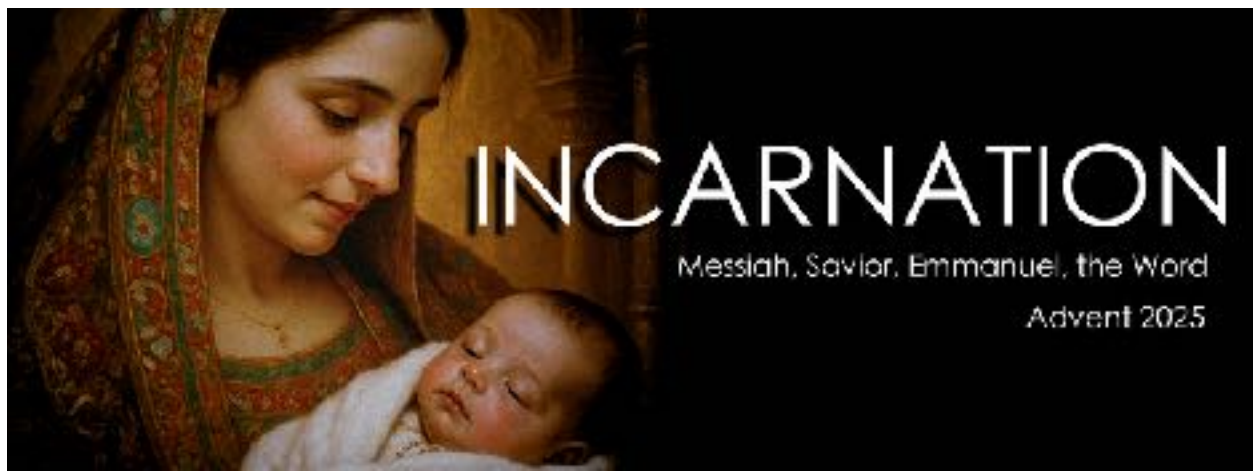




Week 1: Messiah and Lord - The Royal Titles

Monday—Read Luke 2:11 in the New Testament. The announcement came suddenly and in the dark of an ancient night. In modern terms, the announcement went *viral*! The news had come that a savior had been born—a Messiah had come! Some were waiting for delivery from living in a land occupied by Roman conquerors. Others were waiting for a healer for the ills they were suffering, both spiritual and physical. But this child that had come would deliver the people from much more—from sin itself. Do you understand that Jesus offers us more than a political solution? Do you know that he offers us more than a healing?

Tuesday—Read Matthew 1:16-18 and 2:1-6 in the New Testament. The word “*Christos*” translates to “*Anointed One*,” which in ancient Hebrew means the same as the word “*Messiah*.” Israel loved the hope of God sending a ruler born in Bethlehem, as the prophecy had told. The text from Matthew covers a part of Jesus’ ancestral line. Why was this important? Is this anything like an earthly king’s royal lineage might be recited?

Wednesday—Read Acts 17:1-4 in the New Testament. The apostle Paul always had one great central message. He used all his learning, his extensive knowledge of the Old Testament, and his speaking skills to convince his hearers that Jesus was “the Christ,” God’s anointed king. Why has this message sounded so convincingly down through the ages? What is the chord in us that is struck when we hear about the coming of Christ?

Thursday—Read Psalm 72:1-6 in the Old Testament. Over the centuries, Psalm 72 has been identified by many Biblical and historical scholars as the “Royal Psalm.” The description given in just these first six verses look remarkably like a description of Christ. If you now look at Matthew 16:13-20, you will see how Peter adopted the same description for Jesus, the one he called Christ—the true king who could bring justice, peace and righteousness forever. What qualities do you want in your leaders? Can you imagine how the world might change if world leaders genuinely committed themselves to being righteous and just? Have you prayed for that?

Friday—Read Acts 10:34-43 and Romans 14:2-12 in the New Testament. Rome’s Caesar claimed worship was due him as “Lord,” so for someone to say out loud that Jesus was Lord was fraught with danger. With Rome’s military might pitted against Jesus’ seemingly naïve witnesses, the contest looked very unmatched. But 2,000 years of history shows that it was Caesar, not Jesus,

who was outmatched! Can you think of any movement that has withstood the test of time more than Christianity? Why do you guess that might be?

Week 2: Savior - The Deliverer's Title

Monday—Read John 14:27 in the New Testament. On this second week of Advent we light the Peace candle. The end result of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is a deep and lasting peace, regardless of our circumstances. With Jesus coming into the world, fear has no more usefulness for us. His peace will dispel doubt and uncertainty, and will disarm the many things that are at war within us. During this week, keep a thought on the Peace of Christ, and how lighting the Peace candle is emblematic of the light of Christ shining within you. How will you let the light shine through you this Christmas?

Tuesday—Read Isaiah 43:5-11 and 52:6-10 in the Old Testament. These passages give us some insight into the violent world of the ancient Middle East. God was thought to be a savior in a political or military sense of the term. It's almost as if God were the cavalry that would arrive and save Israel's day at the very last and most dramatic moment. What are some of the "saviors" that people look to in modern times? What sense of "savior" is being used? Do you identify with the truth Isaiah declared about God being a savior?

Wednesday—Read Luke 1:67-75 and 2:10-11 in the New Testament. What does it mean that Jesus is Savior? What does he save us from? What does he save us for? Have you ever looked at "saving" this way? In the sermon on Sunday we heard that salvation is more than just a one-time thing. Salvation is a lot more than just getting to go to heaven. Jesus saves us from the consequences of our sins, and the Bible says so in Matthew 1:21! How has being saved from the consequences of sin changed you? How are you transformed by forgiveness?

Thursday—Read 2 Timothy 1:8-11 and Titus 3:3-6 in the New Testament. We heard on Sunday that God does not save us based on any set of good things that we have done. In other words, we can't fix the problem because we ARE the problem! Instead of having earned our salvation, we are in fact saved only by God's grace and mercy. We can never demand or become entitled to being saved. Do you know people who have said they believe they are "good enough" and by virtue of that they have confidence in their salvation? Have you ever said that? What helps you, amid all the holiday hoopla, to remember that Jesus the savior is God's extravagantly generous Christmas gift to you?

Friday—Read 2 Corinthians 5:14 through 6:2 New Testament. The Savior's work comes to us in the *past tense*, in that Jesus saved us through his life, death and resurrection. The Savior's work also comes to us in the *present tense*, in that we yield ourselves to him each day and join in his current mission. The Savior's work comes to us, yet again, in the *future tense*, in the hope God's people have that Jesus will save us when the divine reign begins. Do you see that Jesus *saved, is saving, and will save*? Do you need saving *yesterday, today and tomorrow*? Will you say, "yes" to making Jesus your savior?

Week 3: Emmanuel - The Incarnation Title

Monday—Read Luke 1:43-48 in the New Testament. On this third week of Advent we light the Joy candle. What does it mean to be filled with Joy? How does this kind of joy show itself to the world? From the passage we hear that Elizabeth's unborn baby "leaped for joy" when coming near Mary's unborn baby, who would be called Emmanuel. Does this image of joy before birth speak to you of blessedness and hope?

Tuesday—Read Matthew 1:20-23 and Hebrews 1:1-3 in the New Testament. Emmanuel means "God is with us." In the passage from Hebrews, the incarnation of God in Jesus is likened to a mirror image and an exact imprint of God's very being. In Jesus, the promises and prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled. And now, with the words of Jesus available, we have God's incarnate voice actually speaking to us through Jesus. When you think of God being with you, do you imagine a figure with a shape and a face? Do you imagine a spiritual presence? What would you want, or hope it to mean, that God is with you?

Wednesday—Read Psalm 16:7-11 and Joshua 1:9 in the Old Testament. These are strong words of reassurance of God's promise to be with us, wherever we go. God has never asked anyone to do something by themselves. Whatever God calls you to do will be done in partnership with him. God will guide you as well, if you let him, through his counsel. How do you tap into the counsel of God? Is there a place you can go to hide from God? Where do you go to stop and listen for God.

Thursday—Read John 14:7-11 in the New Testament. Getting a glimpse of Jesus is our best shot at getting a glimpse of the heart of God, for Jesus is God incarnate. Has knowing Jesus reshaped any of your images of God? How deeply are you able to trust the truth of what Jesus said? In what ways do you wish to grow deeper in knowing Jesus, and not just knowing about him?

Friday—Read Philippians 2:5-8 in the New Testament. This picture of Jesus as a servant and sufferer, while at the same time being "king" and "God with us," causes many people to struggle in their faith. Clearly, Jesus was not the kind of savior that human wisdom would have wished for! While fully God, Jesus came down to the lowest level, and obeyed God completely, even though it led to his death. Does the career path of Jesus strike you as backward, or do you sense the power that it carries? How does this deepen your understanding of what it means to be like Jesus? How are you at humility?

Week 4: The WORD Became Flesh

Monday—Read John 13:34-35 in the New Testament. On this fourth week of Advent we light the Love candle. In this passage loving one another is given to us as a new command. Love is certainly more than just warm and fuzzy feelings. This love means helping until it hurts, when not convenient, and putting the welfare of others ahead of your own. This is a high calling,

indeed. Do you see the command to love one another as a command to commit to a sacrificial kind of love? What does the phrase “love others as Jesus loved you” mean in your life?

Tuesday—Read Luke 2:1-7 in the New Testament. Christmas is one key story about God’s Great Reversal. Rome’s ruler at the time of Christ’s birth was Caesar Augustus, a man who thought that he was a god. This man issued the decree that forced Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem. Jesus, the true God become human, spent his first night on earth in a humble animal shelter. On Christmas Eve, how will you take time to reflect on the birth of the child who showed us God’s kind of power—the power of selfless love? How are you teaching others about this?

Wednesday—Read Luke 2:8-20 in the New Testament. We’re used to seeing dignified, noble shepherds in manger scenes, Christmas pageants, parades and paintings. Yet when Jesus was born, most people looked down on shepherds. Most priests shunned them because, caring for flocks, they couldn’t carefully observe all the rituals it took to be “holy.” Why do you suppose God revealed his wonderful news to the shepherds first? Why were they first to hear?

Thursday—Read John 1:1-5 in the New Testament. Coming to earth, Jesus the creator was creating anew. The author of the Book of John connected Hebrew and Greek thought words when he wrote of “the Word.” Many Greek thinkers identified “the Word” as the great idea behind the world. For Hebrews, meanwhile, God is said to have created by speaking “the Word.” Does this context help you connect to how profound Jesus’ coming was to the ancient world? How has Jesus changed your world view?

Friday—Read John 1:6-14 in the New Testament. Jesus will deliver us from the darkness we find within ourselves. Verse nine of this passage states that Jesus was the “true light that gives light to everyone.” Have you embraced this idea? Have you claimed your part in Christ’s ministry? Tell someone!