right on their heels.

Watching parades is enjoyable, yet marching in them brings about entirely different emotions. You still anticipate the scheduled day, you even practice your step or song or wave. You know that thousands of eyes will be upon you, and there is a chance of great recognition and prestige. On parade day, you prepare. You think about the route, where to line up, where the judges stand is placed and where your parents will be waiting. Then you begin to march and see people lined on both sides of the streets anticipating your arrival just as you do. You see them prepared to wave and cheer and celebrate.

The Christmas season is a season filled with parades. These parades are special parades with special music, prodigious amounts of candy, and they almost all conclude with a special guest. Kids await his arrival with a special anticipation, hoping to be the first to spot him and his elves and hoping that he'll grant special gifts under their tree this year.

Isaiah 60 describes a scene similar to a parade. "Arise, Israel, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." Israel is about to hold a parade. The oppressed have cause to celebrate. Like many parades, everyone awaits the main float ushering in the most distinguished Guest. The nations are showing up, the streets are getting crowded.

Have you found your place to watch? Have you been practicing to march?
The parade is about to start.

PRAYER

Lord of hosts, we celebrate your coming. We reflect on your faithfulness as we read about your first coming, how it was anticipated by the Magi, attended by shepherds, attested to by a star and proclaimed by angels. We now await the day of your promised return with great anticipation and eagerness. May we arise and shine, may we reflect you to the nations around us that all will join in this greatest of celebrations. Grant us strength and perseverance till that day. We pray this in your GREAT name, Jesus. Amen.

Andrew Hatfield



HOPE

Wednesday - December 1

Read: Isaiah 49:6

The thought of Christmas conjures an image of a nostalgic Norman Rockwell painting of a young boy with his beloved dog, sitting at the foot of a tree decorated with old-time ornaments, complete with a mountain of gifts underneath, begging to be opened. The wonder and sheer joy radiating from the face of the child defines the mysterious magic of the most wonderful time of year. As adults, the most wonderful time of year is often wrought with elevated stress, financial burden, and emotional reminders of loved ones no longer gathered around the family table. Anxiety catapults in severity at a time we feel responsible for making the season perfect for our children.

The first Christmas was anything but perfect. Mary, unable to fully comprehend the sheer wonder of carrying the Christ child, labored in a dark and dusty barn, surrounded by animals, shepherds, and an innkeeper who turned her away from the comfort of a room that would have made delivery a bit less...rustic.

There, in that less-than-hygienic setting, Mary delivered the much-anticipated Savior of the world. An imperfect situation with God's divine hand overcoming the elements of struggle, discomfort, and wide-eyed, 'This is really happening' thoughts among the earthly parents Jesus would come to know.

Few human minds grasped the gravity of that innocent baby born centuries ago. His entrance to the world did not immediately heal the broken, dry the tears of the hurting, or solve the world's problems. Yet. With this child's miraculous birth, a glorious hope entered the dark world that very first Christmas Day.

The true gift of Christmas is the unfathomable peace, exhilarating joy, and glorious hope that accompanies the knowledge that Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection would free the world of its collective sin, one heartfelt decision to accept Him as Savior, at a time. Christ came to seek and save that which was lost. To offer hope to a hopeless world. His light shines on every human soul; past, present, and future. The HOPE we have in the Savior we know bridges any gap of doubt and fear this world can bring. And this HOPE is not reserved to one people group, but has always been for the whole world...you and me!

From a babe wrapped in cloth, to a man miraculously healing the sick and loving the poor, to the death and resurrection of God's only Son, our hope lies in the greatest gift ever given, on that first Christmas Day years ago, in the form of a tiny baby, lying in a manger full of hay.

PRAYER

Thank You for Your gift to the world when your beloved Son was born. May we be the light that shines Your love upon this fallen world and shares with others the glorious hope Jesus' birth brought forth.

Mandi DeBoef



HOPE

Thursday - December 2

Read: Isaiah 53:1-12

I'm always amazed when I see some sort of plant growing up in the middle of a concrete sidewalk. I always wonder, "How is this even possible?" I am no biologist, but I at least know that plants need three things to grow: soil, sun and water. Yet it is obvious when you see a dandelion in the middle of a sidewalk that the smallest amount of light and soil and water can still produce life even out of the hardest ground.

Isaiah 53 describes the coming Messiah as a "tender shoot growing out of dry ground." We know from the Gospels that Jesus' life on the planet was anything but comfortable. He endured ridicule, hardship, homelessness, and much more even before he made it to the cross. Isaiah points out in alarming detail the suffering of His cross. The irony in this is that crucifixion had not yet even been invented when the prophet wrote these words.

Verse 11 offers us a glimpse of hope even in the tragedy of His suffering. Jesus will see the light of life and be satisfied. He will justify many. We find ourselves among those who have been forgiven and justified by the sacrifice of Jesus. In this week of Hope, perhaps you've sensed your heart feeling more like concrete than the life of Jesus that wants to grow through the cracks.

I believe it's really hard to focus our thoughts on Christmas without remembering the reason Jesus came in the first place...to give us hope through His death and Resurrection. Though the original audience in Isaiah's day probably had little idea their precious Messiah would be stretched out on a cross for their sins, we know today that our hope is found in this established fact: Christ has come. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.

I pray this hope opens the cracks of your heart a little more today!

PRAYER

Jesus, we thank You for the purpose of Your birth...Your death on the cross and Resurrection! Help us to once again place our hope in what You have already done for us. Soften our hearts to the eternal significance of Your sacrifice.

Corey Scott



HOPE

Friday - December 3

Read: Micah 7:8-10

When I was a young boy, my brother and I decided that it would be great fun to set up glass bottles as an “obstacle course” for cars to drive through as they came up over the hill on the country road that we lived on. My brother and I crouched in a culvert along the side of the road so that we could have a front row seat to watch the action. As you can imagine, the driver that discovered our handiwork did not think this was a great idea. While my older brother had the sense to disappear into the woods, I ran home... with our unwilling slalom driver following behind me. Boy did I feel my parents wrath that day!

Being a parent is hard. Sometimes it’s so difficult to watch your children make decisions that they could have avoided. You wonder why they have to go through consequences and discipline instead of just seeing what seems so clear to you as a parent. I can’t imagine how much more our Heavenly Father yearns for us to choose the narrow path that can lead us through the briars and thorns that so quickly entangle us in this world.

I remember vividly the sense of relief I experienced as a child when whatever consequence I had brought on myself finally came to an end! It felt so freeing to finally be in my parents’ good graces again!

During this season we celebrate a Father that sent His Son to plead our case, to uphold our cause so that we could emerge from the shadows of our mistakes and sins into the light of His Grace! He offers us hope. No matter how massively we have screwed up, no matter how badly we have disappointed our loved ones, our Savior, ourselves... we know that He is ready and waiting to redeem us.

PRAYER

Our prayer today is that the same God that sent His Son to save us from our sins will meet us where we are today, in whatever mess we’ve made for ourselves and bring us into the light of His forgiveness.

Corbin VanDeWege



HOPE

Saturday - December 4

Read: Revelation 22:1-5

What do you think of when you hear the word 'night'? Cold. Darkness. Fear. Lost. What about when you hear the word 'light'? Warm. Bright. Clear. Hope. When God created the world, the first thing He did, before even creating the sun, was create light. Man cannot live without it. Nothing can survive without it. We are all totally dependent upon the light God gives us.

However, man chose and still chooses to reject God's light and to forge his own path in the darkness. That path leads to death, destruction, fear and hopelessness. God in His love has continued to shine His light upon humanity, seeking to draw them back. A few men have had glimpses of God's light, like Moses whose face shone brightly after spending time with God. Or like Paul, who was blinded by the light of his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Jesus, the Light of the World, continues to shine, illuminating the minds and hearts of any who would believe in Him. Some have received the Light and have been set free from the darkness, but many still remain in that darkness. There is even a large majority who were born into that darkness never having known the Light exists.

Yet God promises that at the end of days there will be a new heaven and a new earth filled with those who follow Jesus in faith and obedience. The curse of sin will be no more. Night will no longer exist. The sun will be out of work because God will shine on them forever. Pure, glorious, life-giving Light. Not just for a select few, like in the past, but all will see His face.

This Christmas reflect on the Father's heart to fill your life and this world with His glorious Light. He went so far as to send His Son into the world so that many from every people group would be able to see Him face to face and enjoy His Light. How far are you willing to go this Christmas to help others know Jesus and experience His life-giving Light? If you have experienced the warmth, hope and power of His Light, look around you for those living in darkness and go share with them His Light so that they too could experience the joy of God's Light this Christmas.

PRAYER

Thank God for shining His Light upon you. Ask Him to show you with whom you can share His Light this Christmas season. Go do it.

Kyle Koval



PEACE

Sunday - December 5

Read: Isaiah 60:19-22

The Christmas season is coming upon us! I have always enjoyed walking around or driving by all the Christmas lights! There are so many kinds of lights now and how people display their decorations. But even though they shine brightly for a few weeks, there is only one true and everlasting light that shines forever.

In Isaiah 60:19-22; this Prophet reminds us that the Lord is our everlasting light. His presence is magnified even when the sun goes down (v19) and glorified by night even by the brightest moon. The Lord God is our everlasting light! In your sorrows (v20) and in your darkest times, God's light still shines.

How do you carry God's light in your own life, for your family, friends and neighbors? Picture yourself in the middle of your own city and staring at all those Christmas lights; when they all go out at the same time, what do you feel? Are you sad, upset that the Holiday Season may be over soon? Are you angry that you have to take your own lights down? How will you remember that God is the everlasting light? How will you feel? How does He make you feel?

We all can feel a little stressed around this time of the year. My challenge to you is: What are you will to give up this Holiday season? Maybe it is something as simple as not putting up lights this year to remind yourself that God is the everlasting light. When you center yourself on Jesus, God's light prevails for the whole nation, (v22) "the least of you will become a thousand, the smallest of a mighty nation."

John 8:12 says, "When Jesus spoke again to the people he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the life of life." John 1:5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Do you want to give your life to the Lord so that you can know how God's light is everlasting?

PRAYER

○ Jesus, during this season, we desire to know You personally and accept You as the true and everlasting light.

Eric Longing



PEACE

Monday - December 6

Read: John 8:30-47

We have all been met with an eager smile and the statement, “Tell me about yourself!” It’s an unassuming nudge when you want to get to know someone, but that statement can mean so much. When I was in school, my classmates and I had to fill out a small survey where we told our teacher all about ourselves every year on the first day of class. As I’ve grown, I’ve had to answer that question multiple times: for college scholarships, job interviews, or just making friends in general. When I am asked that question, it is easy for me to say things like, “Well, I am going to be a teacher!” “I am learning to speak Spanish fluently!” “I like singing.” “I have one sibling.” All of these random facts can all be squished together to tell a person a lot about me. But what if those things were taken away from me? What if one bit about me were gone? Would I still be the same?

I think the crowd of people listening to Jesus had an identification problem. They are shouting “We are children of Abraham! We are children of Abraham!” But Jesus is trying to strip that away so that these people can realize that Abraham isn’t who saves them. Before Jesus, the covenant (really big promise) that God made with Abraham was a big deal. To say you were a child of Abraham was a big deal. But what did Jesus say He found when he stripped that title away from them? Read verses 42-44 again.

Jesus is trying to reshape their identity for the better. He wants the Jews and us today to realize that when Jesus becomes our identity, meaning we recognize that Jesus is God, we put our faith in Him, and we turn away from our sin. Nothing else matters. He becomes THE reason we do the things we love. He becomes THE reason that we recognize that we are God’s children. Jesus wants this crowd of people to realize that when they put their faith in Christ, being Abraham’s child isn’t the most important part of who they are anymore, because they are God’s child and free from sin.

So if I were to take away all of those random facts about me, one thing can still remain and will always remain: I am God’s child, and through Jesus, I am free from sin. How amazing! How powerful! So no, the next time you are asked, “Tell me about yourself” you don’t have to feel weird for putting down things like “I like to sing!” “I have one sibling!” But it is certainly also joyous to say “I am a child of God!” Because through your actions and sharing parts of who you are, God’s love is shown to others.

PRAYER

Thank God that He has given us our true identity, our true name, in Jesus. Ask for help to wear that name well today; that you would represent the character of Christ in all you do.

Milana Hainline



PEACE

Tuesday - December 7

Read: Psalm 86:1-17

How BIG is your God? I don't know if you see God as big or small right now in your life. Or maybe you have just lost sight of how big God really is in the midst of all the negative we can be inundated with in today's worldwide 24/7 news feeds. I have a tendency to lose sight of how big things are, especially when it comes to my own physical stature.

You see I grew up as a very skinny kid and never saw myself as being big, but in college, I grew almost four inches to become almost six feet seven inches tall. Once my metabolism started slowing down and I stopped playing sports, my frame filled in to a weight of 250 pounds. And I don't like to admit it, but I apparently have a big head too. Saying all of that, I still often see myself as the skinny kid in high school that was never big in any way. I am often reminded and sometimes shocked at how big I look when I see myself in a picture next to other people. I am a BIG guy!

In this Psalm, David begins and ends crying out to God to save him, but in the middle of this Psalm, we see this tremendous expression of trust and confidence in who God is. David understands the BIGness of God and trusts that God can save him from any situation. David reminds us that God is unrivaled in His position when he says that "among the gods there is none like you, O Lord" (vs. 8 NIV). He also says that his God does "marvelous deeds" in vs. 10 and that "no deeds compare" with his God's in verse 8, reminding us that God is unrivaled in His works. My favorite is how David reminds us that, "all nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to Your name" (vs. 9 NIV). God will be worshiped by ALL! David's God is BIG!

How dialed into these truths from David are you when you are going to God in prayer?

Do you tend to focus on the magnitude of struggle rather than on the "bigness" of God?

My prayer for you this season is that you will find and tap into the BIGNESS of your God.

PRAYER

Though Jesus came to us in a small way, to an "insignificant" family, God accomplished something huge. Praise God for the big ways He has moved in your life. Thank Him for the seemingly small things He has done on your behalf.

John Presko



PEACE

Wednesday - December 8

Read: Ephesians 5:6-14

He sat in my office nervously fidgeting with his hands folded into his lap. He didn't want to look up and make eye contact, because he didn't want to be here at all. We had met a couple times before and after church services. Occasionally, we talked about his weekend or how school was going for him. Never much more than small talk. But this meeting was different. A little over a week ago, his mom discovered that he was looking at porn on his phone. He thought he had covered his tracks well, but his mom stumbled across his search history. Before he ever came into my office, he already had everything taken away and endured multiple conversations with mom, then dad, and then mom and dad. As his youth minister, his parents asked if I would talk with him too. I told her I am always available to talk, but he may not want to talk with me. So there he sat, nervously not wanting this conversation with his youth minister.

It is hard to know how to start a conversation, when you know someone else doesn't want to have it in the first place. I think the Holy Spirit gave me the right words at that moment. I said, "You probably think this is the worst thing that can happen to you right now: getting caught, and having conversation after conversation about your choices in life. But I want you to know that this could be the best thing that has ever happened to you. Because what was once hidden is now seen. What had control over you in the darkness has now been brought out into the light. You can now work through your struggle knowing Jesus forgives you and gives you the Holy Spirit to help you find victory from this addiction."

We read in this passage that you used to be in the darkness of your sin. It had control of you. Most likely, you tried to hide your sin so that no one would know about it. But now because of your faith in Jesus, you are in the light. You don't have to hide anymore. Jesus' grace is enough for you. His mercy is overwhelming, and His strength will help you in the daily struggle to turn from the dark acts of sin and live in the light of the Lord.

PRAYER

Thank you Jesus for coming as the light of the world and showing us how to live as children of light.

Kevin Punch



PEACE

Thursday - December 9

Read: Mark 4:21-25

Do you ever just feel lied to? Maybe like me you answered, “Well yeah! Have you watched the news lately?”

Have you ever opened your Bible to have a similar feeling, realizing that something you were taught growing up in Sunday school, oversimplified the message in a way that actually ended up being deceptive? Have you ever been studying a passage to realize those words you heard from that pulpit didn’t actually line up with what you found there? I have been in a season of feeling lied to by religion. I have been indignant that the “church” could deceive me about something as essential as God’s Word. Simultaneously, I have had to look at my own stewardship of the Bible and consider why I didn’t know His Word well enough to pick up on the errant teaching sooner. Even worse, I can give examples of when I have played my own part in misrepresenting God and His Word.

Mark 4:21-25 encourages us to use our light (which John 12:46 tells us is Jesus) to start seeing the hidden things for what they are. Jesus tells us in this passage, that if we will tune up our ears and listen, we can learn to become stewards of God’s truth. As we align our hearts with His Spirit, He also says that those who really want to find truth will, and in increasing measure. Those content with the watered down niceties that we sometimes try to pass off as God’s truth, will be prevented from plunging the depths of the real thing.

As we light Advent candles of peace this week, let’s do so with prayer asking the Lord to help us become stewards of the truth that He wrote into the pages of the Bible. Let’s ask Him to help us to quit leaning on man’s interpretation of that Word and to seek the Holy Spirit’s illumination. I can’t help but wonder if it is here that we begin to find the real meat of that promised “peace that passes all understanding” that will “guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6).

PRAYER

Lord God, we are exhausted from being lied to. We long to be people of light who are able to discern truth. Show us Your heart. Reveal to us YOUR Word and make us good stewards of it as we find peace in our hearts and minds through You.

Lori Medlin



PEACE

Friday - December 10

Read: Matthew 5:9, 14-16

Blessed ARE the peacemakers. Those currently and actively engaged in peacemaking were the ones to receive solace from the words of Jesus. In addition, being a source of light so that others might see and glorify the Father (as opposed to attention being drawn to the light itself) was another statement made by Jesus to those present.

These words were as counter-cultural two thousand years ago as they are now. In a time where international, domestic and cultural wars flood the news, televisions and social media accounts, being a peacemaker in the midst of this seems impossible. Additionally, when self-promotion and personal glorification are heralded, being a light on a hill that shines for the purpose to illuminate something else, instead of one's own efforts and accomplishments, can seem like some sort of social suicide.

Even as a Global Worker relying on the support of others, I have difficulty in not falling prey to the tendency to blind others with the light of my efforts and work. Trying to prove our worth to others by expounding on our actions instead of pointing to the work we have been invited into is a constant battle. A battle that seems like an antithesis to peacemaking.

But that is what each of us are instructed to do, despite our geographical location. We are to be makers of peace in times of never-ending entropy. We are to shine brightly into the darkness so that others (believers and unbelievers alike) will see the source of our light. This may seem like a daunting task, but we have been given an example in Jesus Himself. God delivered the Prince of Peace to earth as a babe, knowing that chaos would teem throughout the region at the whispers of His birth.

PRAYER

Our prayer is the humble request of a uniting peace in the eye of life's storm, and for our light to shine as a beacon of peace for everyone to see Kingdom work being carried out on earth as it is in heaven.

Jason Brotherton



PEACE

Saturday - December 11 **Read:** Isaiah 5:20; John 3:14-18

As believers it can be easy for us to be confused or misled by the world we live in. Throughout life we are confronted by the world's view on issues, and many times, the world views these issues as good when in fact they are evil actions and thoughts. There are also those that substitute truth for evil. With confusion comes uncertainty, with uncertainty comes doubt. Doubt can be a very powerful tool for the enemy because it allows him to change our focus.

When we begin to question what we know to be true about Christ, we allow for our minds to focus on things of this world rather than things above. When we are mindful of what is evil and what is good, our focus can stay clear. With this clear focus we can set our eyes on the purpose given us. This purpose is to serve and bring glory to our God. Unlike the enemy, our King has no desire to cause confusion or distrust but rather He brings clarity and purpose.

Through Christ, we understand there is no confusion; yes, there are times when we don't understand His plan for us. Is there a mystery? Yes. We understand that when our trust is in Christ it will work out for the glory of His kingdom. For God loved us so much that He gave His only Son so that we may be with Him and bring glory to His kingdom.

Throughout church history we have seen the church question aspects of culture that we have been told are good when in fact they are evil. As the church, we need to stand for what Christ has called us to stand for, and that is the Bible. We must not allow ourselves to be confused by the enemy but rather stay focused on Christ and His Kingdom.

PRAYER

O Jesus, Your coming into this world as a gentle, meek and humble baby shows us that work in ways that are mysterious...not confusing. Thank You for being consistent and faithful, even if You're not always predictable. We trust Your ways. Help us today to embrace the mystery of Christmas. And may You receive our trust as worship. In Your name, we pray, Amen.

Mitchell Denney



LOVE

Sunday - December 12 Read: Psalm 119:113-128; Matthew 4:1-11

I don't know about you, but I love a good list to keep me on track. Like a grocery list to stay focused at the store helping me leave with what I need, not just the snacks that catch my attention along the way. And "to do" lists are so helpful for me to stay on track. I keep a general running list of things that need to be done, but my favorite tool is my tiny green set of sticky notes that is titled at the top, "Today's Top Three." It has only three small boxes to be filled each day, making sure the main things get priority.

This time of year, there are so many extra items vying to be a priority that it's easy to be mentally all over the place. Add these to your normal lists: shopping to be done, food to be cooked, parties to attend, family expectations to be met, festive activities filling the calendar, and memories filling our thoughts. On top of that, we can look around us at all that is going on in the world, and it becomes easy in the moment to let it all overshadow what belongs at the very top of our priority list - our personal relationship with our Savior and spending time in His Word.

We can open our Bibles to Psalm 119:113-128 to read the writer's prayer to God telling that His Word is a priority in the midst of the hectic things going on around him. He prays "I need more revelation from Your Word to know more about You, for I am in love with You!" and "Truly, Your message of truth means more to me than a vault filled with purest gold." Time with the God he loved and in His Word was treasured to keep him focused on what matters. We see that in Jesus' life as well. The Gospels state that regularly Jesus retreated away for prayer and solitude, and we see in Matthew 4:1-11 when Jesus was tempted, the Scriptures were stored in His mind and heart ready to be poured out at the perfect moment.

PRAYER

In the midst of all the holiday happenings, it can be difficult to keep your relationship with God as the main priority. Today, spend time with your Savior in prayer before you tackle your to-do list. Open your Bible, spending time in God's Word to make His priorities yours. Ask Him for help to do this.

Lauri Newlin



LOVE

Monday - December 13

Read: John 3:19-21

“Look! Christmas lights!” No matter how often she sees them, my wife is always delighted by colorful strands following roof lines, draped across porches or wrapped around trees. It signals to her, and to the world, that this is a season of anticipation and celebration. Christmas is REALLY a big deal!

And yet, our individual Christmas experiences are often disappointing, despite all the eager anticipation leading up to them. It seems we all have some childhood expectations of an exultant feeling Christmas will produce in us, which is never quite fulfilled. What we want and need is more Jesus!

Christmas lights are good, but the light of the world is even better. Maybe some of our frustrations about Christmas day arise from the fact that we are expecting earthly things to produce heavenly sensations. Or maybe sometimes we realize that our eagerness for Christmas is still the residual hope for that Red Ryder B. B. gun we just knew would revolutionize our life.

When Nicodemus tracked down the wandering rabbi he'd been hearing about, he had no idea what to expect, but Jesus offered him something he couldn't even imagine—the chance to start over and live an entirely different kind of life. Jesus described this new life as being as different from his old one as light is from darkness. Whereas his old life may have been about status, accomplishment, and power, the new life Jesus was modeling was about serving and blessing others.

As we approach “the most wonderful time of the year,” let's focus on that light. Shopping and hot chocolate and decorating our house are all warming and enjoyable activities, but can only do so much. But when we follow the light of Jesus and invest ourselves in His business, that's where the REAL joy comes from. Let's find some ways this Christmas to love others as Jesus does.

PRAYER

Lord, please forgive us for sometimes getting so caught up in a holiday about You we lose track of You. Thank you for trusting us enough to represent you in this world. Open our eyes to the needs around us which you invite us to fulfill in Your name. And thank you for the colored lights which remind us of Your love for us, and the rest of Your world. Amen.

Dave Embree



LOVE

Tuesday - December 14

Read: John 14:1-26

In Honduras, Central America, where my family and I have lived and worked since Jim and I finished college, I have learned so many things about the Honduran people. One of those is that Hondurans understand worship. Since 2011, I have had the wonderful privilege of organizing a women's conference for the Christian churches across the country of Honduras. My all-time favorite part of the conferences is praise and worship time. As I have played the piano or drum, I have witnessed what Jesus gets to see and hear when His Honduran daughters praise Him. Tall, widowed Juanita, (who suffered so at the abusive hand of her husband for so many years) with tears running down her smiling face, worships her Rescuer. At the back of the auditorium, Mary with her long, beautiful, curly hair (who this year received the operation to finally stop the bleeding) bows before her Healer. Rosa, broken hearted over the infidelity, raises her voice to the One she completely trusts. These women have taught me over the years how to worship my Savior - in both spirit and in truth.

As we draw closer to Jesus during this Advent season, let us remember what He taught us in John 14. He clearly stated that He and the Father are one (v 11). He is the One that the prophets foretold, the long awaited Messiah, the Anointed One, the sacrificial Lamb that was to take away the sins of the world. He is the One who purchased our ticket to heaven (where He has been preparing a place for us). He purchased our tickets with His very blood. Jesus also stated that He is Truth (v. 6). In these days, we could really use more truth, wouldn't you agree? In verse 17 of John 14, we see this promise completed in us. We too have been given the Spirit of Truth in the form of the Holy Spirit, given to us at our baptism (Acts 2:38). In verse 26, we read how His Spirit teaches and reminds us of what Jesus taught.

All that said, as the Christmas season is in full swing, let's remember that Jesus is the Messiah. He is One with the Father. He lives in us. THAT is cause to celebrate. Take some time out of these busy days to worship your Savior in truth and in spirit. Why not worship Him right now, remembering Who He has been to you, just like the women in Honduras do?

PRAYER

Offer a prayer of praise to Jesus. Consider all the qualities of Christ that stand out to you during the Christmas season. You may want to use the alphabet to think of a quality of Jesus for every letter. Set an alarm to go off at 1:46 PM (stands for John 14:6) to remind you to take time to praise Jesus again.

Teri Riley



LOVE

Wednesday - December 15

Read: Luke 17:22-25

Have you ever waited for something with such high expectations and excitement that you felt as though you couldn't possibly wait any longer for it to come?

This is the way I felt as a little girl, just around Christmas time in 1967, when our family was gathered at my grandparent's farm. We were awaiting my Uncle Donnie's homecoming from boot camp. This would be the last time we would see him before he received his orders for Vietnam. It might be the last time we would ever see him. We didn't know exactly where he would be deployed, or when and if he might return. So, we waited with much anticipation for that happy reunion!

The disciples were anticipating what Christ would do to bring change to their current world. But when Jesus said, "But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation." I am sure there was uncertainty and confusion about why Jesus was saying these things. They did not fully understand that as the Messiah, he must fulfill the prophesied suffering and rejection of God's Salvation plan. Jesus foretold of a time to come when they too would suffer and long for the days when He walked among them. He warned them that many would come proclaiming to be Him and that the disciples were not to be fooled into believing them. He told them that there would be no doubt of His return. It was a lot to take in.

Jesus, the light of the world, spoken about in John 8:12, will be seen by the whole of Earth. All will know when He comes, just as lightning can be seen in the darkness of a storm. He will come in all His glory filling every corner of the Earth with His presence.

It was very hard for this impatient, overanxious, 5-year-old girl to wait for the sound of tires on that gravel dirt road. But as it turned, out Donnie actually drove in after dark. Seeing the lights shine in the darkness made it easy to know of his arrival. The light illuminated the way for Uncle Donnie's homecoming, and so shall it be for Jesus' much anticipated return.

The SON's glorious light will break through the darkness of this present world, and all of mankind will know of HIS return!

PRAYER

Father, as we wait with trepidation for the day and time that Jesus will make His glorious return, help us to be patient. Protect us from false teachers and those proclaiming to be the Messiah. Help us to live a life that honors and anxiously anticipates Jesus' return!

Libbie Hampton



LOVE

Thursday - December 16

Read: John 12:35-46

The winter months can bring a coldness to life that can sometimes be hard to shake. Maybe for you it's seasonal depression, grey days, less outdoor time, lack of vitamin D... but it does seem like winter can take its toll on us. The hours seem to shrink, and some days it feels like a race against the setting sun, if there is any sun at all.

Something about this time of year makes me long for a little bit more sunlight. It seems that I always have grand ideas for outdoor projects or adventures during the coldest months. Filling up my wish list on Amazon is usually quite amusing because it's filled with things that I know won't be used until March. Then the warmer months move in, the schedule fills up and other things distract me from all my winter wants.

Jesus warned His followers about a winter that was coming. Many who were following Him in secret, many religious leaders compelled by His message, were scared to admit it out loud. His warning to them: don't sit inside while the sun is shining. Now was the time to follow Him, to give their lives and walk in His ways. Because there was coming a time when the miracles would start to fade and the Miracle Worker would be gone.

Jesus was leaving; the Light was leaving. (Note: this warning was likely given on the Monday before the Friday of Christ's crucifixion). This darkness that Jesus is referring to comes with a chilling truth. A step of faith without sight will be a jump too far for many. Jesus urges the crowd to act now because there is no better time to start following Jesus than when He's standing right in front of you.

Of course Jesus would not leave His followers alone as He departed. He sent the Holy Spirit to empower the early church and the Saints for ages to come. Jesus would pray for those who would come to faith by the message alone (John 17:20), and even to His own disciple Thomas, He said "Blessed are those who had not seen, yet believe" (John 20:29).

Yet, I believe His words still hold true in these winter months. As my brain is filled with all the things I want to do when it gets warmer, my spirit can also long for brighter days. This Advent, in the middle of winter, we are reminded that love came down.

Look around. This season begs for warmth. New life is coming. But why wait until spring? Why not see that the Light has come now. He speaks to us through His Word. And there is no better time to start following Jesus than when He's standing right in front of you.

PRAYER

Since Advent is a time of waiting (i.e. waiting for the Second Coming), take time to pray and ask God to give you patience as you look forward to that great and glorious day. Ask that He would help you remain faithful until the very end.

Allen Tyger



LOVE

Friday - December 17

Read: John 8:2-12

When I read this text, I know my first thought isn't compassion. I tend to have judgmental thoughts towards her. I tend to think like the Pharisees in this text. I tend to focus on the sin first instead of seeing a hurting person who desperately needed Jesus. But thankfully, Jesus isn't like that. He is full of love and compassion. He doesn't condemn her, but instead shares truth with her and encourages her to leave her life of sin. He also forgives her.

What sin do you have today that you need to give to Jesus? What thought is keeping you captive instead of allowing you to live in the freedom of Christ? When I tend to think about those things, I get overwhelmed, but when I let it all go, I am so thankful for Jesus! He is quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. He is abounding in love and free of condemnation. He is offering mercy and grace and all we have to do is believe in Him and turn from our old ways.

So, for this Advent season, all our hope is in Jesus. A baby born to save the world. A baby that is our Savior! A baby that grows into a man who loves and forgives us. A person who is both fully God and fully man. He knows us before we know ourselves. He knew the sins of the woman before they were even committed, yet He didn't judge her. He gave her mercy and love. He gave her hope.

PRAYER

○ Jesus, as we focus on Your love this week, help us to display Your limitless compassion. When we feel the impulse to judge, help us to love instead. Thank You for showing us such infinite love and compassion. Help us to treat others in this way. Amen.

Kasey Longing



LOVE

Saturday - December 18

Read: Matthew 17:1-8; 28:3

The transfiguration of Jesus was a preview of coming attractions. Matthew told us that Jesus' face "shown like the sun, and His clothes became white as light" (Matthew 17:2). Mark's account said that His clothes became radiant and so white that no one on earth could bleach them that white (Mark 9:3). Luke's account said that His face was altered, and His clothing became dazzling white (Luke 9:29). The coming attraction was the resurrection. When Jesus rose from the dead His appearance was like lightning and His clothing white as snow (Matthew 28:3).

Some years ago in a sermon, Randy Gariss (Ozark Christian College) said that in the transfiguration God the Father was saying to God the Son, "Okay Son, for a brief moment, just take off your mask and show them who you really are." At times the veil of Jesus' humanity hid the power of His divinity. But there were other times in Jesus' earthly journey where His divinity could not be contained. His transfiguration was one of those moments. His resurrection was one of those moments. His birth in Bethlehem was one of those moments (Luke 2:8-14).

Peter made a bone-headed comment on the mountain that day (i.e. "I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah"). But he never forgot this moment (2 Peter 1:16-18). Christmas, the transfiguration, and the Resurrection were all scary. God's divinity was invading our humanity. On the mountain that day, Peter, James and John were terrified and fell on their faces. Seeing Jesus only (without His mask) can be anyone's undoing. But seeing Jesus and hearing Jesus made Peter into the rock that he was for Jesus.

It is the same for us. Christmas is a time to see Jesus—the real divine/human Jesus. As scary as that might be, be sure to see Him and hear Him this season. Remember that "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

PRAYER

O Jesus, would You open our eyes to see You clearly? We long to look upon Your unmasked face. Give us the ability to see the ways You are revealing Yourself through this day, as well as throughout the entire Christmas season.

Mark Scott



JOY

Sunday - December 19

Read: Luke 2:25-32

I'm obsessed with Christmas lights. In my mind, they simply cannot be overdone. Never a bulb too bright or a strand too many. My family patiently indulges me every Christmas season when I shout, "Lights!" and point at literally every house we pass that is decked out in illuminating LEDs. There is something about the brightness emanating from Christmas lights that radiates joy. It warms my heart as it reminds me of Jesus and the light He brings to our lives.

In Luke chapter 2, we learn about Simeon, a man the Bible describes as righteous and devout. God promises Simeon he will see the Messiah before he dies. One day, the Holy Spirit leads Simeon to the Temple at the exact time Joseph and Mary are there with baby Jesus. Simeon's actions show us he was talking and listening to God. He was definitely tuned in to the Holy Spirit. When Simeon arrives at the Temple, he recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, even though Jesus is only an infant.

What happens next is my favorite part of this encounter. Simeon takes baby Jesus into his arms and gazes upon His precious, little face. Then Simeon declares he has seen Salvation. One look at Jesus, and Simeon knows he has laid eyes on the light of the world.

In verses 30 – 32, Simeon's quoted as saying:

"For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel."

Simeon proclaims Jesus is the Savior for the Gentiles and for the people of Israel. During that time in history, for a devoted Jewish man to declare Jesus as the Messiah for everyone, is quite astounding. Simeon saw salvation in Jesus' face for everyone, for all time and for all nations. What a beautiful thought and truth.

I can only imagine how overwhelmed with joy Simeon felt as he looked at baby Jesus. During this season when we encounter glimmering Christmas decorations, let's remember the light of redemption Jesus shines on the world.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank You for being the light for all people. Help me to focus my eyes on You and mediate on Your love, forgiveness and grace.

Cheryl Kepes



JOY

Monday - December 20 Read: Matthew 4:16; Isaiah 9:2; John 3:27-30

A sign hangs on the wall of my work cubby: "Hope shines the brightest in the darkest moments." I think of that sign as I read the words of Matthew 4:16 and Isaiah 9:2 - "the people living in darkness have seen a great light."

We'll get back to the sign here in a second, but let me set the stage a bit. John the Baptist began his ministry after about 400 years of silence (so to speak) since the last prophet of Israel. To say things were dark might be an understatement.

The Light was about to dawn on Israel, and John was announcing the news as we read in John 1-3. His words in these chapters remind me of what my mom used to say in the mornings when she woke me up for school by abruptly turning on the light: "Watch your eyes!" John is announcing to everyone to watch and to look - the Light is coming!

To John's delight, he got the opportunity to see the Promised One, but to his followers, Jesus' growing ministry seemed to be in competition with what John was doing. This is the exchange we read in today's Scripture: John 3:27-30.

What's noteworthy to me about John's words to his followers is that he had a clear understanding of who he was and who he was not. He knew the job God had set before him, and he embraced it wholeheartedly. He didn't want for more prominence or for more time in a place of influence. In fact, John's joy was to let Jesus take the spotlight and be the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah: "People walking in darkness have seen a great light."

And, Jesus was that beacon of hope and joy shining bright in the darkest of places.

I think it is easy to complicate the Christmas season, to complicate what will bring us joy. John's example here shows us that Jesus should be our ultimate source of joy. Joy doesn't come from chocolate pie or from the perfect Christmas card photo or from finding the best gift ever.

Joy comes from Jesus, from letting His light shine in our darkest places. As we are heading into the final days of the Christmas season, take some time to evaluate what you are trying to find joy in. Let the light of Jesus bring joy and hope into the places of stress, sadness and the feeling of being overwhelmed this Christmas.

PRAYER

As the final countdown to Christmas is upon us, it's possible that we have become slightly blinded by the busyness. Ask God to open your eyes in a fresh way today so you can see Jesus and what He has for you. Pray that you'll have a "watch your eyes!" moment.

Jessica Clements



JOY

Tuesday - December 21

Read: 1 John 2:1-11

There is one thing that I hate more than just about anything else when it comes to waking up early in the morning. That thing is turning on the light. I almost feel like I get a headache every time I am forced to do it because my eyes have become so adjusted to the dark that the light just seems unbearable. However, if we don't flip that switch, then we will continue to live in darkness. In the same way, our own sinful darkness can become extremely comfortable to live in, but it simply isn't beneficial to live in as followers of Christ.

However, there's a difference between that analogy and our own lives. We don't have to endure that pain because "the true light is already shining." We no longer have to fear the darkness or even deal with the fear of leaving it because we know that the light has already won. Jesus' life, death and Resurrection is illuminated before us so that we can find peace and rest in that fact, but even though this is true, the holidays can still be a time where a lot of that darkness can become much more prevalent in our lives. Loneliness, depression and anxiety can be at an all time high during this season, but we can always find peace in the fact that this darkness is temporary. Just like how you can't ever stop the morning from coming, the darkness of this world will forever be temporary.

The hope and light that Jesus has given us is an unstoppable, unconditional and uncontainable force that we desperately need but will never deserve. Jesus has shown us this truth through His Word and through His own life, and we can find rest in that during this holiday season. I encourage you to take a look at the things in your life that are keeping you in the dark and surrender them over to Jesus in order to find the true light that only He can give.

PRAYER

O Jesus, please shine the light of Your love, purity and grace on the darkest places of my heart. Search the hidden spaces and uncover sin that I've been unaware of. Help me see, so that I can confess these things to You, affirm Your forgiveness for me, and request the grace to truly change.

Ethan Scott



JOY

Wednesday - December 22

Read: Psalm 43:1-5

Are you entering this Christmas season feeling oppressed by our enemy? Perhaps instead of being characterized by joy, this season has left you feeling overwhelmed, discouraged, and weary...even as I write, my heart is heavy. Tears come easily as I recall the loss and heartache this season has held for our church family. My weary spirit longs to rest in the presence of the Lord, yet lately, it just seems harder to get there.

The writer of Psalm 43 could identify, for he too was feeling oppressed by the enemy and even wrestled with feeling rejected by God (vs 2). He longed to rest in the presence of the Almighty but needed help getting there as well. His emotions were unreliable, and the darkness too much to bear, so He cried out for Truth and light to lead him to the very throne of the One who could care for him (vs.3).

Perhaps it's time for us to do the same. We live in a world that has continued to dwell in darkness and prides itself in the uncertainty of Truth, claiming it's irrelevant and constricting. The irony, however, is that the Word of God is unchanging and holds the power to set us free from such darkness. It strengthens our weary spirits and arms us to fight the enemy's lies. When all else fails, it is Truth that reminds us of God's faithfulness through the generations and restores our hope. It is here that we find our JOY! (vs 4).

As Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah, he also recognized the power of Truth and light. In Isaiah 9:2, he writes, "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned." And the result was...Joy! (vs. 3). The presence of Christ changes everything and ushers us into true joy, unhindered by circumstances and steadied on the faithfulness of our loving Savior!

PRAYER

Take time to cry out to the Lord today for Truth and understanding. Spend time in His Word and watch as it powerfully leads you into His presence. Here, may you too find strength and joy as you rest in Him!

Leah Scott



JOY

Thursday - December 23 Read: John 18:28, 19:1; Hebrews 12:2-3

What does joy look like? How does it sound and feel? Maybe, like me, the images filling your mind are of kids at Christmas. The giggles, the wonder and the giddiness of it all.

Children are often tiny little reminders to look for joy. But sometimes when we see their joy, we write it off as the by-product of innocence. While we look longingly at their experience of joy, our own hearts feel weary and burdened. Maybe we know too much. Maybe the weight of responsibility is too heavy. How can we experience joy in the face of the pain of life?

Hebrews 12 tells us that Jesus endured the suffering and shame of the cross because of joy. Quite the opposite of children, Jesus knew everything. He knew the brokenness and pain of all of humanity. He carried the burden of it, took on the weight of responsibility for sin for us. And He did it because He knew the joy that would happen as a result.

After He was arrested, Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. If it was, His servants would be fighting to prevent His death. But His kingdom was a heavenly one, and so was His purpose. He told Pilate, “the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.”

Jesus knew His purpose: not just to speak the truth of God and the Kingdom, but to put it into action. The truth of God’s love is made clear in Jesus’ life. Jesus came to live among us. He took on sin and death and defeated it once and for all. Jesus made a way for us to come back to God.

While children remind us to look for joy, Jesus shows us what it looks like in the midst of life’s messiness. Jesus knew our pain, but He also knew joy because He knew His identity and purpose, and He knew the truth and hope of the Kingdom He represented.

Jesus invites us to experience this deeper joy, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in this Christmas. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we can know and experience the fullness of God’s love for us and the truth that we belong to His unchanging, unshakable Kingdom. Jesus came to testify to the truth, this is why we, a weary people, can rejoice.

PRAYER

Thank God for the truth and hope found in Jesus. Ask Him to help you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and to give you joy in all circumstances.

Molly Bunton



JOY

Friday - December 24

Read: 3 John 1:1-4

Rarely do I ever think about what 3 John says. This letter from John, or “the elder” as he calls himself, speaks not only to joy but to hospitality. It makes sense that we would read it on today, Christmas Eve. The climax of our Christmas season, celebrations and Advent is at hand! The joy of the season, which has been building and growing each day as Christmas approaches, culminates in these days where we often are hosts or hosted by family and friends.

John tells his friend Gaius that he prays for his physical wellness to be as healthy as he knows Gaius’ spiritual health is. And then John recounts hearing about how faithful Gaius has been to Christ.

The next few days, as we recount the year and share in food and fun, let’s make sure we devote time to rejoicing in the faithfulness of God and His people. One of the highlights of John’s life was getting to hear that his “children are walking in the truth” and continuing in the Way of Jesus.

Who in your life brings you joy through the way they continue to faithfully walk with Jesus? What people (and their testimonies) fill you with joy when you think of them knowing Jesus? What from your past year of life could bring joy to others because of how you chose to remain faithful as He has been faithful to you?

It is so easy for us to get caught up in the busyness, the collective crazy of the season, that it can rob us of joy. Specifically, it is easy to only be consumed with our own stories that we forget to take joy in the example of our fellow brothers and sisters. We can miss the joy God is trying to gift us.

Take a moment, even just a couple of minutes, and dwell on the joy of knowing Christ and that others know Him alongside us. Let’s not miss out on the joy that John experienced, and instead spread that joy. Let someone know today how their continual faith in Christ has given you joy.

PRAYER

Pray a prayer of gratitude for your brothers and sisters in the faith today. Thank God for the mutual joy of walking with Him. Pray with each other and pray that others would know Him in the coming year.

Garrett Holle



LIGHT

Saturday - December 25

Read: Revelation 21:22-27

Less is more. And often...

Simplicity is the source of significance.
(try saying that 5 times fast!)

That's probably a truth we need today more than any other day. This day will probably be full...full of events, friends, family, gifts, food, activity, pictures, etc. Yet, sometimes, God chooses to display His character through what is absent rather than what is present. Our text today reveals this exact truth.

This season of Advent began with the Apostle John's revelation of Jesus as the Word of God, and even God Himself. Now, we conclude this season with the Revelation given to John. So much of the entire book of Revelation can be put under the categories of "then I saw" and "then I heard." The Revelation to which John gives witness was something he personally experienced through his senses. So as we get close to the end of this book, we should be struck by what he did NOT see. Enter Revelation 21:22. Read it again if you have to.

He doesn't see a temple since God, Himself, fills that void. For all of time, the sun and moon had provided the light we needed, but now they can take the rest of eternity off! The reason for this is because the Lamb is the lamp. He fills that void. He is the light! And I love how the gates of heaven will never need to be shut since it will never be dark. In the first century, city gates were closed at night for safety, but in the Heavenly city, there will never even be the need for this. We are safe forever!

Christ alone is our source. Everything else is simply a reflection of Him. According to Colossians 2:17, so much of what we experience now is simply a shadow of what's coming, but Christ is the substance. On this Christmas Day, we remember Christ as the Light. Rather than filling our celebrations today with what won't satisfy, let's allow Christ alone to be our source, our substance, our light. And may we simply join the theme of eternity: Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!

Merry Christmas! See the appendix for additional Scriptures to carry you through the next 12 days...all the way to Epiphany!

PRAYER

Ask that God would help you to keep Jesus as the substance and source of light in your Christmas celebration. Pray for those who attempt to fill their lives with won't satisfy and request God's help to see Jesus as their only hope, peace, love, joy and light.

Corey Scott

APPENDIX

Epiphany

In order to encourage you to continue the rhythm of daily Bible engagement, use the simple guide on the following page to lead you through the 12 Days of Christmas... all the way to Epiphany!

Liturgies

The following liturgies come from [Every Moment Holy](#) written by Douglas Kaine McKelvey.

We selected a few from his book that may help you honor the traditions of the Christmas season.

12 Days of Christmas - Epiphany Scripture Readings

The word, "Epiphany," means manifestation or revelation. This celebration on January 6 is the culmination following Christmas where we link the coming of the Messiah to His coming for all peoples, as revealed through the account of the Magi coming to worship the child (Matthew 2:11-12).

Praise God that Jesus did not only come for the Jews, but for Gentiles too! Enjoy encountering the nearness of Jesus through these 12 Days of Christmas, so that when January 6 comes, we can clearly see Jesus once again as our Messiah!

Simply read the text assigned for each day, and take time to continue the pattern you've followed through Advent, but instead of reading a devotional thought, simply consider two things:

- 1) LOOK - What do you notice about God from this passage?
- 2) LIVE - How can you live based on this passage? Close with prayer asking for God's help to apply the text.

December 26, 2021 - Matthew 2:1-12

December 27, 2021 - Luke 4:14-30

December 28, 2021 - Luke 6:27-36

December 29, 2021 - Luke 7:1-10

December 30, 2021 - Luke 10:1-24

December 31, 2021 - Luke 10:25-37

January 1, 2022 - Luke 15:1-31

January 2, 2022 - Genesis 1-3

January 3, 2022 - Genesis 4-7

January 4, 2022 - Genesis 8-11

January 5, 2022 - Genesis 12-15

January 6, 2022 (Epiphany) - Genesis 16-18

A Liturgy to Mark the Start of the Christmas Season

Leader: As we prepare our house for the coming Christmas season, we would also prepare our hearts for the returning Christ.

People: **You came once for your people, O Lord, and you will come for us again.**

Though there was no room at the inn to receive you upon your first arrival,
**We would prepare you room
here in our hearts
and here in our home,
Lord Christ.**

As we decorate and celebrate, we do so to mark the memory of your redemptive movement into our broken world, O God.

Our glittering ornaments and Christmas trees, Our festive carols, our sumptuous feasts -

By these small tokens we affirm that something amazing has happened in time and space -

That God, on a particular night, in a particular place, so many years ago, was born to us, an infant King, our Prince of Peace.

Our wreaths and ribbons and colored lights, our giving of gifts, our parties with friends - these have never been ends in themselves.

They are but small ways in which we repeat that sounding joy first proclaimed by angels in the skies near Bethlehem.

In view of such great tidings of love announced to us, and to all people, how can we not be moved to praise and celebration in this Christmas season?

As we decorate our tree, and as we feast and laugh and sing together, we are **rehearsing our coming joy!**

We are making ready to receive the one who has already, with open arms, received us!

**We would prepare you room
here in our hearts
and here in our homes,
Lord Christ.**

Now we celebrate your first coming, Immanuel, even as we long for your return.
O Prince of Peace, our elder brother, return soon. We miss you so!

Amen.

A Liturgy for Setting Up a Christmas Tree

Leader: O Immanuel, we would find in our traditions these reminders of the wonders of your love:

First let this fragrant tree, cut down and then raised beneath our roof, remind us how once upon a time, the High King of Heaven consented to be cut off from the glories that were his birthright, and descended instead to dwell with us in a broken world, beset by harm and evil.

People: Praise to you, Immanuel!

Next, let the hard wood of the trunk and the outstretched branches remind us how that same Heavenly King who had entered our world on that distant night, would soon act to redeem his creation and his people in it, though it would require the stretching out of his arms upon a cross of wood - his death for our life.

Praise to you, Immanuel!

Then, let these evergreen boughs be a reminder of his mighty triumph over death and hell, of his resurrection unto a life eternal which will never fade - an eternal life which he has also secured for us. There is no greater gift!

Praise to you, Immanuel!

Finally, as we drape the branches of this Christmas tree in glittering finery and sparkling lights, let us imagine Christ our King, seated upon his heavenly throne, arrayed in the royal raiments of his glory. And when at last we set the star atop the tree, let us imagine Christ crowned in his splendor, and all creatures in heaven and on earth bowing before him, crying "Holy! Holy! Holy!"

Glory to you, Immanuel!

Worthy are you, O Lamb of God, to receive all glory, honor, and praise.

Glory to you, Lord Christ!

A Liturgy for the First Snow

The snowfall is observed in reflective silence before all join the leader in this prayer.

**O Christ, King of Snow,
we bless you for bidding this blanket
of white to cover us in holy hush,
that our hearts might be quieted
at the sight, that we might sense
the emptiness of canvas
over which your Spirit broods,
and upon which you would
create
and recreate
our hearts in the image of the one
whose word first spoke snow into existence.**

Amen.

A Liturgy to Begin a Purposeful Gathering

Leader: And so we are gathered here, uniquely in all of history, we particular people in this singular time and place.

People: Accomplish your purposes among us, O God.

Tune our hearts to the voice of your Spirit.

Wake us to be present to you and to one another in these shared hours we are given.

For it is you, O Lord, who have so gathered us from our various places,
and you alone who know our hearts and our needs.

Among us are some who arrive anxious, some who are lonely, some who suffer pain or sorrow.

May we in our joys find grace to enter the sorrows of others.

Among us are some who arrive rejoicing,
Hearts made light by good news, good health, glad anticipation.

May we in our sorrows find grace to embrace the joys of others.

Let us prize these moments and care for one another deeply - for each of us, and our relationships to one another, are precious and fleeting.

Amen.

Let us prize these moments and care for one another deeply - for each of us, and our relationships to one another, are precious and eternal.

Amen.

Together: Breathe upon our gathering, O Spirit of God.

Grant each of us a place to humbly receive and to faithfully serve, that we might know in this brief gathering a foretaste of that greater communion yet to come.

O Father, enlarge our hearts.

O Spirit, expand our vision.

O Christ, establish your kingdom among us.

Be at work even now, O Lord.

May your will, in us, in these hours, be accomplished.

Amen.

A Liturgy for the Preparation of a Meal

Leader: O Bread of Life,

People: **Meet us in the making of this meal.**

As we perform the various tasks of washing, chopping, sifting, mixing, simmering, baking, and boiling,

let those little acts coalesce into an embodied liturgy of service -

an outworking of love offered for your purposes, that through us, your tender care might be translated into the comforting and cheery language of nurturing food and drink offered for the benefit of others.

Let us invest in this preparation a lovingkindness toward those who will partake.

Let us craft this meal with a care as would befit any endeavor touching eternity.

Meet us in the making of this meal, O Lord, and make of it something more than a mere nourishment for the body.

Make it the center of a sheltered space where grace freely flows.

Let the slow savoring of these foods give pause to those who will soon partake, prompting them to linger long at table, taking rest from the labors of the day, engaging in good conversation.

Let the comforting qualities of the dishes we prepare, become catalysts for a rich fellowship, a warm consolation, and a fruitful increase of holy affections.

May this meal serve to remind those who share its pleasures of the goodness and the hope that infuses all creation.

Unto that end, let us labor creatively, with imaginations engaged, knowing that we are cooks in the kitchen - yes -

but we are also agents of a deep eternity, whose prepared meals might feed more than the body, nourishing also the hearts and hopes of those sometimes-weary souls who are well-served by our labors.

Amen.