

# Advent Devotional



*Grace of Christ Presbyterian Church 2023*

*This devotional was originally published in 2020; there have been some changes. The scriptures are ESV (English Standard Version) unless otherwise noted.*

# HOPE

December 3

## The Fulness of Time

*“But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth His son, born of woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons (and daughters).” Galatians 4.4-5*

Read Galatians 4.4-7

*When the fulness of time had come.* We might say, “at just the right time.” That first Christmas was the one full, right, perfect, God appointed, moment in all of human history for the life-shaking, heart-changing, death-destroying arrival of the King of all Kings. God chose an obscure village in a defeated nation. It was Israel not Rome, Bethlehem not Jerusalem. He chose an everyday man Joseph and his betrothed Mary not a king and a queen, or a prince and a princess.

It began there, with them ... the right moment, the fulness of time.

Why do I keep looking in the wrong direction and giving my attention to those quite opposite from the ones chosen by God? I am drawn to Seattle and Philadelphia when I should be paying attention to Granger and Wiley City. I am more concerned about celebrities and politicians rather than the everyday couple in Mabton and Cliffdell.

And yet, thankfully, my affections and admirations are being changed, slowly but surely, by the gentle and relentless grace of God. As my years increase so does my understanding of the beauty and value of those I encounter each day. It was not Hollywood or New York, not those with trophies and titles, it was an everyday couple in an easily overlooked village, chosen by God, at just the right time. And, because of that moment, we have definitive proof that WE, you and I, are valued and loved by God. Our adoption papers were signed at just the right time, at the birth of the ONE who would redeem us, and the world.

*Father, we are Your adopted sons and daughters. Help us, this Christmas, to grow in our understanding of who and what really matters. Free us from the superficial and open our eyes and hearts to each one around us who is of eternal value.*

**December 4**

**The Journey**

*"Casting all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you." 1 Peter 5.7*

Read 1 Peter 5.6-11

I often think about what it would have been like for Mary, the mother of Jesus, traveling to Bethlehem. A journey away from...known to unknown, familiar to strange, family to strangers. We all are going on that journey in some way, big or small. No one knows their path or what it will be like. Yet the encouragement in the Advent story is that those of us who call Jesus friend know we have a faithful companion all along the way and we hear the steady footfalls of the One who carries us. For Mary it was a four-legged animal who she put her whole weight on and let it carry her to her destiny. I'm not suggesting our Lord is a donkey but the image of being dependable and strong and bearing the burden is intriguing. This life, our road, can at times seem perilous! It can lead to places we never dreamed of going! And sometimes it is very lonely and unknown. But the Gospel never fails! The coming of Jesus has given us the assurance that no matter the journey we find ourselves on, we will always be held and carried by the One who knows the Way and can lead us home.

*Father, we are on a journey from known to unknown, from familiar to strange. On this journey may our confidence grow that You are our faithful companion. You never fail us. Lead us forward, lead us home.*

**December 5**

**Standing in the Presence of God and With Us**

*“And the angel answered him, ‘I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.’” Luke 1.19*

Read Luke 1.5-23

An angel, who was standing both in the presence of God and man, brought unbelievable news. In their senior years, Zechariah and his wife would have a baby. Now? After all these years of hoping? It didn't make sense. In his unbelief, Zechariah asked the angel for a sign that the news was true. The sign? He lost his voice.

Today, we have the Holy Spirit, who stands both in the presence of God and with us (John 16.15). When we take the time to listen, He tells us good news. He reminds us of God's love, gives wisdom for the day, and nudges us to bring the good news to another.

During the Christmas season, in the quiet of the morning, I turn on my tree lights and spend time with the Lord. As I read God's Word this season, I think I'll pray, "Holy Spirit, through this scripture, tell me the good news." Then remembering Gabriel speaking to Zechariah, I'll glance at the angel on the top of my tree, and ask, "Holy Spirit, what other good news do You have for me today?"

*Jesus, You were the good news that first Christmas, and You are the good news today. Fill me with belief that You speak through the Holy Spirit. As I pause, tell me the good news You have for this day.*

**December 6**

## **Mary's Prophetic Song**

*"And Mary sang this song:*

*"My soul is ecstatic, overflowing with praises to God!*

*My spirit bursts with joy over my life-giving God!*

*For he set his tender gaze upon me, his lowly servant girl.*

*And from here on, everyone will know that I have been favored and blessed.*

*The Mighty One has worked a mighty miracle for me; holy is his name!*

*Mercy kisses all his godly lovers,*

*from one generation to the next.*

*Mighty power flows from him*

*to scatter all those who walk in pride.*

*Powerful princes he tears from their thrones*

*and he lifts up the lowly to take their place.*

*Those who hunger for him will always be filled,*

*but the smug and self-satisfied he will send away empty.*

*Because he can never forget to show mercy,*

*he has helped his chosen servant, Israel,*

*Keeping his promises to Abraham and to his descendants forever."* Luke 1.46-55

The Passion Translation

In this song Mary shares her bold vision of what the baby she carries will do.

This child will turn the world upside down! He will bring princes to their knees and redefine the world order! He will open a new age in which the poor, the powerless, the lowly are lifted up.

If Mary were to appear today, how would she feel about her prophesy?

Would she rejoice that it had come true? Or would she be dismayed at earth's despotic rulers who still create unspeakable misery? Would she weep that wildly wealthy people are still oblivious to the desperately poor? Would she be able to summon a song of hope to her lips at all?

I wish we had better evidence of progress. In fact, the air is heavy with discouragement. Which is to say, there is still a vast amount of work to be done in Jesus' name. It feels utterly overwhelming until I recall that this is the work of the Holy Spirit. It begins in individual hearts like yours and mine with a desire to share what we have and to be shaped, not by world leaders, but by the indwelling Christ.

*Dear Lord, may Mary's vision of your kingdom on earth give us hope and inspire us to persevere in the name of Jesus.*

**December 7**

**Experiencing the Lord's Favor**

*"After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days He has shown His favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." Luke 1.24-25 NIV*

Read Luke 1.39-45

Favor. Elizabeth had favor. Mary had favor. What do we do with favor? How do we understand it in our Christian culture? It is a complex subject. How come some people have favor and others do not? Some may believe favor is packaged along with grace, mercy, and love. I believe favor is unique. It deserves to be recognized, acknowledged, and celebrated. Favor is not often spoken of, or if it is, I find our culture calls it by a different name. Perhaps luck. Favor can provoke feelings of jealousy, even contempt. It is a wasted opportunity when we humanize favor, reducing it to a result of someone's efforts or character. Favor is not earned; it is a gift from the Lord. When we see the favor of the Lord on someone, why don't we rejoice, praising and giving thanks to God for the ability to see His divine glory resting on someone's life? It's as if the invisible is made visible. Elizabeth recognized her own favor, and celebrated Mary's.

May we be a community who celebrates God's favor when seen in another's life. When we hear about doors suddenly being opened, or a financial provision that makes no sense, or even being gifted a brand-new Christmas tree when no one knew yours broke the day before. Favor can look like many different things. I believe it is important to recognize God's favor, steward it well, and celebrate when others receive it.

*Lord, we love You. All the mysterious parts of You, even those we cannot understand. Help us to recognize and celebrate Your favor in our own lives and the lives of those around us. Give us Heaven's language for the things we do not understand but perceive, lest we credit the wrong source. Give us the discipline to guard our hearts and control our mouths this season and focus on your extravagant nature, praising and giving thanks to the Father of Heavenly Lights who is the author and illustrator of all things good. Amen*

## December 8

### What's in a Name?

*"His name is John."* Luke 1.63b

Read Luke 1.57-66

My brother was named after our dad, James Henry. I was named after my grandfather, John Conrad, whom I never knew. Names are important, especially in biblical times, because of the meaning behind them. Out of Zechariah's doubt when he was told his prayer had been answered and he'd be a father in his old age, he was not able to speak. One thing he never doubted was the name the angel Gabriel told him to give his son, John (Graced by God) which was not a family name. When Elizabeth was questioned as to his name, John, at his circumcision, Zechariah confirmed the name was to be John. His first words, after being silenced for nine months, came in the form of praise.

Zechariah went from doubt, to belief, to praise. God worked in him during his nine months of silence allowing him to trust and obey God. In this Advent season of waiting, and with the isolation of the pandemic, where is God wanting you to trust him, obey him, and praise him? I, another John, have found God to have been more than gracious to me in my lifetime, and I praise Him.

*Father, open my eyes to see You in my life so that I can trust, obey, and praise You as Zechariah did. Amen*

**December 9**  
**God's Abundant Mercy**

*"Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke 1.78-79*

Read Luke 1.67-80

It's a first Christmas for a tiny baby—and an 87<sup>th</sup> Christmas (and birthday) for an aging man. Four generations are gathered together in our cozy house. Anticipation fills the air, knowing what is coming soon. Knock, knock, and knock! To our family's delight, it is Sonny Salsbury with his angelic crew of carolers. Let's assemble around the Christmas tree to be bathed in blessings of song from Sonny. The music brings forth memories of Christmas's past and expectation of Christmas present. The living room is filled with our loved ones.

Once more, there is another rap at the door. Surprise, this time it is Santa Claus! Come in Santa and listen to the words of Sonny's song. His words are not a myth, nor legend, but true.

Now, what could be better than to have each other and to be home? From near and far, all assembled together, what could be a better gift? Who could bestow a greater gift? By God's abundant mercy, we are offered the best gift of all. It is a gift, given by grace, one that won't disappear or lose its glitz the following day. It is a gift that evokes eternal salvation and turns the darkness into light. This is the greatest gift ever given.

*May we remember this Christmas that this world is not our home; that we don't get to be here long. Our true home is in paradise with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray for our Lord to bring His sunrise to those in darkness and we thank and praise Him for His tender mercies. Amen.*



### **Week 1**

Sunday December 3 – Curt McFarland

Monday December 4 - Robin Stuber

December 5 - Dick and Kathy Myers

Wednesday December 6 - Carol Licht

Thursday December 7 – Sarah Huck

Friday December 8 - John Stolzenbach

Saturday December 9 - Roseanne and Bruce Bacon

### **Week 2**

Sunday December 10 – Ericka Clark

Monday December 11 - Brooke Arkills

Tuesday December 12 - Carolyn Mason

Wednesday December 13 - Fred and Pat Erickson

Thursday December 14 - Ericka Clark

Friday December 15 - Curt McFarland

Saturday December 16 - Curt McFarland

### **Week 3**

Sunday December 17 - Janet Krieger

Monday December 18 - Linda Sorenson

Tuesday December 19 - Don Stuber

Wednesday December 20 - Dennis Whitcher

Thursday December 21 – Nancy and Eric Gustafson

Friday December 22 – Kara Brown

Saturday December 23 – Peggy Schaffer

### **Week 4**

Sunday December 24 - Cathy Simons

Monday December 25 – Peggy Steere

Tuesday December 26 – Alex Rule

Wednesday December 27 – Dennis Whitcher

December 28 – Kathaleen McFarland

Thursday December 29 – Betty Rosenkranz

Friday December 30 – Joel Whitehead

Saturday December 31 - Carla and Jake Kupp