

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.

PEACE

December 17

A Sign to Strengthen the Faith of Many

"All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel---God is with us." Isaiah 7.14 (New Living Translation)

Read Isaiah 7.13-14

It was during the reign of the idolatrous King Ahaz that Jerusalem was attacked by the king of Syria and Israel. King Ahaz and his people trembled in fear for their safety. Isaiah was sent by God to tell King Ahaz to stop worrying and not fear; God himself would protect them if they simply believed what he said. God then told Ahaz to ask Him for a sign to prove that Jerusalem would remain under his protection; to ask for a sign of confirmation and to make it as difficult as he wanted. God did not put any limits on what Ahaz might choose. God wanted the sign to be of earth-shaking importance, a sign that all people throughout time would recognize, a sign that would strengthen the faith of many. But Ahaz refused to test God, not believing that God could or would do anything for him. And so, God Himself chose the sign, a virgin birth. The significance of the sign being that a young woman, who had never known a man, conceived and gave birth to a son. This was to be a sign to the whole world that God is with us; He is our Savior and Protector.

Father, thank You that there are no limits on what we may ask for, that there is nothing too difficult that we cannot lay at Your cross. Today we affirm our victory, our security in Christ and offer thanksgiving for Your protection and love.

December 18

What's in This Name?

".... and you shall call his name Jesus ..." Matthew 1.21

Read Matthew 1.18-21

In English, we call the Son of God, Jesus, which is the Latinizing of the Greek Iesous, a translation of the Aramaic Yeshua, from the Hebrew Yehoshua or, as we read in biblical passages of Moses' commander, Joshua. Actually, it's a fairly common name in Israel's long history, and also in modern times, both in English and Spanish speaking cultures.

So, what's in this name?

Jesus means *YHWY (God) is salvation*.

In naming this child Jesus, a prophetic utterance was being declared.

Jesus lived into this declaration as He walked the earth as a man *and* as the incarnate Son of God. Read Philippians 2.5-8, *"...He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness..."* (NIV)

Yet, the great I AM, who stated through Isaiah 42 *"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise..."* has chosen to share His glory and His praise giving to Jesus the Christ, His Anointed One, *"...the name that is above every name..."* (NIV) (Read Philippians 2.9-11)

Father, words are inadequate for the praise due You for taking upon Your incarnated-self as Jesus, the cost of redeeming my sin. I am wonder-filled in the glorious mystery of it all. Be gloried! Hallelujah!

December 19

He Took the Initiative

"... they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)." Matthew 1.23

Read Matthew 1.22-25

Immanuel – God with us. The advent season is a celebration of that amazing story. When the world was not getting the message of God's love for us, He took the initiative. He slowed his Eternal Self down to the point of visibility, and came as a baby. The Incarnation. The Word became flesh. Jesus was the visible expression of the Invisible God. As we look at the baby Jesus (God the Son) we understand God the Father. Christmas is ALL about the fact that God is with us, not a far-off mystery that is a hands-off deity.

The everyday application of this is that God continues to be with us. He comes to us in unexpected ways. No one in the Jewish faith expected Yahweh to come as a baby or for that matter to die for us. This Christmas season, look around and see the Christ Child filling your world each day. He comes to us with stealth – in the snow, music, friends and family, sunshine. Today, will you see Immanuel, the God who is with us?

Eternal Immanuel, thank You for taking the initiative, for showing us the full expression of Your love, Yourself, in Jesus. Help us to live each day with confidence that You are Immanuel, God with us.

December 20

The Best Christmas Gift

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1.12

Read John 1.9-13

In a week or so, we will be looking at gifts under the Christmas tree. What was the best Christmas gift that you remember receiving?

For me, one of the best gifts I remember from my childhood came back in the 1950's. It was a pool table! It wasn't a full-size, slate pool table, but it was 3/4 size with a heavy plywood top and green felt. I didn't know it then, but my engineering instincts were already forming, and I learned about angles, finesse, and patience.

But what really is my best Christmas gift? To become a child of God. By *believing in* Jesus Christ, I am a child of God, brought into His family by the power and grace of Jesus' sacrifice for me.

Heavenly Father, thank You that I may call You Father, because I am Your child, through Jesus Christ my Lord. Shine more of His light into my heart, so that I come to know You more and to love You better each day. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

December 21

Anna, a Footnote to a Postage Stamp

"And coming up at that hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem." Luke 2.38

Read Luke 2.36-38

In terms of biblical characters, Anna the 84+ year old, 60+ year widowed, temple dweller (thus obviously penniless) is but a footnote to the story of the birth of Jesus. Likewise, Simeon (vs 25-35) is merely a postage stamp to the news being delivered to the world of the arrival of the Christ, the "salvation [of the world and] a light for the revelation to the Gentiles." Neither is ever mentioned again in the Bible—aged nobodies. Yet they are the first named individuals in the Bible to recognize the Messiah!

Both were in communion with God in their daily walk and heard from the Holy Spirit as they spent their lives focused on higher things. Simeon blessed the newborn child, brought to be consecrated to the Lord as Joseph and Mary's firstborn, yet also foretold the anguish that the parents would experience as He would become the "redemption of the world." Anna simply began a heralding of thanksgiving for all that God was doing and would do through Jesus.

Three takeaways: 1) God delights in using "Nobodies." 2) "Age" is irrelevant in service to God. 3) With God there is always reason for thanksgiving. Hallelujah!

Application: Are we willing to be used by our all-powerful God as a testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, even in tough times, or when we are old?

Father God, help us to be inviting to all people so they can hear, respond to, and receive, the message of the Messiah, as Anna went forth and did.

December 22

A Love Like No Other

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” Isaiah 9.6-7

The Hebrew word for “zeal” in this verse, according to Strongs Concordance, is: **“Qin’ah”**, most often used to describe “jealousy” or ardor”. Oxford’s English dictionary defines jealousy as: “Fiercely protective or vigilant of one’s rights or possessions.” As I reflect on the promised Messiah described in verse 6 and on the enduring peace, justice and righteousness prophesied to come with Him in verse 7, I find the closing line incredibly humbling and honoring. It is “The zeal of the LORD of hosts” which “will do this”. What is the object motivating this promise? What is the blessed inspiration for this incredible gift?

It is you and I. It is humanity. It is His Creation. The Lord is “fiercely protective” of his “possessions”. His desire for us to be reconciled to Him and restored to His presence is the motivator for His providing the Messiah. What an awesome and honor filled thought: That the Lord of all the earth would be so desirous of protecting His connection with you and me, that He would set in motion the entire promise and fulfilment of The Messiah.

As you reflect with gratitude on the gift of Christ, The Messiah, in this advent season; consider also: The fact that YOU are the object of His zealous passion. Receive His love. Receive His peace. Know that you are His prized possession. Recognize that He moved heaven to earth on your behalf. Consider His great love for you, and know: We love, because He first loved us.

Father, thank You for Your incredibly deep, wide, and strong love for us. We are in awe of Your love for us. Holy Spirit, show us how to receive Your love to its fullest, so we can embrace it and express it to others this advent season.

December 23

Stepping Past Our Fears

"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and they were filled with great fear." Luke 2.8-9

Read Luke 2.8-14

Who were these men that an angel of the Lord would speak the Good News to them? Poor, dirty, unimpressive to society, but they certainly knew how to watch and listen, didn't they? This was their occupation, after all.

Just think how terrified they must have been. They didn't run and hide. But they did depart quickly. They left their flocks, their livelihood, behind.

When Jesus speaks, am I only half listening? Could I be more like those shepherds? When God honored them with his sacred announcement, they stepped past their fears and believed. In so doing, they were rewarded with witnessing the glory of Christ!

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You that You're always with us. Help us to trust You and to listen to how Jesus might be calling us to move beyond our fears during this blessed season.

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