

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.

LOVE

December 24

Unsuspecting, Insignificant, Bethlehem

“But you, O Bethlehem ... from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler of Israel ...” Micah 5.2

Read Micah 5.2-5

In this passage from the prophet Micah, he foretold the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah would come forth from the **unsuspecting, insignificant** land of Judah.

Fast forward to the birth of Jesus. In the gospel of Matthew 2.6 the Magi were inquiring of King Herod where the Christ child had been born? It was reiterated by the chief priest, and the teachers of the law, from the scriptures they had memorized. They replied to Herod, “He is to be born in Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, and by no means least among the rulers of Judah....”

From unsuspecting and insignificant ... to the place of honor and significance at Christ’s birth!

What I am reminded of again is that Christ’s birth was foretold from the beginning of time. More personal to me is that my life from birth to death has been pre-determined by God. My unsuspecting and insignificant life, only God knows the length of my earthly existence. How will we choose to live our life for him? It begins with seeking God through prayer, scripture reading, and fellowship with other believers.

My challenge to you is to seek ways to make a difference in your “bubble of influence.” How can you fulfill your life’s story for Him?

May God richly bless you in your journey of being significant for Him.

Father, thank You that you use what is unsuspecting and insignificant, Bethlehem, us too, to accomplish far more than we can hope or imagine. You hold all of our days. Help us to live out those days more fully for You.

December 25

Merry Christmas Grace of Christ Family

“Now to the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only God, be honor, and glory forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Timothy 1.17

Read 1 Timothy 1.12-17

T’was the night before Christmas and all through the house not a creature was stirring – particularly not Tinker our cat. Tinker had escaped the warmth and safety of our house a few days before Christmas and disappeared into the freezing, snowy, dangerous outdoors. There was finger pointing, and blame shared, as to who left the door ajar, but it was short lived. We pulled together as a family and got to work. The girls spent hours calling and searching the neighborhood. Flyers were made and hung. Neighbors were alerted. Jeff followed tracks that led to the roof and risked a broken neck to search the roof. Christmas Eve, however, was sobering and sad as the sun set on another day without Tinker. We prayed as a family that Tinker would be safe and find his way home but there were tears of genuine despair that night. Christmas morning, we all dragged ourselves out into the living room and with little interest, lethargically arranged ourselves around the piles of Christmas presents under the tree. Jeff opened the glass doors to the fireplace to light the Christmas fire and out of the ashes of the fireplace emerged a sooty, thirsty, and hungry Tinker! The girls screamed and squealed! Tinker was hugged, kissed, and passed from lap to lap to be loved on and welcomed home. Even when offered food and water, Tinker preferred to be held and purr with unabandoned joy. Our Christmas miracle.

None of us recall what we **got** for Christmas that year, but we will never forget what we **experienced** that Christmas. God’s mercy, tender care, and grace extended to a wounded little family. Like Paul, as sinners, we were aware we did not deserve any gift. Like Paul we also understood that “for that very reason we were shown mercy so that Jesus Christ might display his immense patience.” In gratitude and humility, we recognized *“the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”* Vs 14

“Now to the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the only God, be honor, and glory forever and ever. Amen.” Vs 17. Christmas Day is a celebration of how much God loves us. Thank You, Lord, for the gift You have given us on this day! Merry Christmas Grace of Christ Family!

Father of mercy and grace, thank You for your underserved, unexpected, GIFT. Remind us that it is not in what we get, but in what You have given us, what we have experienced because of Jesus, that we find our Christmas miracle.

December 26

The Solution to ALL Our Problems

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3.16

Read John 3.16-21

My son Andrew has memorized one of the most important verses in the Bible, John 3.16 which are the words of our Lord Jesus. In this Bible verse God tells us how much he loves us and that he gave his only son so that we can be forgiven and be saved. I like it when my son reminds me that God loves us eternally.

Our world is being destroyed by environmental pollution, and it's filled with many difficult situations; from disease and spiritual poverty, natural disasters and so much pain in broken relationships; in every hard situation, it is part of our human nature to complain and ask ourselves where God is in all of this. Where can we find the answer?

Where is God's Love? Where is God's Grace? Where is God? The pain we all experience in this sinful world is very real, confusion, anguish, despair. All our emotions really exist, and we cannot deny them, this requires our immediate attention, and honesty, we need to be sincere with ourselves and recognize that we need God in our life and that we are not perfect. I want you to know that the answer to all these questions, and the solution to all of these problems, can be found in Jesus, our Lord and Savior. He was the one who died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, and only in him we can find Peace and Salvation. God offers us eternal life in his Son Jesus and no one cometh unto the Father, but by him.

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us with Your unconditional Love, and for sending Your Son Jesus to make the sacrifice on the cross so that we can all be saved in Him. Amen!

December 27

He is Owed All of Our Worship and Praise

"That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it."

John 1.5

Read John 1.1-5

Right here John sums up the season of Advent. Even amidst the great deal of darkness in this world, the light of Jesus Christ shines bright. He who experienced all of the darkness, even death itself, and was not overcome, now *dwells in us* as God's Spirit.

Even as followers of Jesus, we still live in a world where darkness seems ever-present. We experience suffering in relationships, through disease and death, and seeing the world run by, and for, those in power. Remembering the truth found in John 1:5 and the resurrection of Jesus allows us to have faith that He is the very God of the universe who is owed all of our worship and praise. Let us worship Him this day.

Jesus, Light of the World, during this Advent season, may we not ignore or fear darkness, but help us see the same light that came into the world 2,000 years ago still shines in us today. When we grow weary, strengthen our hearts. When we feel despair, encourage us through community and Your words, and where there is darkness, lead us to be light. Amen.

December 28

What Was God Thinking?

“He emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” Philippians 2.7

Read Philippians 2.5-7

Death and, most definitely birth, can be messy. Quite often these two events can be the most undignified moments of our entire lives. They involve vulnerability and an absolute lack of control. There’s NOTHING we can do to stop either of these two things once the ball starts rolling. Dignity goes out the window. You are vulnerable and at the mercy of those around you.

Once the baby starts coming, believe me, you want it OUT! Nothing else matters. It’s going to happen.

Sitting at the bedside of a loved one, after everything has been done, that can be done. You solemnly wait for the inevitable. There are no magic words. Death will come.

It’s a crazy kind of surrender. You come face to face with your own weakness and lack of control. It blows my mind that the Creator of the Universe CHOSE to enter into this limited existence. God HIMSELF entered the world as a baby. A vulnerable, undignified, breakable baby. His birth and death were messy. He was at the mercy of those around him. What was God thinking??? He was thinking of me and thinking of you.

Father, thank You for loving us so much, caring about us so much, valuing us so much that You were willing to enter into this world, our lives, the way You did. You humbled yourself. Born that first Christmas as a baby, and yet you were, are, and always will be, Savior of the world, God of all eternity, Master of birth, life and even death. Thank You.

December 29

My Sins Are Washed Away

"At one time we too were foolish disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." Titus 3: 3-7

I strive to have a quiet time with my Lord first thing in the morning before I go out and mess up the day with disobedience and envy and critical speaking. Recently as I was quiet, waiting, Jesus brought to mind a movie I have watched many times: *Amazing Grace*. *"I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."*

Having grown up near Gettysburg, slavery had a different meaning to me. I was a "Yankee" at heart and hated what our nation had done. I sorta held a grudge against the instigators who held this race of people in slavery.

During one of my quiet times in the still of the early morning just as the sun was coming up, Jesus pointed out to me about my own enslaving behaviors. Following a life of pleasure and giving in to worldly gratifications surely leads to slavery that separates us from God. A person is no longer free but enslaved to follow the dictates of this world. But He reminded me that He came to provide a way for me to escape those bonds and live free. My sins are washed away. I have renewal and freedom through the Holy Spirit. I gain eternal life with all its treasures.

As we celebrate His incarnation let's remember that He didn't remain a baby. He came to do His Father's will and He did it perfectly. In His mercy He took my sins and He made them His very own. He holds me in His love now and forever into eternity.

How wonderful, how marvelous is my Savior's love for me. God, help us to love as You love. Open our eyes and help us to see; open our ears and help us to hear; open our hearts and help us to love and serve You with great joy.

December 30
Boundless Grace

“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” John 1.16

Read John 1.14-18

Can you think of the last time you were in the wrong, and you knew it? We’ve all been there. Maybe it was being short with your spouse or child. Accidentally (or, purposefully) cutting off someone in traffic. Giving less than your best on a task that you weren’t excited about. We can all relate to that sinking feeling of guilt. Maybe you’re feeling that right now.

As I reflect on John 1.16, which finds itself in the larger context of John 1.14-18, I am thankful for the reality of the incarnation, that because of Jesus, the Word made flesh who dwelt among us (v. 14), there is no end to the boundless grace we are offered; no situation where it does not apply.

The “knowledge of sin” that the law brings (Romans 3.20) is a heavy weight, but we can have joy knowing that Jesus has come to set us free. Whatever that weight might be that you’re carrying today, know that in Jesus you have received grace upon grace. You are free.

Lord, thank You for grace upon grace, given to us because of Jesus. Fill us with joy today. Help us to believe this reality for ourselves, so we may offer it to someone else in their time of need. Amen.

December 31

What Joy to Make Him Known!

“Lord, now I can die in peace! As you promised me, I have seen the Savior you have given to all people. He is a light to reveal God to the Nations and He is the glory of your people Israel.” Luke 2.29-32

Read Luke 2.25-32

Like Simeon, who sought God throughout his life, the Holy Spirit testifies to us about Jesus who forms the life of Christ in us as we seek Him. When Christ is formed in us, we become a new creation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors as though God were making His appeal through us.

We have been given the opportunity to “make Jesus known” as we spend time with our youngest granddaughters. They come to our home and are like sponges desiring to learn about life and their questions to us are often prefaced with: “What does God think about that?” What joy to make Him known! We are grateful for God opening this door for such a time as this.

Lord, open our eyes to see You giving us opportunities to share Your love with others.

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