

# 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.*

# JOY

December 10

**I Am God, and There is No Other!**

*"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."* Isaiah 45.22

Read Isaiah 45.18-22

The Lord God, Creator of the heavens, the earth, and all that are in it. In today's scripture it is written, *"he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty but formed it to be inhabited."* Our Creator fashioned this earth and each one of us on purpose. For a purpose. That makes us pretty special. Yep, I'm talking about you. And your family. Your neighbors. Your co-workers. The checker at the grocery store. The people who maintenance your cars. Our schoolteachers and our pastors. He created us for worship – and He created us for community.

I love my alone time. However, too much alone time and I find myself craving time with friends and family. Singing with church family on Sunday mornings fills my heart like nothing else. Dinner with family, catching up and laughing. Another heart filler. Serving alongside friends, using the gifts God's given us to help another, is yet another wonderful way to be connected to our Creator – get filled up. The Lord says to us, *"Turn to me and be saved,"* – this requires action on our part. We need to, get to, choose to turn to Him. To accept His amazing gift of salvation. We get to say, Yes Lord, I am Yours, use me.

Rest is important. For some of us, alone time is important. But community, time with the Lord, those are life-giving. He is our God and there is no other. He is our Creator. Our Savior. Our Redeemer. He chose you and He loves you like no other.

*Father God, we are in awe of You and Your creation. You formed each of us on purpose and for a purpose. As we worship You, expand our hearts and open our eyes to the needs of those around us. Show us ways we can be a blessing to others this advent season. Amen.*

**December 11**

**God Wants to Inhabit Every Part of Our Lives**

*"...you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High ... and of his kingdom there will be no end."* Luke 1.31-33

Read Luke 1.26-33

What would happen if you knew how God planned to use you?

Mary's visitor, the angel Gabriel, gave her prophetic news and the magnitude of it. Not only are you going to become pregnant, but it'll be the Son of God, who will reign forever. God's plan was so far beyond what a human could accomplish or even fully comprehend.

There was a time when I wasn't sure if I could be a mother. God told me He could use my womb to specifically accomplish something He wants to do in the world. So, I prayed and gave God my womb. Years later, I have two sons. One of them loves to create worship songs and he says God gave him the words when he was in my tummy.

Today, will you bring something to God and ask Him what he wants to do with it? It can be any ordinary thing – your hands, your power tools, your spare bedroom. Maybe even something you hold tightly, like my desire to be a mom. God wants to inhabit every part of our lives and His plans have eternal significance.

*Holy God, You are great, and Your plans are so very good. Thank You for using Mary to bring us the gift of Your Son. [open your arms to God] Please use me too. Amen.*

## **December 12**

### **Our Life in His Hands**

*“And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Luke 1.38*

Read Luke 1.34-38

Mary’s gracious and humble response to the angel’s message that she would bear the Son of God is astonishing. This young woman was eagerly awaiting her wedding day and making plans for a life with Joseph when the angel of the Lord appeared to her. That alone would have been a little startling, but additionally, the angel shared the disquieting news that she would bear the Son of God.

Mary understood that news of a pregnancy before being Joseph’s wife held potentially dire consequences, yet her response was not one of dismay or fear. Nor did she protest or flee. Instead, her reaction was one of wonder. “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” Her words reflect great love, faith, and trust in God. Unwaveringly, she put her life in His hands.

*Dear Lord, may we face the unexpected adjustments in our own lives, large and small, with grace and faith similar to Mary’s. Her unwavering response helped provide the world our Greatest Gift. When You call, may we also joyfully respond with faith and wonder.*

**December 13**

**No Special Arrangements, And Yet ...**

*"And Joseph, ....with Mary, ....went up from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered.... And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." Luke 2.4-7*

Read Luke 2.1-7

As I reread, over and over, this most well-known passage of scripture, I am struck by how arduous and common and everyday their journey is. They have both had angelic visits and know that God is up to something unimaginable and big in their lives, but they are patiently carrying on with what the world expects and requires. No special arrangements seem to have been made by God for their journey. And yet they find themselves cared for in the most unexpected, warm, and secluded space to receive God's miraculous gift of LOVE!

*Lord Jesus, help me, out of love for You, to serve You in what often seems to me to be "the wear and tear of common, unpoetic life."*

**December 14**

**There is No Darkness in Him**

*"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:*

*"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for from you shall come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.'"* Matthew 2.1-6

*"We saw His star..."* Jesus is the light of the world. He came to save us. You and me. He is the One we seek, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. (Isn't that great news!) This advent season, as we spend time reflecting on God's gift of His Son, let's ask ourselves where do we see His light shining in our life? Do we believe that there cannot be any darkness because of Jesus' light? If you believe that, how do you pray for yourself, family, friends, or the world around us as we go through times of trouble, heartache, or darkness?

Sit for a moment and thank Jesus for being the light in your life today. There is no darkness when we walk with him. (John 8.12) He replaces worry with peace. He is our ruler and shepherd. He is our Hope. He really is all we need.

*Christ Jesus, you are the light of the world and I want more of you in my life. Thank you for reminding me, this Christmas season, you are with me and you love me. I believe you are who Scriptures say you are, and I put my hope in you. It is in your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

**December 15**  
**The Wonder of a Star**

*“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”* Matt 2.10

Read Matthew 2.7-12

Two of my greatest memories from childhood involve a dark night sky filled with bright stars. The first, as a kid living east of San Francisco, my sister and I would sleep on our back porch on a warm summer night and look up in wonder at a thousand points of light. My dad wasn't very involved in our family life, but there were occasions, special memories for me, when he would join us and talk about the stars and constellations.

The second, my home church, Community Presbyterian, offered an outdoor parking lot Christmas Eve service. It started at 11:00 and ended just after midnight. Bundled up in blankets, singing Christmas carols, looking up at the vast expanse of stars above, I sensed the power and presence of God.

2000 years ago, a group of wise men (often referred to as: magi, astrologers, kings) were also moved by what they saw in the night sky. A particularly bright star appeared, and they believed it pointed to the birth of a great king. They left their homes and traveled a great distance to welcome this king's birth.

Interestingly, the star did not lead them to Bethlehem ... or to Jesus. It led them to Jerusalem. And then apparently the star disappeared for a period of time. While in Jerusalem the Jewish scriptures were opened and Bethlehem was revealed as the birthplace of the king they sought. Leaving Jerusalem, the star reappeared. We are told, “when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly ...”.

The stars and beauty of nature will only lead us so far. It is the Bible, as God's Holy Spirit speaks to us through what is written on each page, that brings us to Jesus.

I am thankful for the wonder of nature. But what I really need, what we all need, is direct communication from God Himself. By the merciful work of the Holy Spirit God reveals Himself, His intentions, His heart in each story, each truth. Nature itself points us in the general direction, the Bible directs us to a baby born in a stable, born to reveal the fulness of God, born to save us, to love us, to guide us home.

*Father, Thank You for leaving evidence of Your power and intentions in creation around us. Thank You for communicating with us directly on every page of the Bible. Help us to see You in nature, but more importantly thank You for coming in person to reveal who You are, and who we are. Thank You for loving us that much!*

## December 16

### Tears, and Hope, in Darkness

*"... for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him ... Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under ... Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."* Matthew 2.13, 16, 18

Read Matthew 2.13-18 (prepare yourself for this difficult passage)

How horrible! How evil! How I wish it were not a part of the Christmas story. Herod was furious. His attempted deception failed. He told the visitors from the east, "when you find the child born to be king let me know so I too can go and worship him." Deception on his lips and death in his heart.

Each Christmas we read about shepherds and angels, wise men, and gifts. We re-tell stories of the couple just arrived from Nazareth, of Bethlehem and the Inn, the birth, the stable. But I don't like, don't want, to hear this other part of the story. It is a dark episode in an otherwise glorious, albeit, quaint, moment in time. How dare evil intrude at such a holy moment.

The travelers from the east had been studying and then following a star for two years. Their presence, and inquiries, in Jerusalem attracted the attention of crafty, sinister Herod. He would do whatever it took to maintain his power and position, even if it meant killing anyone who stood in his way. That's what he did ... every boy two years old and younger ... all in an attempt to eliminate one child.

Weeping and tears filled homes in Bethlehem and beyond. Our homes too.

Christian faith takes evil seriously. The message of Christmas moves beyond platitudes and plastic nativity scenes and into the reality of the blood and tears brought about by human sin and evil. Dark forces were at work, hoping to bring a swift end to the baby born in Bethlehem. Jesus came into the world to save us, to redeem us, to rescue us from darkness and death. That's just what he did. Herod brought death, tears, and weeping. Jesus brought hope, joy, and life. Jesus even brought that, I believe, to the families and infants that tragic night.

*Father, help us as we come face to face with the darkness around us. Give us courage. Strengthen us. Even though the battle with evil still rages, the final victory is assured. Thank You that Jesus came to crush evil and death. 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