



MAGNIFY THE LORD
THE SONG OF MARY
AN ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Stephanie Newman
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Magnify the Lord: The Song of Mary for Advent and Christmas

by Pastor Steph Newman

*And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

-Luke 1:46-55

Advent Invitation: Magnify the Lord-The Song of Mary for Advent and Christmas

Dear Church Family,

This time of year can whirl by in a blur - calendars full, lists growing, events stacking up one after another. Even here at church, our days are joyfully busy: gingerbread houses to build, cookies to decorate, and yes - even a visit from Santa!

But in the midst of it all, I want to invite you to pause.
To breathe.
To remember why we do any of it in the first place.

Advent is the Church's gentle protest against a rushed world.
It invites us to slow down, to breathe, and to remember that holy things take time - that **hope, peace, joy, and love** are gifts that grow in the waiting.
We don't rush to Christmas; we pause to make space for the miracle that's still unfolding among us.

At the heart of this season is a song - **Mary's Song**, known in Scripture as the *Magnificat*.
After the angel told her she would carry God's Son, Mary's soul overflowed with praise:
"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

It's a song of trust in the face of uncertainty.

A song of courage from someone young, poor, and overlooked - who dared to believe that God was working through her.

It's a song that proclaims **a love strong enough** to lift the lowly, scatter the proud, and fill the hungry with good things.

The Magnificat is more than poetry - it's a revolution sung in the key of grace.

This year's daily devotional, ***Magnify the Lord: The Song of Mary for Advent and Christmas***, follows the unfolding story of that song - of the young woman whose "yes" changed everything. Through Mary's eyes, we'll rediscover:

- the **hope** that begins in silence,
- the **peace** that grows in community,
- the **love** that turns the world upside down,
- and the **joy** that bursts forth in the birth of Christ.

This devotional begins on **Sunday, November 30**, in which you will be invited to take a few quiet moments daily with Scripture, prayer, and blessing to help you center your heart on what truly matters.

I invite you to make time for these moments... to let the Spirit speak to you in this sacred season of waiting.

As we journey together through these days of preparation, may Mary's song become our own - a song of **faith** that trusts when we cannot see, a song of **love** that reaches where fear once lived, that brings **hope**, a song of **joy** that magnifies the Lord in every ordinary day.

So dear Church, let's walk together toward the manger - toward the promise that our God is Emmanuel - God with us, still.

With hope and grace,

Pastor Steph

Advent Devotional: The Song of Mary

Days 1–14: The Annunciation and The Visitation

The first part of the devotional series walks verse by verse through Luke 1:26–45, inviting you to listen with Mary, hope with her, and discover the peace born of God's presence.

Day 1 – The Silence Before the Song sunday, November 30th

Scripture: *Luke 1:26–28 (NRSV)*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

Opening Prayer

God of hope and holy waiting, quiet our hearts as we enter this season of Advent. Teach us to watch, to listen, and to wait with expectation for Your coming.

Amen.

Reflection

Advent begins in silence.

Before shepherds hurry or angels sing, there is an ordinary village, a young woman, and a visitor.

God often begins in the quiet.

Hope starts not with noise or power, but with presence: *"The Lord is with you."*

That is the heartbeat of Advent. God shows up, not with spectacle or sound, but with stillness. The holy often begins in the hush - in the pause between what was and what is about to be.

Mary wasn't expecting a divine interruption. She was just living her life - and God met her there. I wonder how often we miss God because we fill every space with sound, with hurry, with striving. But sometimes, God chooses the quiet.

Advent is our invitation to slow down and listen again - to let God's nearness surprise us in the small, in the ordinary, in the things we too often overlook. As this holy season begins, let us together be reminded that God is already whispering:

"I am with you."

So take a deep breath. Let the noise settle. Pause in silence.

May we realize somewhere in the stillness, the miracle is already unfolding.

Practice for Today

Take five minutes of silence today.

Whisper: *"The Lord is with me."* Repeat it.

-Let that promise sink in.

Challenge Question

Where might God be showing up quietly in your ordinary life?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Come, Lord Jesus, into our quiet.

Slow our racing minds, calm our anxious hearts,

and teach us to notice Your presence in every ordinary place.

Amen.

Dear ones,

May your heart be tuned to God's voice this Advent,

and may taking the time to make space for silence become the doorway to holy encounter.

-Pastor Steph

Day 2 – Favored One? Monday, December 1st

Scripture: *Luke 1:29–30 (NRSV)*

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

Opening Prayer

God of grace, when we doubt our worth, remind us that we are loved.
Call us by name and assure us we are Yours.
Amen.

Reflection

Mary was confused. How could she be “favored?” She was young, poor, from a nowhere town. Nothing about her situation screamed *special*. And yet - this is exactly how God works: choosing the unexpected, naming the overlooked, lifting up those the world forgets.

The word “favor” sounds fancy, doesn’t it? It makes us think of being impressive or accomplished or holy. But divine favor is not about earning or achieving. It’s about *belonging*. It’s grace that chooses you before you ever have a chance to prove yourself.

Mary didn’t do anything to *deserve* this. She simply existed - and that was enough for God to look at her and say, “I choose you.”

And the same, dear ones, is true for you today.

You don’t have to have it all together to be loved. You don’t have to achieve some kind of “holiness” factor to be called beloved. God’s favor isn’t a gold star for good behavior - it’s the steady, unshakable truth that you are seen, known, and chosen right where you are. Mind blowing, isn’t it!?

If you’ve ever looked at your life and thought, “*Why me?*” or maybe even, “*Why not me?*” - remember Mary. God’s favor doesn’t always look like success; it looks like presence. It looks like the quiet strength to trust that God is doing something sacred in your ordinary.

Today, hear that same whisper Gabriel spoke long ago - not to a perfect saint, but to a very human heart:

“Do not be afraid. **You** have found favor with God.”

You don’t have to earn it.
You just have to receive it.

So receive it today, dear ones.

Practice for Today

It may seem silly, but go with me on this one....

Write down the words: “*I am God’s favored one.*”

Put it where you’ll see it today - on your mirror, your dashboard, or your desk. Let it interrupt the lies that say you’re not enough.

Challenge Question

How might your day change if you really lived as someone chosen and loved by God?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God who names us beloved, help us trust Your favor when we feel unworthy.
Let Your love quiet our fear and remind us who we are.
Amen.

Blessing:

May you hear your name spoken by God in love today,
May you know you are favored...
and may that knowledge and love settle into the deepest parts of your being -
until you believe it's true.

With you on the journey,
- Pastor Steph

Day 3 – Do Not Be Afraid

Tuesday, December 2nd

Scripture: *Luke 1:30 (NRSV)*

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

Opening Prayer

God of courage, speak peace into our fears today.
Remind us that You are near - that we are never alone.
Amen.

Reflection

Yesterday we touched on this verse but from a different perspective. We dove in deep to what it means to be "favored" by God. Today I want to talk about the first part of that verse, "Do not be afraid." Easier said than done.

Hear this: In almost every divine calling in scripture there is fear woven in...AND nearly every time God shows up the first words spoken are the same: *"Do not be afraid."*

That phrase isn't a scolding; it's an embrace. God doesn't shame Mary for being afraid - God *meets* her in it. And isn't that just like our God? Hope doesn't erase fear; it stands beside it.

When Gabriel spoke those words to Mary, he wasn't promising her that everything would be easy - only that she wouldn't face it alone. "Do not be afraid" was less of a command and more of a comfort. It was God saying, *"You don't have to carry this by yourself."*

To experience fear is to be human. It's what happens when the holy interrupts our plans or when life shifts in ways we didn't anticipate. Hear me clearly, dear ones: even the faithful tremble. But courage doesn't mean we stop being afraid - it means we choose to trust God anyway. In the midst of our fear may we remember that our God will never leave nor forsake us, even in the midst of our ever-shifting circumstances.

So today, maybe you're standing at the edge of something new, uncertain what comes next. Maybe fear has been your quiet companion lately - showing up in the middle of the night or whispering "what ifs" into your prayers. Hear this truth: God is with you there too.

For surely, the same God who promised to be with Mary, promises to be with you too- not because you're fearless, but **because that's who God is.**

Practice for Today

Acknowledge your fears...this is not a sign of failure. List them in your head. Now also remind yourself that God is there with you. Breathe deeply and pray, *"I will not fear. God is with me."* Repeat it slowly until your heartbeat begins to match its rhythm.

Challenge Question

What would change in your heart and mind if you trusted that courage doesn't mean the absence of fear, but remembering the nearness of God in the midst of it?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of peace,
Quiet our anxieties with Your presence.
When fear rises, let Your love rise higher still.
Hold us steady in Your promise: we are never alone.
Amen.

Blessing:

If you are struggling today, may Christ's hope steady your trembling heart,
and may His peace walk beside you into whatever comes next.

With love,
- Pastor Steph

Day 4 – Nothing Is Impossible

Wednesday, December 3rd

Scripture: *Luke 1:31–33 (NRSV)*

*And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.
He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.
He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom will have no end.*

Opening Prayer

Almighty God,
Today we ask that you stretch our vision beyond what seems possible.
Plant hope where we cannot imagine a way.
Amen.

Reflection

The angel's words must have sounded impossible. A young girl in Nazareth - unwed, unknown - being told she would carry the Son of God? Nothing in her life had prepared her for this. And yet, **this is the way of Advent hope: God speaks promise into places that seem least likely to hold it.**

Mary's world, like ours, was full of limitations - social, economic, personal. She could have said, "That's too much," or "You must have the wrong person," but God's invitation was not dependent on

her résumé. It was built on God's power to do the impossible through ordinary lives...and you've heard me say it before, "Our God loves working through the ordinary, Amen?!"

When we hear these verses, we often focus on the miracle itself - the child, the kingdom, the eternity of His reign. But there's another miracle unfolding quietly underneath: that Mary ***believed it could happen***. That's faith. She dared to imagine that God could do what had never been done before. She had courage to trust God in a time of uncertainty.

What if that's still true for us?

What if Advent is a reminder that God is not constrained by our timelines, our logic, or even our doubts? Where we see dead ends, God sees a doorway. Where we see endings, God sees resurrection. Where we see impossible, God sees opportunity to show up, and gently surprise us again and again and again.

Sometimes, the most faithful thing we can do is whisper, "I don't see how, but I believe You can." Trust that the God who holds you, also knows how to carry you through...anything. That's where hope begins to take root - not in our certainty, but in our trust that the One who spoke the stars into being is still speaking possibility into our impossibilities.

Practice for Today

Name one "impossible" place in your life.
Pray over it and invite God to bring light there.
Ask for the courage to believe in what you cannot yet see.

Challenge Question

What would it look like to live today as if God's possibilities are greater than our limitations?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of the "impossible, "
Let Your kingdom come in us.
Do what only You can do - bring hope where there's been despair,
and life where we thought all was lost.
Amen.

Blessing:

May hope stretch your vision today,
and may the God who makes all things possible open your heart to wonder again.
With faith,

- Pastor Steph

Day 5 – How Can This Be? Thursday, December 4th

Scripture: *Luke 1:34–35 (NRSV)*

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God."

Opening Prayer

God of mystery, meet us in our questions.
Teach us to trust Your Spirit even when we cannot see the whole picture.
Amen.

Reflection

Yesterday we talked about Mary believing it could happen. But remember she's also human...Mary's first response to the angel is so honest: "*How can this be?*" She doesn't pretend to understand how it can happen, or hide her confusion. So, she asks. How beautiful is that example to us? To ask God "How can this be?" When we do not understand. Her question is not a lack of faith; it's faith in conversation. She brings her uncertainty right to God-and God meets her there.

Church, hear this clearly: faith does not mean never Questioning of wondering. It means daring to ask the holy questions and still staying open to the answer, even when we can't comprehend how. It means trusting God to make a way. And what's more beautiful? God does not silence Mary's question. God honors it with presence: "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you.*"

That is God's pattern again and again. When our plans make no sense, when we cannot see a way forward, God doesn't hand us a map. God gives us Himself. The Spirit- the advocate/helper comes- not to explain everything, but to walk with us through it, to guide our hearts and minds.

Every "How can this be?" we whisper becomes a holy prayer. Every "How, O Lord?" becomes an invitation for the Spirit to draw near. Sometimes the overshadowing comes as comfort, sometimes as courage, sometimes as a quiet knowing that we are held in something larger than our understanding. She helps us to trust God's providence.

Maybe that's what trust really looks like: not having all the answers, but choosing to stay in the conversation. To keep showing up. To let God fill in the mystery with mercy.

So ask your questions. Bring your "How can this be?" straight to the One who still creates life where none seemed possible. God is not threatened by your wonder. In fact, I'd say, that like in Mary's situation, it is often where the miracle begins.

Practice for Today

Bring one unanswered question to God today.
Don't rush to fix it-just hold it in prayer and invite the Spirit to sit with you there.

Challenge Question

What question or mystery in your life might become a doorway for the Holy Spirit to move through?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Spirit of God,
Overshadow us with Your peace.
In our questions and our confusion, remind us that You are near.
Turn our wonder into worship and our uncertainty into trust.
Amen.

Blessing:

May your doubts become openings for God's Spirit to move,
and may your heart rest in the mystery that holds you.

With peace,

- Pastor Steph

Day 6 – You Are Not Alone

Friday, December 5th

Scripture: *Luke 1:36 (NRSV)*

And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

Opening Prayer

God who provides companions for the journey,
thank You for reminding us that we never walk alone.
When we feel isolated or unseen,
send us an Elizabeth - or make us one for someone else.
Amen.

Reflection

After all the shock and awe of Gabriel's message, the angel gives Mary something so deeply human - a *name*.

Elizabeth.

A real person. Someone who will understand.

It's as if God is saying, "You don't have to carry this by yourself."

That's grace in its simplest form - connection. God calls us into something sacred while surrounding us with people who can hold us, walk with us, and remind us of who we are when the road gets hard.

Mary's story could have been one of loneliness and misunderstanding. But before she even says yes, God has already placed community in her path. When Mary hurries to Elizabeth, she doesn't just find confirmation of the angel's words; she finds kinship - a companion whose own miracle mirrors her own. Together, their joy magnifies what each could not hold alone.

God still works that way. None of us are meant to carry faith in isolation. We need each other - to listen, to laugh, to cry, to pray; to remind one another that God is still moving even when it's hard to see.

Sometimes your Elizabeth will be someone who's been where you are, who can say, "Me too." Other times, *you* will be the one called to stand beside someone and whisper hope back into their weary heart. Either way, it's holy ground.

You are not alone, dear one. A mentor of mine once said, “You may *feel* alone, (untruth) but you are *not alone*.” (truth) God is always with us, and we are part of this community of faith together. Lastly, I want you to remember that you are part of a story that’s bigger than you - this beautiful story of faith - a story that binds us to one another and to a God who delights in sending us company for the road.

Practice for Today

Reach out to someone who encourages your faith.
Send a text, write a note, or simply say, “I’m grateful for you.”
Let them know they are not alone, either.

Challenge Question

Who has been an “Elizabeth” in your story - and who might need you to be one for them right now?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of companionship, thank You for the people who remind us of Your love.
Make us good friends to others - steady, kind, and full of grace.
Help us carry each other’s burdens with hope and tenderness.
Amen.

Blessing:

May you find joy in the gift of community,
and may your presence become a reminder to someone else
that they are never alone.

With gratitude,
- Pastor Steph

Day 7 – Nothing Will Be Impossible with God

Saturday, December 6th

Scripture: *Luke 1:37 (NRSV)*

For nothing will be impossible with God.

Opening Prayer

God of all possibility,
breathe courage into our doubt and hope into our weariness.
Remind us that Your power is not limited by our fear,
and that Your promises never fail.
Amen.

Reflection

There it is - one short sentence that holds the entire story together:

For nothing will be impossible with God.

It's the kind of line that sounds simple when everything is going right, but much harder to believe when life feels uncertain or prayers seem unanswered. Still, that's where it means the most.

These words aren't a motivational slogan. They aren't meant to dismiss our pain or deny reality. They are a declaration of divine faithfulness - that God's imagination stretches farther than ours ever could.

Mary's story, like Elizabeth's, reminds us that God specializes in the improbable. The barren conceives. The virgin bears life. The lowly are lifted. The hungry are filled. What looks like the end becomes the beginning of redemption.

When Gabriel said these words, he wasn't promising Mary a smooth path. He was promising her a *faithful God*. The impossible wasn't that her life would be easy; it was that the Holy One of the universe was about to enter it on a very real and intimate level- and change everything.

We tend to limit what God can do because we measure divine possibility by human logic. But the Advent story calls us to think differently. It invites us to look at our own impossible places - **the relationships we think can't heal**, the wounds that feel too deep, the hope that seems too far gone - and dare to whisper, *"Maybe God's not done yet."*

This verse isn't about wishful thinking. It's about holy trust. Because when God is present, even the unthinkable can become the birthplace of grace, and Praise Almighty God for that!

Practice for Today

Look at one situation in your life that feels "impossible."

Name it in prayer and simply say, "God, I trust You here."

Don't try to fix it; truly trust that God is in it and with you, and already working it for your good.

Then leave space - silence - for God to speak possibility into it.

Challenge Question

Where have you seen God make a way where there was none - and how might that memory strengthen your faith now?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of miracles,

Thank You for meeting us in our limits with Your limitless love.

Help us to see the impossible as an opportunity for Your glory.

Give us faith that outlasts our fear.

Amen.

Blessing:

May your heart stay open to the wild, beautiful ways of God,
and may you carry quiet confidence that nothing - not even this -
is impossible for the One who holds you.

With steadfast hope,

- **Pastor Steph**

Day 8 – Let It Be with Me Sunday, December 7th

Scripture: *Luke 1:38 (NRSV)*

Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Opening Prayer

God of invitation,
teach us to trust Your plans even when we cannot see their shape.
Give us Mary’s courage to say yes to You,
and the humility to let Your Word take root in us.
Amen.

Reflection

With just a few words, Mary steps from wonder into willingness: *“Let it be with me.”*

It’s one of the most courageous sentences in all of Scripture.

She doesn’t ask for assurances, timelines, or proof.

She simply surrenders - not out of resignation, but out of trust. Her “Yes” isn’t a loss of control; it’s a leap into grace.

Mary’s faith is active, not passive. She offers her whole self to the possibility that God is doing something new through her. And that is the heart of discipleship - not perfect understanding, but a willing spirit.

Our own “Yes” to God often doesn’t feel as grand as Mary’s. It might be a quiet decision to forgive, a gentle act of kindness when we’d rather turn away, a moment of obedience when we’d prefer comfort. But each of those is a little echo of Mary’s voice, saying, *“Let it be with me.”*

To say yes to God is to believe that God’s story through us is still being written - and that even when the angel departs, the promise remains.

Practice for Today

When you face something uncertain today, pause and pray: *“Let it be with me, Lord.”*

Let those words be your anchor and your act of trust. The God who holds the Universe, holds you too.

Challenge Question

Where might God be inviting you to say “Yes” - even if you don’t yet see the whole path ahead?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God who calls and creates,
teach us to respond with open hands and courageous hearts.
Let Your Word take flesh in us today through our actions and our trust.
Amen.

Blessing:

May you find peace in your “Yes,”
strength in your surrender,
and the joy of knowing that God is writing something beautiful with your life.

With grace,

- Pastor Steph

Day 9 – Mary Set Out and Went with Haste Monday, December 8th

Scripture: *Luke 1:39 (NRSV)*

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country.

Opening Prayer

God of movement and meaning,
when You stir our hearts, give us courage to respond.
Send us running toward the places where Your love is waiting.
Amen.

Reflection

The first thing Mary does after saying yes to God is **move**.

Her obedience propels her toward community, not away from it. She doesn't isolate; she goes - *with haste*.

Faith often calls for movement before we have clarity. We don't always know where we're going; we just know Who's leading. Mary's journey through the hill country wasn't just physical - it was spiritual. She was walking toward someone who could understand, someone whose own story held echoes of her own.

God meets us on the road, not just at the destination. When we move in faith - even when it feels uncertain - we discover that grace is already waiting up ahead.

Practice for Today

Think of one step of faith you've been hesitant to take. Take it today - even a small one.

Challenge Question

Where might God be calling you to **move** in faith, even before you have all the answers?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God who calls us onward,
give us the courage to go where You lead,
and the grace to find You in the journey.
Amen.

Blessing:

May your feet follow the stirrings of your heart,
and may every step draw you nearer to grace.

With hope,
- **Pastor Steph**

Day 10 – A Door Opens Tuesday, December 9th

Scripture: *Luke 1:40 (NRSV)*

She entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

Opening Prayer

God of welcome,
thank You for doors that open,
for people who make space for joy and for us.
Amen.

Reflection

Mary arrives at Elizabeth's home, and the first thing she finds is **welcome**.
No judgment, no confusion, just embrace. Church, we are good at this one..in knowing that the sacred often begins with simple hospitality - one heart making room for another.

When we enter someone's story, or they enter ours, we carry holy potential with us. Mary carried the Christ-child; Elizabeth carried the prophet who would prepare His way. Both carried hope, and both made space for the other's miracle.

Advent invites us to do the same: to open the doors of our hearts, our homes, our church and our lives - so that grace has room to breathe, and sacred meetings and moments can become apparent.

Practice for Today

Offer hospitality to someone today - even in a small way.
A kind word, a listening ear, a moment of presence.

Challenge Question

What doors might God be inviting you to open - literally or figuratively - this week? How
can you practice radical welcome and hospitality as our faith calls us to?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of open hearts,
teach us to welcome as You welcome -
with warmth, with compassion, with joy.
Amen.

Blessing:

May every threshold you cross today become holy ground, may all you welcome feel the welcome of Christ's love in you.

With peace,
- Pastor Steph

Day 11 – The Child Leaped in Her Womb

Wednesday, December 10th

Scripture: *Luke 1:41 (NRSV)*

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit,
fill us with the same joy that leaped within Elizabeth,
that our hearts might recognize Your presence in every encounter.
Amen.

Reflection

Before a single word is spoken, the Spirit is already at work.

The moment Mary's voice reaches Elizabeth's ears, life responds. John the Baptist leaps in his mother's womb - the one who will one day prepare the way for Jesus already recognizing the One he will proclaim. ***Joy recognizes Joy. Promise meets Promise.***

This is the mystery of faith - *that something deep within us can sense God before we see the evidence.* Elizabeth's unborn child leaps for joy, not because he understands, but because he *knows*. Sometimes our souls leap before our minds catch up. That's what the Spirit does - awakens joy, stirs recognition, and reminds us that God's presence can be felt as much as it's understood.

When we are in the presence of God's movement - in worship, in kindness, in quiet conversation - our spirits respond before we can explain it. Something within us says, "This is holy ground." Today I want to encourage you, don't let your thinking/logical brain steal that joy. "Leap" for joy when you encounter God.

And maybe that's the invitation of this story - to trust the leaping. To listen to the quiet, wordless joy that rises when the Spirit brushes past our hearts. To notice the moments when something deep within us says, *God is here.*

Practice for Today

Pay attention to what makes your heart "leap."
What brings that spark of joy or wonder? That may be where God is drawing near.

Challenge Question

When was the last time you felt joy rise up unexpectedly - and could it have been the Spirit's quiet nudge?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Spirit of Joy,
wake us up to Your movement within us.
Let our hearts leap toward what is holy.
Amen.

Blessing:

May joy find you today in unexpected places,
and may your spirit recognize the nearness of God.
With absolute joy for the mystery of our faith,
- Pastor Steph

Day 12 – Blessed Are You Among Women Thursday, December 11th

Scripture: *Luke 1:42 (NRSV)*

She exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

Opening Prayer

God who blesses and calls us blessed,
teach us to speak blessing freely and to receive it with humility.
Amen.

Reflection

Elizabeth's first instinct is to bless.
She doesn't compare, question, or diminish. She doesn't center herself or ask for proof.
Instead, she lifts Mary up - and in doing so, lifts her own spirit too.

There's power in blessing.
To bless someone is to recognize the divine spark within them and call it forth.
It's an act of holy attention - seeing someone not just as they are, but as God is shaping them to become.

When Elizabeth blesses Mary, she affirms what God is already doing:
"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."
In that moment, Mary's trembling turns to trust.
Elizabeth's words become shelter - a place where Mary's calling can rest and grow.

That's what blessing does: it steadies trembling hearts.
It reminds us we are seen, known, and loved by God.
And it multiplies - because when we bless others, our own souls expand.

Advent invites us to live this way - with open mouths and open hearts, naming the good we see in others, choosing encouragement over envy, compassion over comparison.

When we speak blessing, when we affirm God's work in someone else's life, we echo God's own voice, declaring that grace is already here - alive in us, around us, between us.
In a world that too often wounds with words, blessing becomes a quiet form of resistance.
It's planting seeds of joy; it's how we make space for hope to grow.

Practice for Today

Offer a spoken blessing to someone today.
Tell them what you see in them that is good and holy.

Challenge Question

Whose faith or kindness has blessed your life - and how might you thank ("bless") them this week?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of all blessing,
let our words build others up and not tear them down.
May we speak life, joy, and hope into every conversation.
Amen.

Blessing:

May the words you speak today become seeds of blessing that take root in others.
With love,
- Pastor Steph

Day 13 – Why Has This Happened to Me? Friday, December 12th

Scripture: *Luke 1:43 (NRSV)*

And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?

Opening Prayer

Humble God,
thank You for meeting us in our unworthiness with grace.
Teach us to receive Your presence with awe and gratitude.
Amen.

Reflection

Elizabeth's question isn't about doubt - it's about wonder.
She can hardly believe that God would draw so near to her.
Her words are not, "Why me?" in despair, but, "Why me?" in astonishment.

That's what grace feels like sometimes - unbelievable, undeserved, and yet entirely real.
It disarms us. It softens the edges of our self-sufficiency and opens our hearts to mystery.
God's presence has a way of showing up where we least expect it,
to people who never thought themselves worthy of it -
to those who thought the time had passed, the hope had faded, or the prayer had gone unanswered.

Elizabeth and Mary stand as living proof that God's timing is not ours.
One carries the prophet who will prepare the way;
the other carries the Savior who *is* the way.
One is old, the other young, both chosen, both seen -
and together they remind us that there is no such thing as being too early or too late for grace.

This moment between them is more than a visit - it's *worship*.
The older woman blesses the younger; the younger magnifies the Lord.
Faith deepens not in isolation, but in shared awe.
In that sacred meeting, humility meets joy,
and wonder becomes a language that both can speak.

Perhaps that's what worship really is: **wonder made audible.**

It's the gasp that escapes when we realize God is nearer than we thought.

It's the song that rises unbidden from a heart full of gratitude.

It's the whispered "Why me?" that translates into "Thank You, good and gracious God"

And maybe the invitation of this story is to let that same wonder rise in us -
to ***stop explaining grace and start marveling at it.***

To let our "Why me?" become a hymn of astonished praise.

Practice for Today

Pause three times today and whisper, "Why me, Lord?"

Not from doubt - but from gratitude. Let wonder and marvel take root.

Challenge Question

When was the last time you were truly astonished by God's grace toward you? Stop and notice with gratitude in your heart.

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of wonder,

thank You for noticing us, for choosing us, for loving us.

Keep us humble enough to be amazed by You again and again.

Amen.

Blessing:

May awe be your prayer today,

and may wonder open your eyes to grace in every place you stand.

With love and wonder,

- **Pastor Steph**

Day 14 – Blessed Is She Who Believed

Saturday, December 13th

Scripture: *Luke 1:45 (NRSV)*

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.

Opening Prayer

Faithful God,

when doubts whisper and delays discourage,

remind us that Your word never fails.

Help us to hold fast to Your promises

until they blossom into joy.

Amen.

Reflection

Elizabeth's words to Mary are a benediction - a blessing for belief.
She doesn't praise Mary's perfection or her understanding; she blesses her *trust*.

"Blessed is she who believed..."

It's the kind of faith that doesn't demand proof, only presence. The kind that holds onto God's word even when it doesn't make sense yet.

Belief, in Scripture, is never just intellectual assent; it's lived trust. It's saying yes and then walking it out one faithful step at a time. Mary didn't know the full story - but she believed that God's story was worth trusting, and that God was walking the way with her.

And that's what makes her blessed.
Not because her life would be easy (it wouldn't be).
Not because her questions vanished (they didn't).
But because she leaned into God's promise anyway.

Our own belief often feels fragile, but so did Mary's - and still, it was enough. Remember:
God doesn't ask us for flawless faith, just a willing one. Even the smallest act of trust becomes sacred ground when we offer it in love.

So today, hold onto what God has spoken to you - even if it's still unfolding.
Believe that the same Spirit who overshadowed Mary is still moving through you.
And know this: the fulfillment will come, in God's time, in God's way, through God's grace.

Practice for Today

Write down one promise or truth about God that gives you hope.
Keep it where you can see it this week as a reminder to believe.

Challenge Question

What promise has God placed on your heart that you're still waiting to see fulfilled - and how might you nurture faith in the waiting?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God who keeps every promise,
thank You for calling us blessed even when our faith wavers.
Help us believe that what You begin, You will bring to completion.
Amen.

Blessing:

May faith rise in you like a steady flame,
and may your believing open space for God's promises to take root and grow.

With hope in the waiting,
- Pastor Steph

Advent Devotional: The Song of Mary *The Magnificat*, Luke 1:46–55

Days 15–25: The Magnificat - Mary's Song of Hope

This next portion of our Advent journey walks verse by verse through *Luke 1:46–55*, as Mary's heart overflows into song.

Having received the promise and found companionship in Elizabeth, Mary now gives voice to the joy that has been forming within her - a joy not rooted in ease, but in faith. Her song is a revolution of grace, a proclamation that God's mercy upends the world's expectations and lifts the lowly with love.

Over these next days, we'll listen line by line to *The Magnificat*, letting its melody shape our own hearts this Advent. It's a song of praise born from courage, a song that reminds us that even in uncertain times, God is still at work - still scattering fear, still filling the hungry, still keeping promises.

May these reflections invite you to pause, praise, and proclaim the goodness of the God who remembers His people and magnifies love through ordinary lives.

Day 15 – My Soul Magnifies the Lord Sunday, December 14th

Scripture: *Luke 1:46 (NRSV)*

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord."

Opening Prayer

God of praise and promise,
turn our hearts toward gratitude.
Let our souls, like Mary's, magnify Your goodness
until Your joy overflows through us.
Amen.

Reflection

This is the moment ***everything changes***.
Mary opens her mouth, and the silence of waiting gives birth to song.

Her words are not whispered-they *burst forth*. This is the sound of joy that's been gestating in the dark. After so much uncertainty, confusion, and courage, Mary's heart finds its release in audible worship: ***"My soul magnifies the Lord."***

To magnify means to make something larger-to bring what might have been distant or unnoticed into focus. Mary's life now becomes a lens through which the world, in which we can see God more clearly. And isn't that what faith is? To live in such a way that people can glimpse God through us.

Mary doesn't magnify herself. She magnifies the One who met her in obscurity, who saw her when no one else did. Her song begins not with what she has done, but with who God is. And that's where our songs of faith should begin, too.

Gratitude grows when we magnify what's good, not what's missing.
Hope expands when we focus on the Giver, not just the gifts.
Mary's joy becomes the template for our own worship-one that begins deep within the soul and ripples outward into the world.

Practice for Today

List three things that cause your soul to magnify the Lord today.
Speak (or sing if you feel so bold!) them out loud as an act of praise.

Challenge Question

What might shift in your spirit if you chose to **magnify God's presence** instead of your problems today?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God who turns wonder into worship,
help us to see Your goodness clearly and proclaim it boldly.
Let our lives reflect Your light into every shadow.
Amen.

Blessing:

May your soul find its song today,
and may your praise make God's love visible to all who encounter you this day.

With joy,
- Pastor Steph

Day 16 – He Looked with Favor on His Servant Monday, December 15th

Scripture: Luke 1:48

For He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.

Opening Prayer

God who sees, thank You for looking upon us with love. Teach us to believe that Your gaze is full of grace.
Amen.

Reflection

Something shifts in Mary's song - this time, she isn't hearing favor spoken *to* her; she's proclaiming it *for herself*.

"For He has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant..."

Mary is no longer the startled girl of Nazareth; she has stepped into the truth of what God has spoken. Her "yes" has blossomed into confidence - not in herself, but in the faithfulness of the One who chose her.

This isn't pride. It's praise.

Mary isn't exalting herself - she's marveling at what God can do with an ordinary life that's open to divine possibility.

She recognizes that she is seen, known, and loved by God - not for her perfection, but for her *availability*.

God's favor is not about being flawless or special. It's about being willing. It's about letting our lives become places where God's grace can take root.

Mary teaches us that true humility isn't self-doubt; it's deep trust - the kind that allows us to receive God's love without shrinking away from it.

Maybe that's part of our own calling, too - to stop dismissing the ways God has already shown us favor.

To stop saying, "Who, me?" and start saying, "Yes, Lord - through me."

When Mary acknowledges God's favor, she isn't claiming importance; she's claiming *belonging*. She's declaring that God's mercy has reached even her - and through her, will reach the world.

Our culture prizes achievement, but God's kingdom honors availability.

Mary's story invites us to notice the quiet ways God is already working in our lives - and to have the courage to say it out loud:

"Yes, the Lord has looked with favor on me, too."

Practice for Today

Take a quiet moment to imagine God looking at you with favor, not judgment. Simply receive it.

Challenge Question

What would change in you if you believed-deep down-that God's eyes look on you with love?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of grace, help us rest in Your kind gaze.

Amen.

May you see yourself today as God sees you-beloved, chosen, and blessed.

God's peace,

-Pastor Steph

Day 17–My Spirit Rejoices in God My Savior Tuesday, December 16th

Scripture: *Luke 1:47 (NRSV)*

And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Opening Prayer

God of joy,

lift our eyes from what is heavy

and remind us that You are our reason to rejoice.

Let Your Spirit stir gladness in our hearts today.

Amen.

Reflection

Joy doesn't always come from easy circumstances.

Mary's life wasn't suddenly simple after the angel's visit - it was complicated, uncertain, full of

questions about what people would think and how her life would unfold.
And yet, she sings: *"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."*

This is joy that's deeper than happiness - a joy rooted not in what's happening around her, but in who God is within her.
She rejoices *in* God, not in her situation.

True joy grows from trust. It's born when we remember that God is faithful even when life is fragile.
It's the quiet gladness that knows salvation is already on its way, even if we can't see how it will come.

Sometimes joy doesn't sound like laughter. Sometimes it's a steady heartbeat, a whisper in the dark that says, *"God is here. I am not alone."*
Mary's song reminds us that rejoicing doesn't ignore reality - it transforms it.

To rejoice in God our Savior is to locate our hope in something unshakable - not the news, not our plans, not our strength, but in the One who saves. And when we let that kind of joy rise in us, it becomes contagious. It spills out and invites others to believe, too.

Practice for Today

Think of one place in your life that feels uncertain or heavy.
Right in the middle of it, whisper, *"My spirit rejoices in God my Savior."*
Let your soul practice choosing joy, even in the waiting.

Challenge Question

What would it look like for you to rejoice in God - not in your circumstances, but in who God is in spite of them?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of salvation,
teach our hearts to rejoice in You.
Let joy take root in us deeper than fear,
and may it grow into strength for the days ahead.
Amen.

Blessing:

May your spirit find reason to rejoice today,
and may joy become the steady rhythm of your faith.
With hope and gratitude,

- Pastor Steph

Day 18 – He Who Is Mighty Has Done Great Things for Me

Wednesday, December 17th

Scripture: *Luke 1:49 (NRSV)*

For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name.

Opening Prayer

Mighty God,
open our eyes to the quiet miracles around us.
Remind us that Your greatness is not distant,
but present and personal.
Amen

Reflection

Mary doesn't point to herself - she points to God.
"The Mighty One has done great things for me."

This is not boastful; it's grateful. Her words are testimony, not pride.
The God who spoke galaxies into being has drawn near to her small life, and that changes everything.

Sometimes we think God's "great things" must be loud, spectacular, or world-famous. But Mary reminds us that God's greatness often looks like gentleness - strength that stoops low, power that lifts the humble, love that meets us right where we are.

Her awe is not abstract. It's personal. *"For me,"* she says.
The God of all creation has seen *me*.

And if God has done great things for her, God can do great things through us, too. God sees you too, dear ones..no matter who you are, what you have or haven't done, or how the devil tries to fill your hearts with lies that you are somehow not enough. YOU are beloved.

Maybe when we struggle or don't understand what's going on, the most faithful thing we can do is what Mary does here - **name God's goodness out loud**. That'll have the devil shaking in their boots...Because grace abounds -and fear can't live- and love banishes doubt and when gratitude is spoken.

Practice for Today

Name three "great things" God has done for you - large or small - and thank Him for each one in your heart or out loud.

Challenge Question

How might your story encourage someone else to recognize God's greatness in their own life?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of wonders,
thank You for doing great things - not just in history,
but here, in our hearts.
Let our gratitude magnify Your name.
Amen.

Blessing:

May you see the great things God is doing in your midst
and carry gratitude as your testimony today.

With thanks,

- Pastor Steph

Day 19 – Holy Is His Name Thursday, December 18th

Scripture: *Luke 1:49b (NRSV)*

...and holy is His name.

Opening Prayer

Holy God,
Your name is love, Your name is mercy, Your name is hope.
Let Your holiness shape our hearts today.
Amen.

Reflection

Mary's song slows for a moment in awe: *"Holy is His name."*

It's as if she pauses mid-praise to remember who she's talking about - the God whose presence is both intimate and infinite.

To say God's name is holy means that there is no one like God. How often do we truly pause to stand in awe of that?

But it doesn't mean that God is distant or untouchable - holiness, in Scripture, is God's *love made whole*. It's love so pure that it transforms everything it touches.

When Mary names God as holy, she's not separating herself from God - she's situating herself within God's story. She recognizes that this holiness is what is now working in her, through her, for the world.

To call God holy is to remember that we belong to something sacred - a love that is making all things new. To call God holy is to remember with gratitude and reverence all that God is and all that God does in our lives.

Practice for Today

Whisper the name of God throughout your day -
"Holy One," "Merciful Lord," "Loving Creator."
Let your words become small prayers of worship and remembrance.

Challenge Question

What comes to mind when you think of God's holiness - awe, comfort? How might you let that shape your worship this week?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Holy One,
You are set apart, yet You draw near.
Make our hearts holy by Your love.
Amen.

Blessing:

May the holiness of God dwell in you
and shine through everything you do today.

God's peace to you, dear Church,
- **Pastor Steph**

Day 20 – God’s Mercy and Justice Friday, December 19th

Scripture: *Luke 1:50–52 (NRSV)*

*His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly.*

Opening Prayer

God of mercy and might,
thank You for compassion that never runs dry.
Show Your strength in ways that heal and restore,
and teach us to walk humbly with You.
Amen.

Reflection

Mary’s song now swells beyond her own life into a vision as vast as creation.
The God she praises is both merciful and mighty-love in motion, justice alive.

“His mercy is for those who fear Him”-not fear as terror, but as reverence.
It’s that holy awe that reminds us who we are and whose we are.
And in the same breath, this mercy becomes action: God’s strong arm moves to scatter pride, topple oppression, and lift the humble from the dust.

Mary’s words are revolutionary and tender all at once.
She proclaims a God who refuses to let cruelty have the last word.
This isn’t vengeance-it’s redemption.
God’s power always bends toward mercy, always raises what arrogance has crushed.

Advent hope looks like this: a world reordered by love.
The proud learn humility, the powerful learn service, and the forgotten find themselves at the center of God’s story.

Practice for Today

Pray for someone who you may know feels overlooked or weighed down by injustice.
Ask God to show you one small way to lift them up.

Challenge Question

Where might God be calling you to use your strength for mercy instead of control, for justice instead of comfort?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of mercy and strength,
scatter our pride, steady our hearts,

and make Your justice visible through our love.
Amen.

Blessing:

May your strength be rooted in love,
your power shaped by compassion,
and your life become a witness to God's restoring mercy.

With courage,
- Pastor Steph

Day 21 – God's Promise and Provision Saturday, December 20th

Scripture: *Luke 1:53–55 (NRSV)*

*He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,
according to the promise He made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*

Opening Prayer

Faithful God,
You feed the hungry and remember Your promises.
Fill us with Your goodness and make us bearers of hope.
Amen.

Reflection

Mary ends her song the way all true praise ends-with remembrance and gratitude.
The same God who lifted the lowly also fills the hungry, helps the weary, and keeps every promise.

God's provision isn't just about food-it's about fullness of life.
Where the world forgets, God remembers.
Where others hoard, God gives.
Where we see scarcity, God creates abundance.

What if, "to send the rich away empty," isn't punishment?-what if it's mercy in disguise?
You see, I believe, God longs to free every heart from its false security,
to empty us of what can't satisfy so that we can be filled with what truly can: love, purpose, and peace.

Mary's final verses hold the whole story of Scripture in miniature-
the covenant kept, the hungry fed, the forgotten remembered.

It's the gospel before the gospel, a promise already pulsing with Christmas light.

Practice for Today

Ask God to make a way for you to share something tangible today-a meal, a kind word, a donation.
Let generosity become your song of praise.

Challenge Question

Where have you seen God keep promises in your life-and how can that remembrance fuel your hope now?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God who remembers mercy,
fill the empty places in us with Your good things.
Help us trust that You are still keeping Your promises today.
Amen.

Blessing:

May your heart be full, your hands open,
and your life echo the promise that God's mercy endures forever.
With joy and gratitude,
-Pastor Steph

Advent Devotional: The Song of Mary After the Song... The Birth of Christ, Luke 2:1–20)

This final week of Advent invites us to witness how God's promises take flesh - how joy enters the world not in royal courts, but in the arms of ordinary people. As Mary's song quiets, the chorus of heaven begins. Here, love is born.

Day 22 – In Those Days a Decree Went Out Sunday, December 21st

Scripture: *Luke 2:1–5 (NRSV)*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

Opening Prayer

God of time and history,
remind us that even when the world feels ruled by chaos or power,
You are still writing redemption into our days.
Your purposes unfold quietly and surely.
Amen.

Reflection

The story of Christmas doesn't begin with angels or shepherds - it begins with an emperor's decree. Bureaucracy. A census. Government control. It begins in the noise of the world's systems, yet beneath all that noise, **God's whisper** of redemption hums steadily forward.

Mary and Joseph pack their bags, likely weary and uncertain. Rome's orders don't ask if they're ready; life rarely does.

But even amid political tension and forced travel, *God's timing is still holy*.

Joy doesn't wait for perfect conditions. It breaks in through detours and disruptions, through the moments when plans unravel and we wonder what God could possibly be doing.

Bethlehem wasn't Mary's dream destination - it was a necessary stop on the way to salvation. It was all part of God's plan.

And maybe that's true for us, too. Sometimes the very journey that feels forced upon us becomes the road where grace is born. That is my prayer for each of you...that even when we don't understand what is going on, you can see where God's grace shows up in the midst of it.

Practice for Today

Pause for a few minutes.

Breathe deeply and thank God for being present even in the parts of your life that feel inconvenient or unsettled.

Challenge Question

Where might God be quietly at work behind the scenes of your ordinary days?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Lord of all,
remind us that no decree, no power, no obstacle
can stop Your love from being born.
Amen.

Blessing:

May you find joy in knowing God works
through the small, the mundane, and the unexpected.

With steadfast hope,
- **Pastor Steph**

Day 23 – No Room at the Inn Monday, December 22nd

Scripture: *Luke 2:6–7 (NRSV)*

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Opening Prayer

God of humble places,
thank You for meeting us not in our perfection,
but in our need.
Make room in our hearts for You again.
Amen.

Reflection

There was *no room*.
No vacancy sign. No warm bed.
Just a stable and the smell of hay.

And yet - that's where Love chose to enter.
Right there in the grit and the mess, God showed us that holiness doesn't avoid what's human; it doesn't flee from what is messy; it inhabits it. WOW.

The world had no room for the Savior,
but the stable did.
The feeding trough became a cradle,
the ordinary became sacred.

That's what joy looks like in God's story - not polished or planned,
but present. It is the miracle of *Emmanuel* - *God with us*, even when everything feels too cramped,
too chaotic, too late.

Maybe the question of Advent isn't whether the world is ready for Jesus.
Maybe it's whether **we are willing to make room** - even a corner of our hearts - for Him to dwell.

Because Christ doesn't wait for perfect conditions.
He comes to the cluttered manger, the crowded schedule, the weary soul.
He doesn't ask for a palace - just space enough to be welcomed.

We spend so much of Advent preparing for everything *around* Christmas - the gatherings, the lists,
the lights -
but the real preparation happens within.
It's the clearing away of hurry, the softening of pride,
the quiet whisper that says, "Here, Lord. You can stay here, come into my heart and show me how to
be like you."

And maybe that's the miracle of Advent -
not that God came once, but that He keeps coming still,
looking for hearts humble enough to make room for love again and again.

Practice for Today

Clear five quiet minutes in your day.
Sit in stillness and whisper,
"Lord Jesus, make room in me again. Help me clear the noise, the clutter, the "to-do" lists to make
space for you."

Challenge Question

What spaces in your life feel too messy or crowded for God?
Can you invite Him into those places anyway?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God who dwells in humble spaces,
be born again in us.

Make our hearts Your manger.
Amen.

Blessing:

May you know Emmanuel - God with you -
in both the mess and the miracle.

With tenderness,
- Pastor Steph

Day 24 – Good News of Great Joy Tuesday, December 23rd

Scripture: *Luke 2:8–14 (NRSV)*

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

Opening Prayer

God of angels and shepherds,
surprise us with joy that feels too good to be true.
Open our ears to Your good news.
Amen.

Reflection

The shepherds were night-shift workers - invisible to most, ignored by many. They were considered dirty, lowly individuals at the time of Jesus.
Yet when heaven chose an audience for the world’s greatest announcement, it was *them*.

That’s the heart of God’s joy: it finds the ones no one else sees.
The angel’s words - “*Do not be afraid*” - echo across the hillside, across generations, all the way to us.
Fear cannot silence this good news.

This joy isn’t shallow cheerfulness.
It’s **the joy that comes from light breaking into darkness**.
It’s the song that begins when everything else has fallen silent.
It’s the kind of joy that says, “The world has changed because Love has taken on flesh.”

The shepherds dropped everything and ran - because once you’ve seen God’s glory light up your night, you can’t go back to business as usual.

Practice for Today

Think of one place in your life - or the world - where you long for good news.
Pray for joy to take root there.

Challenge Question

Who might need to hear “good news of great joy” through you this week?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Joyful God,
let our lives echo the angels 'song.
Amen.

Blessing:

May joy rise in you like a song that cannot be silenced.

With joy that overflows,
- **Pastor Steph**

Day 25 – Mary Treasured All These Things Wednesday, December 24th

Scripture: *Luke 2:15–20 (NRSV)*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Opening Prayer

God of wonder,
help us slow down to treasure what You’ve done.
Teach us to carry joy quietly and deeply,
as Mary did.
Amen.

Reflection

After the angels 'song and the shepherds 'visit, the night finally grows still again.
Mary doesn't rush on - she *ponders*.

She treasures. She holds the mystery close.
Advent ends not with noise but with a *heartbeat*.

The God who thundered creation into being now breathes softly in her arms.
Mary reminds us that joy isn't only expressed in celebration - sometimes it's cradled in silence.

To “treasure” means to hold something dear, to store it away for when life grows hard again. Mary keeps the memory of God’s faithfulness as a lamp for the road ahead.

As we reach the end of Advent, may we also pause to remember:
God has come close.
Love has been born.
And the light still shines in the darkness - and the darkness has not overcome it.

Practice for Today

Take ten quiet minutes to reflect on this season.
What has God shown you? Stirred in you?
Write a short prayer of thanks for the ways Christ has met you along the way.

Challenge Question

What will you carry forward from this season into the year ahead?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Christ our joy,
be born anew in us each day.
Let our hearts become mangers of Your grace.
Amen.

Blessing:

May you carry the joy of Christ
into every ordinary moment of your life.

With gratitude and peace,

- Pastor Steph

Closing Benediction for the Series

Dear ones,

As Advent draws to a close,
may you go into this Christmas season with Mary's song still echoing in your heart-

a song of **hope** that begins in silence,
peace that grows in community,
love that turns the world upside down,
and **joy** that cannot be contained.

May your soul magnify the Lord,
and may your very life sing the good news:
God is with us. Always.

With all my love and prayers,
- Pastor Steph

Christmas Day – Love Made Flesh Thursday, December 25th

Scripture: John 1:14

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory as of a father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

Opening Prayer

God of wonder and light,
on this holy morning we pause to breathe in the miracle:
You came to dwell with us.
You wrapped eternity in skin and love in laughter.
Be born again in our hearts today,
that the world may see Your glory through our lives.
Amen.

Reflection

After the waiting, after the longing and the hoping and the quiet, Love has arrived.
The Word that spoke stars into being now coos in a manger.
The Creator now rests in the arms of creation.

Christmas is not the end of the story-it's the beginning of everything new.
God's response to the ache of the world was not from a distance,
but from within it.
In Jesus, God joined our dust, our tears, our laughter, our longing-
so that nothing in this life would ever be beyond redemption.

And this, dear ones, is the gift:
Not that the world suddenly became easy,
but that **God came close**.
Close enough to touch,
close enough to love,
close enough to call you by name.

So wherever you find yourself this Christmas-surrounded by family or sitting in quiet-
the same light that broke into the Bethlehem night still shines for you.
It is not earned; it is given.
It is not fleeting; it is forever.
It is Christ, our Emmanuel-God with us.

Practice for Today

Before you unwrap a single gift, pause and whisper:
“Thank You, God, for coming near.”
Then take a slow look around-
at the faces, the light, the breath in your lungs-
and let gratitude be your song.

Challenge Question

What does “God with us” mean to you today, in this season of your life?
Where can you carry Christ’s love into the world from here?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Holy One,
thank You for drawing close-closer than fear, closer than sorrow, closer than we dared to hope.
Let Your light shine through us,
that the world might see the joy of Your coming.
Amen.

Christmas Blessing:
May Christ be born anew in you today.
May His peace fill your home,
His love surround your heart,
and His joy spill over into every life you touch.
The Word has become flesh-
and the world will never be the same.

Praying blessings on your Christmas Season,

-Pastor Steph

Bonus Devotional – The Day After: “For Unto Us a Child Is Born” Friday, December 26th

Scripture: *Isaiah 9:6-7 (NRSV)*

*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*

Opening Prayer

God of promise and light,
You have kept Your word: the Child is born,
the darkness is pierced, and hope has a name.
Let our hearts rest in the wonder of Your peace-
not just for a day, but for a lifetime.
Amen.

Reflection

The day after Christmas can feel strangely quiet.
The gifts have been opened, the carols fade, and the house exhales.
Sometimes that stillness feels like a let-down after the glory of yesterday.

But the truth of Christmas is this: **it isn't over.**
The miracle didn't end when the last candle flickered out.
Christmas is not a date on a calendar; it's a way of being-
a rhythm of love, joy, and peace that keeps pulsing through the heart of every believer.

Yesterday we stood in awe before the manger, our hearts stretched wide with wonder.
Today, we remember that what began in Bethlehem continues in us.
The Christ child didn't stay in the stable-He moved into human life,
and through His Spirit, He moves into ours.

Isaiah's ancient vision reminds us why this joy endures:
“For unto *us* a child is born.”
Not for kings only. Not for the deserving or the devout.
For *us*-the tired, the restless, the ones who still long for peace to finally stick.

Titles tumble out like a litany of hope:
Wonderful Counselor for the confused,
Mighty God for the powerless,

Everlasting Father for the forgotten,
Prince of Peace for a world still at war within and without.

Yesterday was mind-blowing-a God who dared to take on flesh.
Today we breathe it in: that same God still walks beside us,
still whispers comfort, still shines through every act of kindness and grace.
The miracle of Christmas isn't something we pack away;
it's something we *practice*-
living with open hands, open hearts, and open eyes to see Emmanuel in the ordinary.

So we pause today-grateful for what Advent has taught us,
and hopeful for what Christmas continues to teach:
that Love has come, and Love remains.

Practice for Today

Light a candle and read Isaiah 9:6-7 aloud.
Whisper each name-Counselor, Mighty God, Father, Prince of Peace-
and ask which one your heart most needs today.
Then thank God that the miracle of Christmas continues right where you are.

Challenge Question

How might you carry the wonder of Christmas forward-
not as a memory, but as a mindset, a way of living every day?

Closing Prayer & Blessing

Prince of Peace,
shine through the cracks of our chaos.
Let Your justice roll, Your mercy reign,
and Your light linger long after the candles fade.
Keep Christmas alive in us,
until love itself becomes our daily language.
Amen.

Blessing:

May the Child of Bethlehem guide your steps with wisdom,
guard your heart with peace,
and grow joy in you that no darkness can dim.
And may you remember-Christmas isn't gone;
it's here, alive in you.

With Christmas love,
- Pastor Steph

The free devotional is provided by Christ Lutheran Church Waterford, Michigan

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