

Christ,
the
King
of heav'n is born

2023 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

*A*dvent is a season of waiting and patient anticipation. In Advent, Christians are called to remember our history and to contemplate our coming future. We remember the long wait of God's people yearning for a Savior, and recall the days before we knew Christ—or wandered—ourselves. We remember and consider the significance of the first Advent of Jesus, which we will celebrate on Christmas. And we remember that, while we aren't waiting for Christ to come, we are waiting upon his return, when every tear will be wiped away and justice and righteousness will be established forevermore.

This year for our devotion, Christ, the King of Heav'n Is Born, each day will feature a biblical text and a hymn or song that accompanies the devotional reading. You will see a QR code with each reading. Using your phone's camera, scan the QR code to find the song for that day.

We hope that, together, these three elements will lead to a rich time of reflection for you and your family. May you have a wonderful Advent and a merry Christmas!



Isaiah 60:1-3

Advent is a season of longing. In it, we remember the yearning of God's people throughout history for the times when God would act. After the fall, God vowed that one day he would come a child, a son of Eve, who would crush the serpent's head. Yet, her first son was a murderer, instead of the Savior.

Generations later, God changed Abram's name to Abraham—great father. Yet God still required Abraham and Sarah to wait many years before the promised son arrived. Everyone they met would have asked, "Where are your children, 'great father'?" For years, they no doubt wondered the same—when will God fulfill his promise? In Egypt God's people lived outside the land promised to Abraham for hundreds of years, first in comfort and then in bondage and slavery, crying out to God for aid—before being forced to wander in the desert for forty years due to their immediate ingratitude once God rescued them.

During the time of the judges, God's people fell time and time again, worshipping other gods and rejecting the Lord's commands, which always brings despair in the end. Each generation fell and cried out anew, suffering under the weight of the consequences of their guilt. Even at the height of Israel's supremacy under the reign of David and Solomon, that great glory turned to ashes. The kingdom fractured in civil war and God's people were eventually removed from the land. Back to where they began—dying in a foreign land, suffering under the bondage of pagan lords.

During their great exile, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming great Advent of God's glory. God calls out to his people as if they were the sun, "Arise, shine, your light has come!" After the darkness of exile, the prophet said that "the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you." In that day, when God's very glory would be reflected in the faces of the people, and nations and kings would be drawn to God through them, as moths to a flame.

In Advent, we remember the yearning of God's people for the dawn of this day, and we celebrate the dawning of his glory in the world in Christ. For in Christ, the God who said, "'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Whatever suffering or darkness you are under, whatever yearning you have for God to redeem you—know that God who has been faithful in bygone eras will be immeasurably faithful to you in Christ. The Light of the world has come and, though you are wandering among a people in darkness, His glory will rise upon you. Christ who is the light of the world, now says, "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). In Christ, even kings shall be drawn to our light!

Author: *David Bibee*

Listen to hymn: *Oh Light* by *The Liturgists*





Isaiah 7:14

People love Christmas carols. At least the ones I work with. So much so that it is not uncommon to hear the sounds of Christmas softly emanating from computer speakers in October. Being more of a traditionalist, I'd prefer to wait until after Thanksgiving before turning to carols but I can appreciate how the sound of Christmas music helps usher in the season.

Music is often like that. It tends to find its way from our ears to our hearts and helps, if you'll forgive the pun, set a tone. Perhaps that is why some of my earliest Christmas memories are linked to carols and hymns. One that stands out is O Come O Come Emmanuel. Since my childhood church was named Immanuel, I was taught its meaning from a very young age – God with us. That phrase was incredibly formative for my faith foundation. The notion that God came is both unique to Christianity and a powerful truth. The apostle John captures the same idea in the first chapter of his gospel, writing, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

The lyrics of the carol beautifully express the implications of God with us, that is the extraordinary reality of the gospel. This is the essence of Christmas. Our modern hymn, O Come, O Come Emmanuel, is an 1851 translation of a 12-century Latin seven-verse poem that was first used in the form of call and response. The music is even older as it dates to the 8th century. These dates matter to us because they demonstrate the significance of the doctrine God with us, the incarnation, was to our church fathers. It remains just as critical today.

In its modern form, the hymn is commonly sung in five stanzas and each highlights an aspect of the gospel and the refrain teaches us the response to the gospel – REJOICE! In the first, we sing “Ransom captive Israel that mourns in captive exile.” Here we acknowledge our natural state after the fall. We are captives of our sin and in need of ransom, meaning a price must be paid for our freedom. Verse two highlights the outcome of meeting the ransom “Victory over the grave.” Perhaps the third contains the most precious part of the gospel, the presence of Christ “drawing nigh.” By the fourth stanza, we are poised to sing about the glorious redemption made possible by God with us and so we sing “Open wide our Heavenly home.” The hymn's final verse is a declaration of what Jesus has done, both give and fulfill the awe. It also orients our proper posture, majesty and awe, in light of all of what has been sung. Between each, we sing REJOICE, for what else can we say in view of God with us! and respond. Every day lived in relationship with God is “the day of the Lord.”

Author: *Dr. Joel Satterly*

Listen to hymn: *O Come, O Come Emmanuel by for King & Country*





Tuesday, December 5

Psalm 90

Home is a tricky concept these days. Is home a place, or people? Past generations knew home as a place—it's where they and their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents had lived. The modern age has uprooted us. A generation ago, most people thought of home as where they grew up, but they no longer lived back home. Today, with the ease of travel, many children never have the opportunity to develop roots in a particular place. If home is anything, it's wherever your family happens to be. With skyrocketing divorce rates and children born to unmarried parents (often without a dad in the picture), home is complicated in every way, both in terms of place and people. With these patterns becoming the norm, it's no wonder so many struggle with the question, "Where do I belong?"

In many ways, the Bible is also a story about home. In the beginning, the garden in Eden was the place where heaven and earth met—the place where God would meet with his people. The garden was home. But with the fall into sin, Adam and Eve were banished east of Eden, never to enter the garden again. Now life would be a battle against a hostile, thorn-bearing earth, far from the garden sanctuary. Within ten generations of Adam, sin had so thoroughly corrupted humanity that Noah and his family alone were rescued through the flood. They stepped from the ark into a new world with no home—or garden—to return to. The whole history of God's people is one of sojourn, with only brief periods of stability. Ever since God had to drive Adam from the garden, we've been wandering from any place we might call home.

Our psalm today captures the sense God's people had—and we have—in the midst of our wandering and suffering. Man is dust. We are like grass that withers in a day, while God is one to whom a thousand years are like the passing of an evening (Psa. 90:4-6). Our years are swept away from us "as with a flood; they are like a dream" (Psa. 90:5). But, amid their wandering and exile—even when they were suffering God's judgment—they had steadfast hope: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations" (Psa. 90:1). God has always intended to be with his people. The creation was his idea. Eden was his idea. The tabernacle and temple, where God would cause his presence to dwell, were designed according to his designs. The whole of the Bible—and of history—is the story of how God is going to come and live with us. With the coming of Christ into the world, God has answered the prayer, "Return, O Yahweh! How long?" (Psa. 90:13).

In Advent, we remember the wandering and waiting of God's people, while we glory in the fact that Christ has arrived. For all you who have wandered long in this life and couldn't name home if you tried – Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). Because of Christ "we may rejoice and be glad all our days ... as many days as [we have been] afflicted" (Psa. 90:14). In Jesus, we can find our rest.

Author: *David Bibee*

Listen to hymn: *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus* by *Shane and Shane*





Isaiah 11:1-9

Last June we visited our daughter and son-in-law and our new granddaughter. They live in New York near the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. The rose garden was in full bloom. We savored the sights and scents of 1,000 varieties of roses. The beauty of that place refreshed our spirits and filled our hearts with gratitude to God. Beauty has a way of lifting our spiritual eyes to God. Even unbelievers sense something transcendent when they are in the presence of beauty. That's because God is good and the source of all beauty.

This old German Christmas carol compares the birth of Christ to the blooming of a single rose. But this rose is not newly sprung in June. Instead, it blooms when roses never bloom—halfway through a cold winter night. Also, instead of morning light dispelling the darkness (that's what we would expect), this carol depicts the fragrance and the sweetness of the rose dispelling the darkness.

When God created the world, all was good and beautiful. Harmony existed between humankind and nature. The earth was filled with marvelous potential for discovery and development. Our first parents loved each other, and they walked with God in the cool of the day. But their disobedience brought sin and death into the world. Although there is still much good and beauty in the world, we are confronted daily with the reality that Adam ruined things. We're horrified by news stories and images of murders and warfare. We grieve to hear of yet another broken marriage or a new revelation of abuse.

But as the old carol says, halfway through this dark night of sin, a rose blossomed! That rose is Jesus Christ, the Second Adam. He came to do something beautiful—to restore this world that the first Adam ruined. Restoration is beautiful! A “barn-find” classic motorcycle meticulously restored is more beautiful than one straight off the showroom floor. Your favorite loafers back from the shoe repair shop, re-soled and shined, are somehow better than when you first bought them. And when the Lord Jesus Christ comes into your life and restores what's broken, that's the most beautiful thing of all.

Isaiah 11:1-9 describes Christ's work of restoration. Perhaps the most striking verses in this passage are of animals that normally prey on each other (wolf and lamb, leopard and goat) living in harmony. This is a promise that no conflict, no animosity, no disharmony is beyond the power of Christ to restore. He begins that restoration now in the lives of those who trust him, and he will bring it all to completion in the end. If you are distressed and sad this season, weighed down by life in a fallen world, turn to the Lord Jesus, and the fragrance of his beauty will dispel your darkness and lift you up.

Author: *Rev. Andrew Siegenthaler*

Listen to hymn: *Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming* by *Sufjan Stevens*





Isaiah 40:1-11

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. (Isaiah 40:8) If you are a regular at Coral Ridge, this verse should be very familiar to you. You've heard it on Sundays as a reminder of the power and authority of Scripture. In today's reading, you may see it in a new way, as a gentle word of lovingkindness to people like us, people struggling to be hopeful in a broken world, a reminder that hope rests on God's faithfulness, not our goodness, power, or vision.

As you open your Bible to read Isaiah 40:1-11, there is a structure worth seeing that may not be immediately obvious. Voices are speaking back and forth to each other. God does not speak directly in this passage at all; he and his plans are being pronounced by the heavenly court to an audience on earth. Who is that earthly audience? It is us, in a sense. It's God's people like us but at a time much worse than ours. They were in captivity, their kingdom was gone, and God's city Jerusalem was in ruins because of their rebellion and sin. It seemed that their God was gone, the covenant broken, and hope completely lost. In this dreadful time, the heavens call out a message of hope: redemption is coming! Jerusalem—representing the whole of God's kingdom—will be restored, and God's glory will be revealed to the whole world (v. 1-5). Here is Gospel, Good News! God is going to make all things new. But then God's people respond in 6-7 ... with doubt, fear, and even cynicism. A voice tells them to cry, to speak out, and they do, with all the joy of a depressed poet. "What shall I cry?" they say. "Life is short and empty. We are no more than grass; flowers that wither and die in a moment." How familiar is this scene? God pronounces hope, and his people (we) respond with hopelessness. God says good news! And we cry, "Not for me!" I know my heart often says, "Yeah, right!" to God's good news. I suspect yours does too.

But now to our verse 8. The voice responds, not with condemnation for their doubt or anger at their cynicism, but with the assurance that this promise rests not on anything the people can see around them, but on the loving, covenant promise of God himself. It is like God saying to you, in your worst moment of weakness and failure and despair, "You are right! Grass does wither. Flowers do fade. Your strength can never be enough. But I am enough, and I am assuring your redemption because I promised. I will do this. I will make this right. I promise, and my promises never fail. My word stands forever."

Those familiar words are assurances about the very character of God. This advent season as we look forward to the redemption promised by God here in Isaiah, already initiated in Christ's life, death, and resurrection, it is still possible to despair of the ultimate consummation. When these pages say to your heart, "Cry out in hope," and your heart grumbles back, "Hope in what?", remember God's answer: "Hope in me, because I promise, and my word stands forever!"

If you are his child, redemption is coming to you. God has promised! I fail. You fail. But God's promises never fail. Join me, and let's hope in that.

Author: *Dr. Tim Sansbury*

Listen to hymn: *Comfort, Comfort Now My People* by Page CXVI





Isaiah 2:2-5

As we celebrate the Advent season, we are reminded of the anticipation and hope that surrounded the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. That same earnest expectation should characterize our lives in anticipation of the Second Coming. Today's reading offers a glimpse of the future kingdom of God, where his light will shine brightly for all nations to see.

Imagine a world in which there is no war, no evil, no suffering, and in which worshipers from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation gather to pay homage to the Lord. In today's reading, Isaiah receives a vision from God (2:1) that depicts this glorious reality of Christ's future kingdom, characterized by the Lord's benevolent and peaceful rule over the nations.

From Isaiah's depiction, we learn that in the end times, the Lord will establish Zion as the mountain to which the nations will flow (2:2). From its heights, God's people will adhere to sound doctrine and walk the path of righteousness (2:3). From this mountain, the Lord will judge the nations and rebuke his enemies (2:4a).

Moreover, the Lord's rule will be characterized by peace. The nations will "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (2:4b). Exchanging their weapons of death and destruction for the tools of life and growth, the nations will cultivate peace and friendship. Those previously motivated by evil will be inspired by the goodness of the Lord.

Isaiah concludes the vignette with an appeal for God's people to "walk in the light of the Lord" (2:5). Indeed, God's people are called to be a "light to the nations" (Is 42:6), a preview of God's coming kingdom when the Lord Christ will rule from Zion.

During this Advent season, may we seek to be a "light to the nations," a preview of Christ's future kingdom. May we meditate on sound doctrine, walk in the path of righteousness, and exchange our resentments and quarrels for friendship and peace.

Let us also reflect on the anticipation and hope that filled the hearts of the faithful in ancient times, and the certain hope that should fill our own hearts in this time between the first and second comings of our Lord. As we light the Advent candles, let each one symbolize a different aspect of our anticipation: hope, peace, joy, and love. As we wait for Christ's return, may we be instruments of His light, sharing His love and message of salvation with the world.

Author: *Dr. Rob Pacienza*

Listen to hymn: *Savior of the Nations, Come by Concordia Publishing House*





Daniel 7:13-14

One of the recurring themes within the Bible is the theme of dominion. Adam and Eve are made in God's image and given dominion over the earth and all the animals. They were tasked to subdue the wild earth—to make a fruitful garden of the world. But when they fell, Adam and Eve condemned their children to slavery to sin. Instead of taking dominion for the good and flourishing of the world, now men like Cain, Pharaoh, and Herod would come to power.

The Bible tells us that we are waging a spiritual battle—it is a battle against the kingdom of God and the dominion of the devil—but waging spiritual war doesn't mean it isn't earthly. Those who worship demonic gods offer their flesh-and-blood, earthly children in fire. Wicked kings rob their flesh-and-blood neighbors, oppressing the earthly poor. Evil men are swift to water the ground with blood that came from earthly veins. In this spiritual battle, there are earthly casualties.

We often look back at the disciples with a kind of historical arrogance. We think, "They keep talking about a kingdom as if Jesus is going to conquer the Romans. How could they have missed the point so badly?" But they weren't, in fact, missing the point. When Israel was in exile in Babylon, Daniel saw the coming of the kingdom of God. Daniel saw a figure who seemed to be just a man, but this man ascended into heaven, and God gave him "dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." His kingdom would be "an everlasting dominion [that] shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:14). God's people were right to wait for the son of David, the King to whom God would say, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool" (Psa. 110:1, cf. Acts 2:34, Heb. 1:13).

Jesus did come to conquer the world, but they misunderstood how. Jesus didn't come to set up a throne in earthly Jerusalem or to cross the Tiber to seize Rome, but to "destroy the one who has that power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Jesus came to die so that through his death, the "ruler of this world" would be defeated: "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31-32).

In Advent, we should count ourselves lucky. We live in the knowledge that the Son of Man has taken his throne at the right hand of God, in the True Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22-24, Acts 2:22-36). We can preach the gospel with confidence, knowing that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Matt. 28:18). And because we know what Christ accomplished in his first coming, we can look with great hope for his last Advent. On that day, our bodies shall be made imperishable and every tear wiped away—"when Christ, our King, in beauty comes, and we His face shall see."

Author: *David Bibee*

Listen to hymn: *The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns* by *The Hymnal Project*





Genesis 1; John 1:1-3, 14

When I was a young child, I enjoyed playing a made-up game that I coined as “Territories.” It involved all my toys including but not limited to Legos, stuffed animals, Hot Wheels, action figures, train sets, and Playmobile castles. I would set up each category of toys in a different part of the house. After arranging groups of toys in my bedroom, downstairs in the kitchen, and in my parents’ room, I would quickly get lost in the imaginative process of a world packed with high-action plot lines and countless heroic stunts made by many a handcrafted Lego aircraft. Playing the game was fun, but creating the game was even more rewarding.

While it may take different forms, creativity is deeply embedded into our makeup as human beings. There is a reason for this—we have been uniquely fashioned by the One who spoke the very sun, moon, and stars into existence. Not only did God create these massive celestial entities, he designed the microscopic details of the cells that hold them together. It’s astounding when you stop and think about how much of God’s hand can be seen in what’s around you. Indeed, “All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created” (John 1:3 NET).

In the hymn “Creator of the Stars of Night,” we’re reminded that no matter what situation we find ourselves in, God is with us and by him, we will overcome. The lyrics go on to describe how - even in the wake of our sin and the darkness that ensued—Christ is our redeeming Light. He was swallowed up by death’s dark curse, but even the darkness of death could not overcome the light of salvation that he secured for his very own. Not only has he redeemed his people, but Christ is redeeming all of creation by reversing the curse of death and directing glory, honor and dominion back toward God.

Every time you look at the stars at night, or any part of creation for that matter, you can be reminded of the One who made all things, who made you, and who has the power to redeem you from your sin. In fact, when you’re united to Christ by faith, it’s by his power that God works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose ... that you might shine like the very stars in the sky (Phil 2:13-15).

Author: *Rev. Caleb Koornneef*

Listen to hymn: *Creator of the Stars of Night* by OCP Session Choir





Psalm 2

Loving your children is natural. Jesus pointed this out when he asked the crowds if they would give their son a rock if he asked for bread, or a snake if he had asked for fish. He concluded, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matt. 7:9-11). Parents want to give good gifts to their children. God does too.

Being called “son of God” is a royal title from the very beginning. Adam is described as “the son of God” and is made high priest in the garden of God and given dominion over the whole world (Luke 3:38, Gen. 2:24). He is both king and priest. God calls Israel his “firstborn son” (Ex. 4:23) and names his people a “kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6, 1 Pet. 2:9). And God promised David that he would raise up a king from David’s line, and God would “be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him” (1 Chron. 17:13). All of God’s sons are royal because God’s Son is the King.

In Advent, we remember the birth of God’s eternally begotten Son. John tells us that Jesus was born into the world with Satan, like a great dragon, waiting to devour him because he knew the child would be “a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter” (Rev. 12:5). Psalm 2 shows us why Satan was right to fear. To his Son, God said, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel” (Psa. 2:8-9). If you, though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, will the Father in heaven fail to give to his Son all that he asks?

Because the first Adam fell, all the nations of the earth rage like stormy seas, but, because of the Last Adam, they rage in vain. We see tyrants, corruption, and war and are prone to fear. But they are living on borrowed time. God “who sits in the heavens laughs; Yahweh holds them in derision” (Psa. 2:4). After his ascension, the Father said to his Son, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool” (Psa. 110:1, Acts 2:34, Heb. 1:13, 1 Cor. 15:25). The Father has his King and he has set him on the throne of heavenly Zion, the eternal city (Heb. 12:22, Gal. 4:22-26). And he has promised all the nations—the very ends of the earth—will be his possession. This must be the basis for our hope, now and in the future—regardless of what the talking heads on TV tell us.

This Advent let us not succumb to anxiety or fear concerning the world around us. The earth is the Lord’s, and all that it is in it (Psa. 24:1). Christ will have it all.

Author: *David Bibee*

Listen to hymn: *Of the Father's Love Begotten* by John Michael Talbot





Psalm 22

Our Scripture today, Psalm 22, is a prophetic Psalm of King David that beautifully encapsulates the journey from despair to redemption while portraying the hope and trust that can be found in God's presence and promises. Although Psalm 22 is an individual lament (vv. 1-21), it has an expanded section of praise for God's answer to that lament (vv. 22-32). The beautiful truth of this Psalm is that Jesus is the fulfillment and answer to both halves of the text. The connection of the lament verses in Psalm 22 to Christ is obvious because Jesus utters the cry of verse 1 from the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Jesus bore our anguish on the cross in the terrible reality of Calvary. In the second half of the Psalm, the verses lift the Psalm into a stanza of praise as the Psalmist declares his intention to proclaim God's name to the ends of the earth. King David knew not how this hope would come, but he trusted that one day God's fullness would "be told to the coming generation" (v. 30).

In a seminary class, we were asked this question: What is the difference between a seed and a rose? Scientifically, their DNA is identical ... but on the other hand, our eyes can distinguish between the two. This is because the difference lies not in their substance but in their stage of maturity. The seed alone is a mystery, but a fully blossomed rose lies dormant within that seed. Theologian Geerhardus Vos is well known for using this metaphor. He describes the history of God's plan of salvation in the Bible as a seed that slowly grows into a rose. In Genesis 3:15, the seed of the Gospel was planted, a seed that held the mystery that would one day be revealed. The Old Testament characters (including King David) and redemptive-historical texts are the germination of that seed, which gives us glimpses of God's plan for redemption. These Old Testament stories are the breadcrumbs marking the path, pointing to a moment 2,000 years ago:

One cold winter's night, in the City of David, the answer to King David's Psalm was born. And although he came as a baby, he did not come as a seed; he was not God's backup plan for a fallen world. This baby would become the fully blossomed rose of the mystery that had begun long before. In the fullness of time, God sent his Son to bring us the redemptive plan for all of humanity. This Christmas, let us remember the great hope that we have, that Christ both meets us in our lament and provides his plan to save the world. Friends, we have seen the rose in full bloom, that all the earth would know. *"Arise, O God, and shine in all thy saving might, and prosper each design to spread thy glorious light: let healing streams of mercy flow, that all the earth thy truth may know, that all the earth thy truth may know."*

Author: Andrew Nichols

Listen to hymn: *Arise, O God and Shine* by Indelible Grace Music





Psalm 46

Christmas often feels like a psychic earthquake. Between the parties, the family visits, the dinners, the lunches, and all of the noise. Can we have a little peace and quiet at this time of the year? Maybe the Grinch was right—we need to get rid of the “noise, noise, noise.” Can we just sit and think? Can this thinking help us in the middle of an earthquake (psychic or otherwise)? Psalm 46 deals with that very question. Have you ever been in an earthquake? Did you feel the ground roll around you as if all stability is gone? We are creatures that crave stability, both spiritual and physical. Frank Lloyd Wright, the well-known architect, built the famous Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. When it was built, it had a revolutionary design because it had within it five pillars that could withstand any seismic force that would hit that city. You can find pictures of the hotel standing when everything else had been leveled. That is the kind of stability we all desire, yet we often feel it eludes us.

We often feel more like the offshore drilling platform built by the Ocean Drilling and Exploration Company. It had been engineered to withstand a 100-mile-an-hour wind if that came funneling down the narrow body of water off the coast of Scotland. It was supposed to withstand anything that got thrown at it. And yet one morning when a tanker crested the horizon, it had disappeared. To this day, nobody knows what happened. Seventy souls went with it. It was 30 stories tall, but it vanished to the bottom of the ocean because something was thrown against this platform that it couldn't withstand. Where do we find stability? Psalm 46 is an answer to this existential question. When one needs stability, it is to God that we must turn. Some scholars think this was written by someone who faced an emotional breakdown. Whatever the case, it is written by someone longing for peace in the midst of a difficult time. Yet, ultimately, the writer trusts God during this difficulty.

I'm sure that you know Psalm 46 is a hymn and verses 7 and 11 are the chorus. In verse 7 the text says, “The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.” Look at verse 11—he says it again in case you missed it the first time. The term “Lord of hosts” should remind us of the Christmas story. As the Christ-child was being born Luke tells us “Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts.” Just as during his birth, we are surrounded by spiritual armies that we can't even see. The Lord of hosts is with us. Do you seek stability, refuge, and peace in your life? You will not get it by building an oil rig that can withstand anything; it will fail. You will only find what you are looking for by seeking the God of the universe. There is no final peace and stability anywhere else.

Psalm 20 (KJV) reminds us of this when it says, “Some trust in horses and some in chariots, but we will remember the Lord our God.” I wish you'd imagine Jesus standing near you with a big, beautiful basket, smiling at you. And you just came and put your trust in that basket and said, “Here, Lord. I'm giving it to You—earth quaking, mountains shaking, seas roaring. Bankers, doctors, landlords, friends that forgot me—all of it I put in Your basket. I'm going to trust You, and I'm going to relax.”

Author: *Dr. Sam Lamerson*

Listen to hymn: *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* by *Fernando Ortega*





Isaiah 61:1-3

“O Come All Ye Unfaithful”—what a beautiful rewording of the familiar hymn to remind us that we aren’t accepted based on any merit of our own, but that our good standing before God has been bought and credited to us by faith in Christ. Even the faith it takes to believe this truth is a gift from the Holy Spirit. By faith, the prophet Isaiah saw the “year of the Lord’s favor” when the promised Deliverer would fulfill the very words written in chapter 61:1-3. Indeed, Jesus is the One on whom “the Spirit of God is upon” (vs 1). If Christ is the Messiah, what is the ministry? Reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake, [Jesus was] made to be sin, [though he] knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God.” You can see the relationship between this type of exchange in Isaiah 61 as well. Because sin impoverishes, Christ preaches good tidings to the poor. Because sin breaks hearts, Christ heals the brokenhearted. Because sin makes captives, Christ liberates the imprisoned. Because sin is a crime that must be avenged, Christ proclaims the acceptable year of our Lord. Mourning and sadness are traded for comfort, consolation, and joy. Ashes are traded for beauty and it’s all by his glorious grace. In fact, it’s this very grace by which God’s people will be established as “oaks of righteousness, [through] the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:3).

The central theme to both the song and text for this advent devotional is that our salvation is the work of the Lord. Why is this such a big deal? Because on our own, we are unworthy. On our own, we seek to self-justify by looking to our own righteousness or creating our own standards to compare ourselves to those around us. Instead, we ought to look to the words of Isaiah 61 to remind us that the only ground for us to stand on comes from a righteousness that is not our own. By faith in Christ, we are heirs to the very inheritance that belongs to him. And what is Christ’s inheritance? In short - it’s you. It’s everything. It’s all “glory, majesty, honor, dominion and authority, before all time, now and forever” (Jude 25).

Perhaps you’ve become dull to these truths or maybe you’ve never heard about the great exchange that takes place by faith in Christ. Either way, this Christmas season is a time to be renewed in the power of God’s Spirit and to repent of your sin, but also to take great hope in believing that Christ is the Messiah was born for you.

Author: *Rev. Caleb Koornneef*

Listen to hymn: *O Come All Ye Faithful* by *Sovereign Grace Music*





Psalm 40

Advent is the season of anticipation—and waiting can often be a painful, anxiety-ridden process. In temperate climates, Advent not only leads to the birth of Christ, but also accompanies the transition from autumn to winter. In this transition of seasons, we are confronted with the reality of death, as the earth’s vital green gives way to the barren black and white of winter landscapes, with a dying burst of yellows and reds. When you are living off the land, the transition to winter is frightful. The earth becomes solid like iron, rain falls like rocks, and the long nights turn dangerously cold. Hope for continued life depends on making it to the warmth of spring.

But there are broadly two ways to approach our seasons of waiting and anticipation—with faith or without it. You’ve met both kinds of people—those whose presence brings a sense of confidence and calm, and those who enter the room like a match to a gas leak. With faith, God leads us to become the sort of people who can enter a crisis, or a season of great difficulty, and bring words of wisdom and hope that bring confidence to others.

Our psalm today presents us with a man whose confidence in the Lord enables him to face utter uncertainty with faith and assurance. He is in real trouble: “Evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me” (Psa. 40:12). But in the midst of present troubles, he doesn’t get spooked and forget his history—and God’s history with him. He knows that God is the one who has always “inclined to me and heard my cry” (Psa. 40:1). In past days he “waited patiently for the Lord” and God “drew [him] up from the pit of destruction [and] set [his] feet upon a rock” (Psa. 40:1-2).

God has shown himself to be faithful in the past and this man isn’t quiet about it. God’s goodness has put “a new song in my mouth” and many “will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord” (Psa. 40:3). He doesn’t only point to himself, however, but also reminds his family, friends, and neighbors about their own past, reminding them that God’s thoughts have been “toward us” and he has “multiplied... wondrous deeds” on their behalf. For those who are facing their current crisis with panic and fear, forgetting what they know to be true, our psalmist maintains a perspective that allows him to become a bearer of hope and resilience toward others.

This Advent, may we remember who we are in Christ, and may that empower us to become examples of steadfast, joyful confidence to others. It is fitting that we celebrate the arrival of the light of the world at the heart of “bleak midwinter.” For when our darkness was great when our sins reached to heaven and evils surrounded us, Christ came to lead us through darkness into new life. Though we may be “poor and needy,” as our psalmist says, we may know that we are secure because “the Lord takes thought of me” (Psa. 40:17).

Author: *David Bibee*

Listen to hymn: *In the Bleak Midwinter* by *Gustav Holst*





Isaiah 58:1-11

Advent is a season of anticipation, preparing our hearts for the arrival of Jesus. Today's reading reminds us that while man looks at external appearances, God looks at the heart. In this time before the Lord's Second Coming, we must submit wholeheartedly to him, not only in external appearance but also in inward reality.

In Isaiah 58:1-11, God calls out the hypocrisy of his people who adhered to God-ordained rituals but lacked purity of heart. The historical context is the Exile and Israel's judgment for her unfaithfulness. During this time, Israel had set aside an increased number of days for fasting as they mourned the collapse of Jerusalem and Judah. The days of fasting were supposed to be a time of self-denial and repentance but had degenerated into empty displays of piety. So serious was their hypocrisy that God called upon Isaiah to raise his voice "like a trumpet" against it (58:1).

Israel's hypocrisy had blinded them to the point that they swelled with pride, grumbling openly against God as if he were unjust not to grant their requests (58:2). In response, God declared their fasting useless. They are clothed in the customary sackcloth and ashes, but they were at the same time oppressing the poor and vulnerable (58:3, 5). God expected Israel's fasting to be accompanied by just deeds—the casting aside of injustice and the sharing of food with the hungry (58:6, 7).

God promised that if Israel would change its ways and fast from a posture of humility and obedience, he would bless them. Indeed, once their fasting rituals were filled with faith and accompanied by just deeds, Israel's light would "break forth like the dawn" (58:8). God would answer their heartfelt prayers (58:9), their dark night of the soul would become like the bright light of noonday (58:10), and the nation would become like a well-watered garden or an ever-flowing spring (58:11).

During this Advent season, therefore, let us heed the word of the Lord. As we participate in God-ordained habits—Scripture meditation, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication—may we do so with genuine humility and a heart of faith. Let us "fast" from the worship of power, comfort, and the approval of people. Actively seek out ways to serve people who are in need and consistently show love and kindness to the people in our lives.

As we do so, the light of Christ in our hearts will break forth like the dawn, casting a warm glow over the darkness of our communities. Our own dark nights of the soul will become bright with the light of Christ. Our church's life will become like a lush garden and a bubbling spring.

Author: *Dr. Rob Pacienza*

Listen to hymn: *In a Land by Death O'ershadowed by The Porter's Gate*





Luke 1:5-38

I remember it clearly. I was about 28 years old and was on my first and only trip to Israel. As we left the airport it was amazing to see lots of ancient buildings, roads, and ruins. All of that faded into obscurity as we topped a hill and the city of Jerusalem was right in front of us, lit up and amazing! We could see the walls, some of which were there during Jesus' day. I realized that seeing all of the other things beforehand prepared me for the great sight of the city.

Luke does something similar here. It is clear that this entire book is about the life of Jesus, but the name Jesus doesn't even show up for the first thirty verses. Luke begins by telling us of another pregnancy, another angel, and another prophet. The story of the announcement of John the Baptist's birth prepares us for the greater sights that are coming: the birth of Jesus.

The angel that brings the message to Zachariah is not "just another angel." It is "the angel of the Lord." The fact that Zachariah needs a "sign" (How can I be sure of this?) from this angel is akin to asking André the Giant to prove he is big. This is evidence of the comedy of this passage (don't be afraid to laugh when the Bible is funny). The sign is not what he was expecting. The sign is that he can't speak!

How does one describe an encounter with the "angel of the Lord" using only mime? How does one tell his wife that she is pregnant in spite of her age, using hand gestures? I wish I could have been there. The thing to remember is that the angel was not a cuddly dashboard object, he was a powerful, frightening being. Yet he brought good news. The things that we hear angels saying most often are "fear not" or "stop being afraid." This again shows us that these were not the angels that we see in costume shops. These angels were not to be trifled with.

We don't often (or ever) see such beings today, but that doesn't mean that they aren't there. One of the problems that Christianity faces is a failing belief in the supernatural. We live in a world where we pay lip service to God and other spiritual beings, but many in the church really don't act like we believe it. If you knew that there were evil angels out there seeking to harm you would you pray more? If you knew that good angels were waiting to help you when you called, would you call out to God more? If you really believed that the world runs according to the plan of God (complete with angels announcing births) rather than the power of man, what would you worry about? No matter who is president, no matter what happens in the Ukraine, no matter how the war in Israel pans out, God is in charge.

Angels remind us that we are not in charge and that we should pay attention to the one who is—our Lord Jesus Christ.

Author: *Dr. Sam Lamerson*

Listen to hymn: *Angels We Have Heard on High* by *Phil Wickam*





Luke 1:39-56

When we lived in Chicago, I thought it would be a great idea to take the kids (still very young) and go out to cut our own tree from a farm. It was a cold, snowy day and, unknown to me, people bring their own tools to cut the tree down. I borrowed a hatchet and used everything I knew about cutting down a tree (I'm just glad Cindy was there to help because I know nothing) and finally felled our tree. At the time I owned an old, rusted Honda Accord. Putting the tree into the hatchback, having one child on each side with the hatchback open and snow blowing in did not increase their Christmas spirit. By the time we made it back to the apartment, they were scratched, wet from snow, and so full of sap that they were saying "We hate this tree! It is the worst tree ever!" We were able to work through the issue and eventually the kids loved the tree.

When I think of this I think of the wonder of cutting our own tree, and the nightmare of getting it home—the confusion of Christmas. Mary speaks seven times in the first two chapters of Luke. Her first words (v. 34) are words of confusion: "How can these things be?" Thus, the first question about the virgin birth was not raised by a theologian but by a young woman who was not some sort of ancient troglodyte that didn't know where babies come from, but a shocked exclamation that this simply could not be true. It is a cry of confusion.

It may be that you are facing confusion in your life right now. Perhaps your family is not what it should be or your finances seem more difficult than ever. You wonder why God is bringing difficulty into your life and why things are so difficult even when you try to obey God. Mary could have wondered the same thing. She was a woman of purity and yet she had to admit to her "fiancé" that she was pregnant, yet had never been with a man.

Can you imagine how confusing that conversation must have been? Yet (with the help of an angel) Joseph believed. Thus we move from the first speech of Mary (confusion) to a speech of submission ("Let it be according to your word), then a speech of communication (Mary gets up and goes to tell Elizabeth), and this passage ends with a speech of jubilation, commonly called the "Magnificat." It is a song that, among other things, praises the Lord for his providence.

Despite all the confusion, the difficult conversations, the snide remarks from those who didn't believe Mary, the men who laughed at Joseph for believing—in spite of all of that, Mary sings praises to the Lord! As you face times of confusion this season, don't forget that things that start out looking awful (a prickly, sappy, poorly cut-down Christmas tree) can be turned to gold. So I wish you a "Mary Christmas," a Christmas like Mary where you see the hand of God turn your prickly old tree into beauty and your confusion into jubilation.

Author: *Dr. Sam Lamerson*

Listen to hymn: *Hope of the Ages by Sovereign Grace Music*





Hebrews 2:10-18

I'll never forget the story a man once told me about how he was introduced to Jesus Christ. He was working in a new job in a large business when he made a mistake that cost the business a lot of money. He thought he was going to get fired. He probably deserved to be fired. But his boss took all the blame as an error of his department.

This man went to his boss and said: "Thank you, but why did you do that for me?" His boss said that it seemed the right thing to do. The man replied, "You're not telling me everything. Nobody does this." His boss explained that he had been in the company a long time, and he had a lot of capital, so he could absorb the fallout from this mistake, but the man being new would have been fired. Still not satisfied, the man tried again and said, "But why? You haven't really told me why." His boss looked at him and said, "Do you really want to know? I'm a Christian. Jesus did the same for me."

Hebrews 1 contains some of the loftiest descriptions of Christ in the New Testament. He's called heir of all things, maker of the universe, the radiance of God's glory the exact representation of God's being, and sustainer of all things. Christ is presented as God in the most glorified terms. Someone has described Hebrews 1 as nosebleed Christology because it is so high and glorious. But then what happens in Hebrews 2? He comes down. He descends. We don't climb up to God—he climbs down to us. Look at verses 14 and 17. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity." "He had to be made like his brothers in every way."

There is no aspect of human experience in this fallen world he did not partake of: He was hungry, he was thirsty, he was tired, he went without, he was belittled, his family and friends misunderstood him, he was lied to, he was lied about, he was reviled, he was abandoned, he was betrayed, he was beaten, he tasted death. This Christmas carol describes how even as a little child, Jesus felt our sadness and shared in our gladness.

Why? He's the heir of all things, maker and sustainer, the radiance of God's glory—why would he come down to our level? Why would he take our blame and sin? Because that's what older brothers do. Older brothers love their fathers, love their younger siblings, and are willing to lay everything down for the good of the family. Christ Jesus took on human nature and descended to the shameful death of the cross to bring his younger brothers and sisters to glory.

Author: *Rev Andrew Siegenthaler*

Listen to hymn: *Once In Royal David's City* by *Sandra McCracken*





Luke 2:1-6

Did you know that Bethlehem means “house of bread”? What an interesting name for the city in which the Bread of Life would be born. The prophet Micah was the first to foretell that a Messianic Ruler would be born in this small city. Remember too, that Bethlehem was also known as the “City of David”—the shepherd boy turned king to guide the flock of Israel. How fitting for Jesus, the Great Shepherd to be born here. Even in these small, nuanced ways, Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises to redeem for himself a people for his own possession.

The popular Christmas hymn, “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” was written in 1868 by Phillips Brooks, an Episcopal clergyman in the northeast of the United States. It’s memorable not only for its description of the city of Bethlehem at night but also for its reflections on the meaning of Christmas. Where other hymns focus on the grandeur and splendor of the angelic chorus, Brooks’ focus remains on the humble beginnings that Christ assumed in his birth. In the darkness of this sleepy, rural town, the Christ child emerges born of a virgin—Mary. As the hymn goes on, it modulates from the aesthetic of that first Christmas to the application of Christmas. “O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.”

In these lines, you can hear echoes from Jesus’ sermon on the mount (Matt 5) when he preaches, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven... Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” The words penned by Phillips Brooks are both humbling and empowering because they are rooted in the Gospel. In fact, the very nature of the Gospel is that on the one hand, it brings you to reality by revealing your true need for God. At the same time, the message of the Gospel strengthens you because its power is not something you can attain or earn. It’s bestowed by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Christ was born in lowly estate. The King of kings was a carpenter by trade. He was born in a stable, not a palace. He chose fishermen and tax collectors as his disciples, instead of royals and rulers. In silence, he endured the unjust accusations of those he came to save. Abandoned to death on a cross, he bore the curse of sin and shame. By his very blood, he washes us clean. What an upside-down paradigm, indeed! How does the upside-downness of Christ’s first coming impact you the most? I pray it’s both humbling and empowering.

Author: *Rev. Caleb Koornneef*

Listen to hymn: *O Little Town of Bethlehem* by Nat King Cole





Colossians 1:15-23

I know people are jealous about their favorite Christmas songs, but it's not hard to see "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" as the most theologically rich carol of the season. Beginning to end beautifully articulates the doctrine of Christ's incarnation. Written in 1739 by the famous hymnwriter Charles Wesley, brother to John Wesley, its original title was "Hymn for Christmas Day." The first stanza tells the story of the angels' message that Christmas night, but it centers on the phrase "God and sinners reconciled." When we think of reconciliation with God, our minds usually go to the cross. But this carol also helps us remember that this little baby is the beginning of that reconciliation - the "peace child" who is the mediator between two warring parties.

The second stanza of the carol focuses on the person and nature of Christ. "Hail the Incarnate Deity!" The Son of God took on our humanity, "veiled in flesh the Godhead see." We remember here that God's glory is too brilliant for any sinful person to see and live. By taking on our flesh, Jesus brings the glory of God in a way that we can encounter it, through our own human nature. It is through this means that we can "the Godhead see." He is the "everlasting Lord," but this does not keep him from dwelling with us as Emmanuel.

The third stanza gives us several biblical images to picture the effect of Christ's coming. Jesus is the "prince of peace," son of the King, the heir to the throne. But then we go from son to sun: he is also like the dawn of a new day, "the Sun of Righteousness" who brings light to the darkness. He's also like the ancient mythical Phoenix who brings healing and life in his wings, so that just as the Phoenix dies and rises again, so he also gives "sons of Earth" a "second birth." In him we also die to the old, dark time, and rise again to a new life. Now we can be sons of heaven in the peace child sent from heaven. Most of our versions of this carol end with the third stanza, but Wesley's original version has two more verses. These are harder to sing, but they are even more rich with doctrinal treasure. More Old Testaments are brought in to help us understand Christ. He is the "woman's conquering Seed," born of Mary, yes, but also the son of Eve who crushes the serpent's head. Yet Wesley reminds us that the serpent isn't just "out there," but in each of us. He defeats the evil in our own hearts and lives to reclaim our fallen nature so that we might participate in Christ's own everlasting nature.

The fifth and final stanza has the hardest words to understand, but it is also beautiful and profound. When Christ comes as a second Adam, he wipes out our connection to the old, fallen Adam. The human race can now be "reinstated" to relationship with God in the garden. We had lost God, but in Christ we are returned like the prodigal, and Christ himself is our "inner man," the true image of God who imparts his own life to our hearts in faith. As you sing this beautiful Christmas hymn, I pray that you would be reminded of the Christ who "holds all things together in himself".

Author: *Dr. Robbie Crouse*

Listen to hymn: *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* by *Sovereign Grace Music*





2 Corinthians 4:6-18

One of the charms of portrait art is the effect produced by the contrast between light and darkness, a technique called *chiaroscuro*. A beautiful example of this is Gerard van Honthorst's *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (1622). The Christ child in the manger is the sole source of light. His little body, like a frail candle in the darkness, is sufficient to scatter away the shadows from all those who adore him.

The idea that Christ is the light is a technique of the Gospel writers informed by the theology of the uniqueness of Jesus. The prophets spoke of the coming "sun of righteousness" that would rise with healing for God's people (Mal. 4:2). John the Beloved tells us that Jesus coming into the world through the incarnation was the Light that illumines all mankind (John 1:9). The light of the Savior during his Transfiguration, as Matthew tells us, "shined like the sun" (Matt 17:2). The light of his face, when he appeared to John on Patmos, "was like the sun shining in its strength" (Rev 1:16).

From Paul's sacred and holy text of Scripture we learn that the sun in the heavens was created to illustrate the glory of Christ in his redemption: "God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The wonders of the heavenly sun display the many perfections of the true Light of the World. Jesus' blazing light dazzles all those who dwell in darkness. He awakens the dead out of darkness to arise to the light of new life.

The light of the sun confounds the wisdom of the wise; even our modern sages of the skies are mystified as to how the mathematics of light answers both to the wave as well as the particle. The mystery of the sun works both to soften the wax and harden the clay. Its heat both thaws the snow and creates clouds. The cresting of the earliest dawn makes the darkness of night flee beyond the farthest horizons. The mystery of sunlight reveals the prismatic beauty of the rainbow's arc. Its radiance will illumine the colorful jewels and dazzling gems of the City of Light, the New Jerusalem.

The motion of the sun silently and imperceptibly moves the shadows of the sundial. The sun likewise measures both the cycle of the seasons and the vast circle of the great ages of time. The psalmist composed the praises of the sun. The righteous will flourish in the light of its day, he sang, and peace will prevail until the moon is no more.

The sun's glory is the source and the sustainer of physical life itself. The sun's gentle warmth cheers the cheeks of the blind. The light of the sun restores health and well-being to the frail. We who have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness know its power, for we have been transferred into the mysteries of the kingdom of light. For the Light is Jesus!

Author: *Dr. Warren Gage*

Listen to hymn: *Joy Has Dawned* by *Boyce Worship Collective*





Revelation 21; Ephesians 1:3-14

Almost there! No, not Christmas (well, not just Christmas...). “Almost there!” should be a cry of joy in our hearts as we think about the kingdom that God has promised. Today’s readings should tell you what that kingdom looks like (Revelation) and remind you that your hope to see it rests on God’s promises, not your work, goodness, or strength (Ephesians).

In the book of Philippians, Paul describes himself as full of overwhelming joy. He is joyful in terrible circumstances. He’s in jail, he’s being betrayed not only by the enemies of Christ but also by people in the church. He’s suffering. And yet, he is overflowing with joy. Why? Because he has his eyes set on the future. He knows he is almost there: almost to the kingdom that is coming; almost to the full restoration of his body, his mind, his soul, his very being; almost to heaven! Almost there! In our Ephesians selection, we see the reason for Paul’s confidence. He is certain of his future because he knows the work was done by God for us:

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Eph 1:7-10
Paul knows that redemption rests on God’s work through Christ and that God’s plans and purposes can never be thwarted. This whole selection from Ephesians marks one of the most remarkable, direct, and overwhelming expressions of God’s love for us demonstrated in his taking action to save his people and ensure that they will be saved on account of God’s love and grace, not any temporary, incomplete, and inadequate human action.

And what a salvation he is promised! In Revelation 21, John tells us of our future home: “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away,” Rev. 21:3-4. Jerusalem comes down from heaven like a bride for her husband. We live with God, daily and directly, in his city. Pain, sadness and death are gone forever. Paul is overjoyed because he knows... *Almost there!*

As you get ready for Christmas, which is almost here, take a moment to reflect on what the birth of that tiny child really means. Christ’s birth, his perfect life, his death for our sins, and his resurrection to eternal life means God’s plans are finished... Redemption will happen. It is happening. It has happened already. We need only live and trust and love knowing our joy is out there, guaranteed by the love of God, eternal joy just beyond the horizon of this life. *Almost there!*

Author: *Dr. Tim Sansbury*

Listen to hymn: *Joy to the World* by *Worcester Cathedral Choir*





Luke 2:7-21

What is the point of it all? If you ask any question in Advent, that's a question worth considering. No question is more important. I wonder how the shepherds would have answered the question, "What's the point?" before they heard that Jesus was born. I wonder how many of them wouldn't have known what to say, jaded from the difficulties of life—tired of their hard labor, sick of stupid sheep, and wondering if there is anything more beyond the daily drudgery. Yet in an instant, the world lit up with glory: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). Before they could even grasp what was happening, the night's darkness was banished by figures of the living day singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14). However, they felt when they woke up that morning, they came to understand a life-changing fact: they were alive to see the Savior.

Each year, Advent confronts us in our sluggishness, and the world in its pretenses with an unchangeable fact: God has come into the world he created. One day not all that long ago, the world's maker took his first human breath, blinking through barely opened eyes at his smiling mother, drenched with the sweat of her toil. And here we find the ultimate purpose. The world was created to be the place where God and man would live and build and laugh and eat and love one another—together. The world was created to be the place where God could be known, not merely as an idea, but as one man looks into the face of another. Man was made in God's image, but, even more, we celebrate the glorious truth that God has taken up his image in Jesus. And although he was without sin, he did not abandon us in the world sin produced, but came to innocently suffer so that suffering would cease. In Christ, God has truly become Immanuel—God with us.

So, what say you? You are here because Jesus determined you must be here for just this time—to know him and to make him known. You woke up this morning in the same world Jesus walked—in the same world he rose from the grave, in the same world over which he reigns. Where is the living God leading you? What darkness needs confronting? What chaos needs taming? How many children need having? What businesses need building? What suffering needs comfort? What flowers need planting? What harvests are waiting for your arrival?

This Advent, may you know deep in your bones that your purpose is to know the living God through Jesus Christ. What despair can there be for us since Jesus walked in this world? What hopelessness could grip us since he has overcome the world? What fear could stagger us since he has shattered open hell's gates? What uncertainty might make us doubt that the God who raised Jesus from the dead will be forever faithful and mighty to save in our future?

Author: *David Bibee*

Listen to hymn: *Silent Night, Holy Night* by *The Oxford Trinity Choir*



Notes

You can have the Hope of Heaven this Christmas!

Heaven is a free gift.

The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

We are sinners and cannot save ourselves.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

On the one hand, *God is love. I John 4:8b*

But on the other hand, *He does not leave the guilty unpunished. Exodus 34:7b*

God solved this problem by sending His son, Jesus.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life John 3:16

You receive the gift of heaven by faith.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Acts 16:31

If this is what you want, you can pray right now:

"Dear Jesus, forgive my sin, and come into my life as my Lord Savior. Thank you for giving me the hope of heaven both now and forever. Amen."

This is the promise of Jesus, *He who believes has everlasting life. John 6:47b*

Welcome to the Family of God!

