

NAMES OF JESUS



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2024

CORAL RIDGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Advent is a season of anticipation and remembrance. During Advent, we remember the coming of the promised messiah into the world—the first advent of Jesus. But we also look forward to the time when Jesus will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead—his second Advent.

For this year, we have chosen to focus our devotion on the different names and titles of Jesus. The scriptures give us these names and titles to show us distinct aspects of what salvation would include, and the kind of savior Jesus would be.

This Advent, may we all come to understand the names of Jesus with greater clarity and may that understanding lead us to live courageous, faithful lives in response!

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
—Philippians 2:5-11

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1

Genesis 3:15

THE SEED OF WOMAN

The Advent season invites us to reflect on the great promise of God's redemption through Jesus Christ. In Genesis 3:15, we find the first prophecy of the Messiah, where God declares that the "Seed of the Woman" will crush the serpent's head, pointing to the coming victory of Christ over sin and death. Genesis 3:15 is often called the "Protoevangelium," or the first gospel. It is God's initial promise of redemption, made immediately after humanity's fall into sin. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve's disobedience brought a curse upon creation, but in His judgment, God also offered hope. He declared that the offspring of the woman would ultimately defeat the serpent, representing Satan. This "Seed of the Woman" is a direct prophecy of Jesus Christ, the Savior born of a woman who would bring salvation to a broken world.

At first glance, this verse may seem vague, but through the lens of the New Testament, we see it fulfilled in Jesus. Galatians 4:4-5 tells us, "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law." Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection accomplished what Genesis 3:15 prophesied—He crushed the serpent's head by conquering sin and death on the cross.

This victory is not merely physical but deeply spiritual. The serpent's bite represents the ongoing conflict between evil and humanity, but the ultimate crushing of the serpent's head signifies Christ's triumph. Jesus' crushing of the serpent's head reminds us that he is not only the gentle babe in the manger but the fierce warrior who will defeat the Enemy and set the world to rights. Though Satan still wages war against God's people, his defeat is assured through the work of Jesus.

As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, Genesis 3:15 reminds us of the cosmic significance of Christ's coming. Jesus was not merely born to be a great teacher or moral example; He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). In Him, we find victory over the sin that entered the world through Adam and Eve's rebellion. This season, let us reflect on how Christ's victory over sin affects our daily lives. We are no longer slaves to the power of sin, for Christ has won the battle. This Advent, as we anticipate the celebration of His birth, let us also rejoice in His ultimate triumph, knowing that through faith in Him, we share in that victory.



SEED OF ABRAHAM

The Bible tells the story of God with the world, but it is a story with multiple parts. Genesis 1-11 shows us the history of the world's origins, beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden and ending with the formation of the seventy distinct nations of mankind that resulted from God's judgment of languages poured out after Babel. Up to this point, the Bible is focusing on all people generally. But in Genesis 12, the Bible zooms in on one man—Abram. God calls Abram to leave his father's house and to journey to a land that God would give to him and his descendants, promising that although his wife was barren, God would give Abram a son (Gen. 15).

It might appear that the focus on Abram and his Hebrew descendants, which is the focus of most of the rest of the Old Testament, means that God has left the rest of the world and the nations of his plans and purpose. But we need to remember that God's purpose for choosing him was for the sake of all the world's salvation: "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3).

In our passage today, we see an expansion of God's promises. At 99 years of age, still without the promised child, God renames Abram—"great father," Abraham. God vowed to Abraham that he would "multiply" his family "greatly," making him "the father of a multitude of nations" (Gen. 17:3-4). Not only would the "seed of Abraham" bring blessing to the nations, but God says that the nations of the world would become children to Abraham when God's purposes are complete. Through Abraham, God would bring all the nations that were once divided at Babel back into one family because of Abraham's "seed."

The coming of Christ into the world signaled the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. Paul tells us that God's promise to Abraham was a promise about the gospel of Jesus (Gal. 3:8). The promise, Paul says, wasn't made to Abraham and to his *seeds* "referring to *many*, but referring to *one*, 'And to your [seed],' who is *Christ*" (Gal. 3:16). Because of what Jesus has done, Paul says, the "the blessing of Abraham" and "the promised Spirit" has "come upon the Gentiles" (Gal. 3:14). Because of what Jesus, the seed of Abraham, has done, now Gentiles are called "sons of God, through faith" (Gal. 3:26). Now Galatians, Irish, Kenyan, Armenian, English, Italian, Navajo, and all the other countless ethnicities represented in the Church have become "Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise" because they have the same faith that Abraham did (Gal. 3:25-29).

History has been filled with bloodthirsty division among the nations of the world, and needless war and tyranny casually afflict the world's peoples today. But Christ has come to be Lord, drawing the nations to himself. Only Christ offers the way of peace. For "[Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... reconcil[ing] us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility" (Eph. 2:12-14, 16).

This Advent, remember that you are a part of a world-transforming movement. Jesus, the seed of Abraham, is joining the world's tribes that were scattered into one "great nation" of Abraham's children—the Church. In a world ravaged by division, Christ has come to be our peace.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3

2 Samuel 7:1-13

CHRIST, THE SON OF DAVID

*"Thou art the King of Israel, thou David's royal son,
Who in the Lord's name comest, the King and Blessed One."*

The season of Advent invites us to reflect on the fulfillment of ancient promises, chief among them the promise that God's Messiah would come from the line of David. David, the shepherd boy who became king, is the Old Testament figure who most fully foreshadows the person and work of Christ. Throughout Scripture, we see that Jesus is not only *like* David in many ways, but he is so closely identified with him that the Messiah is even called by David's name. In Ezekiel 37:24-25, God declares, "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd... David my servant will be their prince forever." This passage points us forward to Jesus, the Son of David, who will reign forever and gather his people under his care.

Although Jesus was a carpenter by trade, we most often picture him as our shepherd, guiding us with tender care. This is largely because David, the shepherd-king, gave us the 23rd Psalm, which describes God as a shepherd who leads his people beside still waters and restores their souls. In Christ, this imagery takes on even deeper meaning. As the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), Jesus not only leads us but lays down his life for his sheep, accomplishing the ultimate victory over sin and death.

Similarly, though Jesus never wielded a sword or led an army, we see him as a mighty warrior in the spiritual realm because of the victories David achieved. David's triumphs over Goliath and the enemies of Israel point us to Christ's victory over Satan, sin, and evil. Just as David went before his people in battle, Christ goes before us, defeating the forces of darkness and inviting us to share in his triumph. Through his resurrection, Jesus shows that he is the King who conquers death itself—our ultimate enemy.

The title "Son of David" is more than a genealogical note; it reveals Jesus' identity as the rightful King and the fulfillment of God's covenant with David. The people of Israel longed for a king like David—a ruler who would restore God's people and establish a kingdom of peace and justice. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to the cries of "Hosanna!" the crowds hailed him with the words, "*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!*" (Luke 19:38). Their praise echoed the lyrics of the hymn: "*Thou art the King of Israel, thou David's royal son, who in the Lord's name comest, the King and Blessed One.*"

This Advent, let us worship Christ as the Son of David, the fulfillment of every promise and the King of kings. He is the shepherd who tends to our souls, the warrior who fights for our freedom, and the Prince of Peace whose reign will never end. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, may we bow before him in awe and anticipation, trusting that his kingdom has come and will one day be fully realized. Rejoice, for the Son of David has come—and he will reign forever!

MAN OF SORROWS

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.
—Isaiah 53:1-5

God is afflicted, stricken, and grieved? Christ as the Man of Sorrows is so embedded in our minds as Christians that it is often hard to remember how strange this is. It would have been strange for a Jew. It would have been strange for a Gentile. And really, it ought to be strange for us today. A Jew had a very clear expectation of a new king, in the line of David, who would come and conquer. Losing—a battle, territory, wealth, esteem—was a sign of a king out of favor with God. And the coming messiah would be a better king than David... he would not lose, and so certainly he could never be a man of sorrows. He would be a mighty, victorious, king on a hill leading the perfected people of God before the defeated nations.

The gentiles had no such expectations for a coming messiah and king, but they knew what it meant for the gods to come to earth. Many stories told of gods walking among us, but even if hidden, they were always mighty, always victorious, always self-serving, and certainly never lost to mere humans. A god coming down in human form? Reasonable. A god dying at the hands of regular people? No chance. Even now, for us today, this God and king who gives himself up for his subjects should be a shock. Think of our earthly leaders today ... they may not be kings and gods, but they are certainly self-serving, and no defeat is ever treated like a victory. Losses are permanent stains, or else they are denied outright no matter the evidence. Weakness and power are never together. A leader today with Christ's record of loss would indeed be considered stricken, afflicted, and smitten by God.

But not so with Jesus. Jesus defies every normal human idea of power. Jesus had almighty power and set it aside for people who were his enemy. He did not merely hide it, to be revealed in a great triumph, but he fully released himself into the hands of his enemies. And he did it for his enemies themselves. It is us! By his dreadful wounding we, his enemies, are entirely healed.

As you reflect on Christ this advent season, remember that he is a king above all Jewish imagination, yet stricken. He is God above any Greek imagination from Olympus and yet subjected to humiliation in a backwater territory of Rome. He rules beyond any modern government, and yet even now graciously allows his creation to live in rebellion so that more may be called to that salvation made possible by his death and resurrection. He is no distant God above all trial and tribulation, but a God beyond all human imagination who came down to be a man of sorrows so that we could become his joy in salvation. Praise God!

SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

You've heard the phrase, "Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it." Asking God to show up is something like that. You can be sure that when God shows up, things will get better. But that isn't to say that things will be peaceful. When God shows up that means there's nowhere to hide. And if God shows up and things aren't in order, he's known to throw the furniture around.

Consider other times that God came to check on his people. In the garden, he thundered for Adam and Eve to present themselves after they disobeyed, administering judgments and casting them from the garden. At the flood, God sees the wicked hearts of men and determines to consume the world in a watery deluge. At Babel, God comes down to cast the people into confusion. At Sodom and Gomorrah, God comes down to dine with Abraham before sending avenging angels to destroy the city. At Sinai, God appears with fire and flashes of lightning, and everyone who touched the mountain was to be killed for profaning holy ground. "When the Man comes around," the wicked perish. So too with the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, he was coming to bring peace, to establish his kingdom of eternal justice and to bring redemption to the people of God—and "the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble." These two things are held together in one. There would be salvation and judgment.

John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus came to God's people like Noah did to his generation, warning that salvation is nigh to those who heed God's warnings, but all those who reject God's word would face judgment. As John the Baptist, the one who came in the Spirit of Elijah had warned, "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the tree... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire... he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:10-12). Even as Jesus went to his crucifixion with women weeping over him, he told them to weep for themselves and their children for because they had rejected him, sure judgment was coming upon them.

As Malachi had warned, the coming of the Lord would mean salvation if they repented, or destruction if they didn't. Because they didn't, Jesus said they were facing "the days of vengeance" when the Romans turned Jerusalem into rubble (Luke 21:20-24, 23:28-31). But for those who feared God's name, Christ would be as "the sun of righteousness" rising "with healing in its wings" and they would "go out leaping like calves from the stall." Yet those who did not fear God on that day, they would be set "ablaze [leaving] neither root nor branch" as the old covenant ended forever. When Christ comes to us, we are faced with the same options. To be in God's presence is to have our hearts and minds opened, to have the penetrating gaze of the Holy One of Israel seeing even those dark thoughts and impulses that we are not even aware of. There is both salvation and judgment. Before God, we all stand condemned people of unclean lips, darkened hearts, and bloodstained hands. There is only one choice: flee to God in Christ, pleading his mercy upon us, and turn from the sin that darkens our lives.

As we meditate upon the coming of the Savior into the world, let us be frank with ourselves and with God. Do not shrink from his judgments. For those who are in Christ, God's judgments are the judgments of a Father chastising his beloved child, to whom he plans to give the whole world. Repent, putting to death the old man—the desires of the flesh—knowing that God regards the contrite and uplifts the lowly. Upon all who humble themselves and acknowledge their sin, Christ is the Sun of Righteousness rising with healing and mercy upon his wings.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6

John I

WORD OF GOD

Many of us have favorite passages of Scripture. John I is one of mine. That has not always been the case but these verses have become dear to our family over the years, particularly as part of Advent. Like most families, the Satterlys enjoy certain Christmas traditions. Some of those were established intentionally, such as opening presents on Christmas morning, not Christmas Eve, while others just kind of developed. Our love for John I fits into the latter category.

We first became acquainted with John I as an alternative to the more traditional Christmas reading of Luke 2 mainly because of over-exposure to *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and also a desire for our children to have a more unique family experience. Later, we were exposed to *A Service of Lessons and Carols* during one of our stops in Christian school leadership. Traditionally the Ninth Lesson, John 1:1-14, was read by the Provost of King's College, Cambridge. As Headmaster of the school, this reading became mine. As a result, it afforded an opportunity to deeply read and meditate on the passage.

For many years, and now when we have the privilege of being with our children and grandchildren on Christmas morning, we read and pray through John I. It is a rich passage that highlights both the wonder of Christmas and the majesty of The Christ.

The opening verse ... "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ..." powerfully opens the book and sets the stage for all that follows. John retells the creation story in just a few words. Here *Logos* refers to the unique revelation of God as Jesus. Wisdom personified. D.A. Carson, in his commentary on John, makes the case that the opening verses of John connect God's self-expression in creation, revelation, and salvation depicted in the Old Testament with God's self-disclosure in Jesus – the Word was with God and was God.

The verses also describe Jesus as the true light, the means of salvation, who is rejected by many; and also as one who gives the right to those who believe to be children of God. Here, we are told that Jesus is the means of salvation – the way, truth, and life. Salvation also means that we are restored to a right relationship with God, we are sons. This is Good News!

Two final beautiful elements are revealed toward the end of the passage. Gifts worthy of Christmas morning. First, our status as before God is not of our own doing or any other person, it is because we are born of God. In other words, God does it! It is His gift.

The second is incredible. It separates Christianity from every other religion. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus is made low. He comes to us, lives with us, and is known to us. Hallelujah!

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7

Matthew 1

JESUS

If you could choose your ancestors, whom would you choose? We all have a few bad branches in the family tree that we are ashamed of. By the same token, there are those that we might wish we could trace our lineage to. Jesus had that chance, yet look at the people he chose.

For the sake of space, we will only look at the females in this genealogy, noting that having females in such a list was pretty unusual. Most genealogies from this time are concerned with the “fathers.” In this list, however, we find five different women.

Each of these women has something different about them. Some acted as prostitutes, were foreigners, at least one was an embarrassment to Jewish history (note that Bathsheba is not named but called “wife of Uriah”), and one was a girl who was pregnant outside of marriage. There is something “wrong” with each of them, yet Jesus included them in his genealogy.

One of the reasons for the inclusion of the women in the list is to illustrate the name of Jesus that we learn in this chapter. In verse 21 Matthew tells us that we will call him “Jesus” because he will “save his people from their sins.” From the first time that we meet Jesus in the New Testament, he is helping those who need forgiveness. All of society had convinced these women that they were wrong, useless, or expendable. Jesus offers them a new life, a changed future, and a clean slate.

A second reason for the inclusion of these females is to illustrate another name of Jesus. In v. 23 Matthew quotes from the famous passage in Isaiah 7:14. Here we learn that he will be called “Emmanuel” which means “God with us.” God is on the side of his people. Even when those people fall, sin, or make horrible mistakes.

There are those of you who do not feel like God is with you. You feel alone and dispirited, like you are making decisions with no one to help you. Our passage today should remind you that God is with you. My professor Dr. Robert Reymond said this: “God with us, I will never understand that. I could understand ‘God against us’; I could understand ‘God is angry with us’; I could even understand ‘God wants nothing to do with us’; but ‘God with us’—that I will never understand.

Have a wonderful Advent and remember “God is with us.”



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8

Luke 4:14-21

CHRIST—ANOINTED ONE

Have you ever been in a situation where a person in the audience stands up and interrupts the speaker? I have seen it, and I have actually been the one who was interrupted. Once when doing ventriloquism at a nursing home, a woman yelled at me: “You leave that boy (the puppet) alone, that’s my son.” These kinds of interruptions can change the course of everything.

In today’s passage, we see Jesus stood up to read. He was not interrupting in the normal sense of the word. It was common during this period for a person to stand (out of respect for the word of God) when they read the Scripture, and then sat down to discuss it. It is not the reading that is so shocking to the listeners, it is the comment after the reading that is so unusual.

What do we learn about Jesus from this passage? First, we learn that he, like any other practicing Jewish man, attended synagogue faithfully (v. 16, “as was his habit”). We must never forget that Jesus grew up in Israel and was fully Jewish. Anyone who was a follower of Jesus during his day would have been considered Jewish. It is only later that Judaism and Christianity separated into two different systems.

Second, we learn about Jesus’ view of himself. He read the passage from Isaiah that predicts the end of the exile and the coming of the messiah. The coming will be known because of the things that were happening (blind see, lame walk). Remember when John the Baptist asks Jesus “Are you the one ...?” Jesus answers John’s disciple by telling him that “the lame walk, the blind see...” Jesus is saying, “John, you should have known this. The coming of the Messiah is far different than you might have imagined.”

In this passage, Jesus does this again. After reading this passage he tells the crowd, “I am the fulfiller of this passage; I am the messiah; I am the one you have been waiting for.” Often this season of the year is difficult. We remember those whom we have lost, either physically through death or emotionally through disagreements.

We can always remember this comment of Jesus that shocked the crowd. It is shocking to think that God himself came down and lived with us, taught us, and died for us. As we all go through this holiday season, try to remember that we live on the “visited planet.” Our visitor has come to offer us the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus told the crowd that day and he continues to tell us today. He is the Messiah, come to pour grace on those who need it.



SON OF GOD

Having a child is an enlightening experience. God created us in his image and then we bring forth children after our own image. This is both exhilarating and frightening. What a marvel seeing a child—a new image bearer of God who will live an eternal life—who shares your smiles or eyes. But what trembling they inspire. Children are a living mirror held up to our lives. They learn to say the words they hear us speak and do the things they see us doing, both for good and for ill. They make it impossible for us to pretend we are something other than we are, reflecting our behavior back to us. But as God sanctifies us, he uses these same copycat tendencies to produce children who follow after us in righteousness.

Every child shares their parents' nature. This is key for understanding who Jesus is and the significance of what he has done. From Adam onward, all children came about through natural means—men and women having children. There are many examples where God intervened in order to enable his people to have children, making the barren fertile again. But these children were all still conceived the usual way. The birth of Jesus, however, is something altogether unique. Jesus is the first and only man ever to be born of a woman without an earthly father. Jesus is Mary's son, which means he shares her nature—he is human just as she was. But Jesus is begotten in Mary's womb by God directly—his heavenly Father, not an earthly one.

Jesus is the promised “seed of the woman,” “seed of Abraham,” and “son of David,” but all these fulfillments depend on the much greater truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus is the first *man* ever to partake of the *Divine* nature.

Matthew 3 tells us of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after John the Baptizer announces him. The Lord who was coming into the world is one who brought fire with him. The blazing sun of righteousness would baptize the unrepentant in fires of judgment, but to all who receive him, he would fill them with the fiery Spirit of God. And as John poured forth water onto Jesus' head, the very heavens themselves opened as the Spirit descended upon Jesus, with the very voice that was heard thundering from Mt. Sinai crying out, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Our salvation is dependent upon Jesus' relationship with his Father. Out of all humanity, Jesus is the sole faithful One. Because Jesus is heir of the world, we have become “heir[s] of the world” (Rom. 4:13). Because of Christ's work on our behalf, he is “not ashamed to call us brothers” (Heb. 2:11). Because Jesus has been raised up to a throne at God's right hand (Phil. 2:9-11), we have been raised up and seated on the thrones with him (Eph. 2:6). Because Jesus has delivered us from the domain of darkness, we are now citizens of the “kingdom of [God's] beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). Because Jesus calls God, “Abba, Father” and has poured out the “Spirit of adoption” upon us, we too have been named sons and heirs of God (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:6).

This Advent, let us remember how great God's love is for us. For the joy set before him, Christ, the Son of God and God the Son came to endure the cross so that we might join him as the blameless children of God. And because Christ shares both God's nature and ours, we can have every confidence that he will not fail in remaking us into his own glorious image.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10

Matthew 17:1-23

SON OF MAN

Have you ever had an experience where you came away knowing with certainty you'd just encountered something unnatural? It seems almost everyone I've asked has some story of the supernatural or paranormal. One song describes the world and human nature, saying, "I am creation, both haunted and holy; made in glory." The world is haunted. There are spiritual powers of darkness. We are haunted by our own nature's bent toward sin. There's surely more going on within and around us than what we ordinarily perceive. Sometimes God pulls the curtain back, giving a glimpse into things that no man can explain (2 Cor. 12:4).

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus pulls back the curtain for his closest disciples. Jesus had done the same for Moses and Elijah on other mountains centuries before (Ex. 24, 1 Kgs. 19:9-18). At this point, the disciples understood that Jesus was the promised king. What they imagined was that he would marshal an army and mount an assault on the Roman garrisons surrounding Jerusalem, winning back independence from the pagan Empire. Perhaps he'd launch a reform of the temple and re-establish the biblical standards for sacrifice. They didn't understand that Jesus had much bigger plans beyond what happened in Jerusalem.

Before their very eyes, Jesus began shining as brilliantly as the sun. This would be amazing enough, but then Elijah and Moses were there standing and talking with Jesus as well. Even more, they heard the voice of the Father from heaven proclaiming Jesus again as his beloved Son. I can imagine their hair stood on end. Their world had become a haunted and glorious place. They were standing on holy ground with ghosts and God himself.

Jesus refers to himself as the "Son of Man," forbidding his disciples from telling anyone of what they saw until after "the Son of Man is raised from the dead" (Matt. 17:9). Jesus told them that he would suffer at the hands of men, just as John the Baptist had, but he would be "raised on the third day" (Matt. 17:23). Most modern readers assume that "Son of God" is the most remarkable name used for Jesus. It's true that he is God's Son, but "Son of Man" is even more significant as surprising as that may seem.

The prophet Daniel foresaw the coming of "one like a son of man" (Dan. 7:13). Although this figure appeared to be just a man, Daniel saw him, "with the clouds of heaven... he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13-14).

In Advent, we don't merely celebrate the coming of a *king*. In Advent, we recognize that Jesus is the Son of Man, whom God has made *King of all Kings*. God has proved that Jesus is this King by raising him from the dead on the third day. And, as a result of his victory over death, Jesus ascended into the throne room of the Ancient of Days and was given dominion over all the earth. Now, all peoples, nations, and languages *will* come to serve him. Let us rejoice!

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11

John 1:19-34

LAMB OF GOD

Peter Leithart somewhere described the Old Testament as the biography of Jesus. This might seem like an odd claim to modern readers—and quite an anachronism—since Jesus doesn't show up until the New Testament. But Leithart is right, if not quite in the way we might expect. The Old Testament is the biography of Jesus in the sense that his life mirrors the lives of the patriarchs, kings, and prophets of Israel. Adam met Satan in the Garden, failing to stand firm against temptation, whereas Christ met Satan in the desert and defeated him with the word of God (Gen. 3, cf. Matt. 4). Like Abel, Jesus was killed by envious brothers who could not handle that Jesus was more righteous than they (Matt. 27:18, cf. Matt. 7:28-29). Like Israel fleeing Pharaoh, the infant Jesus escaped Herod by taking refuge in Egypt, to fulfill God's words concerning Israel, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I have called my son" (Hosea 11:1, cf. Matt. 2:15).

In our passage today, John the Apostle introduces John the Baptizer, Jesus' cousin, who preached repentance to the people. John had grown in popularity and many were becoming his disciples, but John testified that he was not the coming Messiah. Rather, he was the one whom the prophet Isaiah would come to prepare the way for the coming Lord. John was appointed by the Father as a prophetic herald, born to announce the arrival of his Son, the King.

It should interest us that when the Spirit descended upon Jesus, anointing him with the divine power and glory that is his birthright, John calls Jesus, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Jesus, the Lord who was now in their midst, is hailed as the *Lamb* that removes sin. The word should immediately conjure images of blood and fire and smoke, the scent of roasting meat and dripping fat. Lambs that take away sin are spotless, perfect, without blemish—and they are born for ritual slaughter. Jesus, John does not want us to miss, is the King that was born to die.

But perhaps even more, the word Lamb should remind us of the beginning of Israel's existence—when God chose Abram and promised him a coming Son. Once Isaac, the miracle child, was born, God commanded Abraham to take Isaac to the mountain and sacrifice him (Gen. 22). For three days Abraham and Isaac journeyed to the place and Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice. Abraham was willing to make this sacrifice because he trusted God's promises. If God promised Abraham a son who would inherit the land and bring blessings to all the nations, then God would have to raise Isaac back up from the dead (Heb. 11:19). God stops Abraham before the killing blow can be struck and he praises Abraham saying, "I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen. 22:12).

The great miracle of Advent is that, with the coming of Jesus into the world, the Father has revealed for all the world to see that he never demands us to do something he isn't willing to do himself. With the coming of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, we have come to know that God will not withhold his Son, his only Son, the Son whom He loves, from us (Gen. 22:2). And because Jesus was willing to come and to die, God fulfilled Abraham's hope—raising Christ from the dead, so that all the nations would become his inheritance. This Advent, rejoice! The Lamb of God has come, the Lamb of God has been slain, the Lamb of God has been raised and is seated at the right hand of God! If God was willing to go to such great lengths to redeem us, may we trust that his mercy, bought with the blood of Christ, is sufficient.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12

Isaiah 1:1-11

ROOT OF DAVID

One of the most epic childhood memories I can remember was when several tall cottonwood trees were blown down behind my house in Colorado where I grew up. For a kid, a blown-down cottonwood tree became an instant fort to explore. Images of the exposed root systems of these felled trees always come to mind when I think about the “Root of David.”

In Isaiah 11:1-10, we encounter a profound prophecy that speaks of hope, restoration, and the coming of a divine ruler. At the time of Isaiah’s prophecy, the great Davidic dynasty had split into two kingdoms and God’s people were being “cut to the stump” because of their unfaithfulness and rebellion. Yet, amid God’s judgment, a profound message of hope is present. “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” For believers, this verse illustrates the hope and peace of the Gospel. Even when situations seem barren or hopeless, God brings forth new life and fulfills His promises.

Ultimately, this passage anticipates Jesus Christ as the righteous ruler that God’s people needed. The fulfillment of Christ’s Messianic reign is characterized in verses 6-11. The wolf living with lamb, the leopard with the goat, young calves with lions, and nursing children with venomous snakes. These counterintuitive scenes are vivid expressions of the peace that believers have with God through Christ in the new creation. To borrow from the Apostle Paul, we might say these scenes portray a peace “which surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

Take a moment to reflect on how the “Root of David” illustrates both hope and peace.

Like a “shoot” from the stump of Jesse, God the Son would enter His own creation in humility and gentleness showing that he is the object of true hope. From a seemingly dead lineage, new hope arises. Revelation 5:6 says, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” Jesus is the hope of the world because he fulfills all of God’s promises. Is he the object of your hope?

Like a branch, Christ’s Kingdom expands outward until the peace of God is realized in every corner of the cosmos. Here’s how: the peace that Christ offers is first extended through being made right with God by faith (Romans 5:1). God’s peace is then manifested *in* believers by the enabling of the Holy Spirit to gradually grow to be more like Christ (Romans 8:6). Finally, and perhaps least thought of, Christ’s peace transforms the world *through* the life and witness of his Church (Romans 12:18). The very peace that we have with God by faith through Christ, is the same peace that transforms you and redeems the world. In this way, Jesus doesn’t just provide the peace we need, he is peace. Do you know his peace?

Whether you’ve walked with the Lord for many years or you are embracing him for the first time, place your hope in the Root of David and experience the peace that only he can give. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).

LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH

There's a critical difference between being peaceful and being harmless. Someone who is peaceful is a person who desires tranquility and seeks to pursue reconciliation among people. Someone who is harmless doesn't have the ability to stand up to anyone, even those who do evil. Jesus is peaceful, but he is not *harmless*.

In Rev. 5, we are shown the ascension and cosmic coronation of Jesus as the King of all creation. What I find most delightful about this passage is the juxtaposition of the image of the lion and the lamb. John weeps for fear that no one can open the scroll, but the angel tells him to weep no more because “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered”! John turns, but what does he see? “I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain.” The Lion of Judah's tribe is no lion, but a Lamb—and not just a lamb, but a lamb that had been killed.

I had a conversation once with a theologian of some note and he posed a question I had never considered, “When Adam and Eve were standing before God in the garden and God asked them what had happened, Adam responded, ‘It was the woman, the woman you gave to me, who listened to the snake.’ At that moment, what kind of a husband would Eve have dreamed of? As Adam threw her under the bus, what would her dream ‘Prince Charming’ have done?”

I'd never considered the scenario from this perspective. In that moment, the kind of husband she would have hoped for was a husband who stood as her protector—a husband who might have said, “She is guilty, but allow her judgment to fall upon me instead. Spare her and take me.”

Jesus Christ is himself that better husband to the Church. Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of the Judah—the conquering warrior King—but he conquers by becoming the Lamb. Jesus does not conquer with martial strength or military prowess. No, Jesus was coming to redeem us not only from tyrannical earthly rulers but also from the dominion of sin and the devil himself. And to defeat the greatest enemies—sin, death, and the devil—Jesus conquers by his own blood. The Lion is the Lion, not because he has the power to maim and shred his enemies, but because he was willing to become the Lamb sent to the slaughter. Jesus is the one who is willing to give his life for the guilty, and his innocent blood is what secures our pardon.

In Advent, we remember the coming of the Messiah—God's anointed. If we think that Jesus is harmless, we've missed the point. Jesus is not harmless, he is peaceful. And, in his desire for peace, Christ was willing to lay down his life—to allow all the punishment for sin to fall upon himself, in order that demonic dragons would no longer hold sway over humanity. The Lion of Judah has conquered because he was “slain, and by [his] blood [he] ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and [he has] made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

In Jesus, we have been sprinkled with the blood of the spotless Lamb that cleanses us of all our sins. In Jesus, we have been redeemed from the devil's hold, rescued from the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the God who is light. In Jesus, we have been made heirs of the world, “a kingdom and priests to our God, [who] shall reign on the earth.” This Advent, let us rejoice in our great Lion—the Lamb.

IMMANUEL

When Moses asked God for his name in order to report to the Israelites which God had sent him, the Lord called himself, “I AM who I AM” (Ex. 3:14). It’s a strange name—I am. When asked for his name, God declares himself to be Self-Existent. God is the one who is, the Living One; or, perhaps, as the Nicene Creed says, “The Lord, the Giver of Life.” God *is*, while all of us *weren’t*—all of us once *did not* exist. God is. We *happen to be*.

In John’s gospel, the phrase “I am” features heavily in Jesus’ public ministry and in his private teachings to the disciples (which will be covered throughout this devotional). Jesus takes the name “I am” for himself, identifying himself as Israel’s God in the flesh. John presents us with these details of Jesus’ life that cast the whole story in a different light. John shows us that the crucifixion of Jesus is, as theologian James Jordan has said, “The funniest event in all of history.” The attempt to kill Jesus was the height of foolish arrogance. When the powers of the world took hold of Jesus to kill him, they were laying hands upon *God Almighty*. Jesus is *Immanuel*, “God with us” Like toddlers lashing out in tantrums, the attempt to kill Jesus—the Great I Am—was like worms rising up to strike a blow against their Maker. Psalm 2:4 tells us the Father’s perspective on the attempt to defeat Jesus, “He who sits in the heavens laughs, the LORD holds them in derision.”

In John 18 and the beginning of Christ’s trial and humiliation, we witness a unique display of his power. When the soldiers came to arrest him, they asked if he was Jesus of Nazareth. As Jesus speaks, “I AM he,” John tells us that the soldiers “drew back and fell to the ground.” Jesus is the Logos (John 1), the Word of God, through whom all the universe was created. When he speaks, God speaks—with “a voice [like] the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder” and with a tongue like a sword that divides and cuts to the core (Rev. 14:2, Psalm 18:13; Rev. 1:16, Heb. 4:2, etc.). His voice knocked them to the ground, yet he might have said more—withering their bodies like the fig tree (Matt. 21:19), or calling “twelve legions of angels” with a word (Matt. 26:53). Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus is always shown to have all the power, even as he is marching toward his death.

Jesus was born to testify to the truth and to wage war as the Lord’s Champion, striking the greatest blow by dying himself according to the purpose and plan of the Father. And therein lies the great comedy—the world’s best effort in defeating Jesus was nothing other than the cunning plan of God to defeat the powers of hell once and for all. If Jesus had not chosen to go voluntarily into their hands, they could not have seized him any more than they could have bottled a hurricane. As Jesus would say to Pilate before his sentencing, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11).

This Advent, we should take great comfort in the fact that Jesus is truly man—he did take on human nature—a nature just like ours. But he united human nature to divinity. In Christ, the “I am” has become a man to save fallen and sinful men. God does not shrink away from the evils of the world but has become Immanuel in Jesus Christ, facing the world’s evils head-on. In Christ, God came to experience the reality of human suffering and, by his blood, has made a way for us to be freed.

He did all this so that *you* would be free.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15

John 10:1-10

THE DOOR

When I was in my teens, I made a habit of going to a neighborhood friend's home after dark without my parents' knowledge. They were under the assumption that I was in my room sleeping. Well, I was in my room at first, but I had figured out how to take the screen off the window, climb out onto the roof and shimmy down the basketball hoop in my driveway. The activities that I snuck out to do were simple things like campfires with friends or skateboarding to a late-night fast-food restaurant or watching movies. While the activities were generally harmless, the level of deceit I became comfortable with was quite harmful to me. Despite becoming an expert at entering my house through anything but the door, I eventually got caught, but in a way that I never expected.

In John 10:1-10, Jesus teaches that there are those who try to enter the “sheepfold” (a metaphor for the collective people of God or the invisible church) not by the door or gate, but by trying to climb in another way. Perhaps you've heard the more modern-day phrase, “There are many paths to reach the top of the mountain.” The Lord warns his followers not to be caught up in this way of thinking. He explains that false shepherds would have people believe that there are lots of ways to get to greener pastures. But His Word is clear, “if anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (John 10:9).

By trying to enter my bedroom by the window instead of the door, I was essentially saying, “I’m going to do things my way.” Even though I had fun doing things “my way,” it didn’t provide lasting fulfillment. One night, as I was climbing back through my bedroom window around 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, I felt my stomach drop. I knew my shenanigans had caught up to me. As I quietly closed the window behind me, shut the blinds, and drew back the sheets, I noticed my mother sleeping in my bed. Obviously, my parents knew something about what I’d been up to. I had to face them and the consequences of my actions.

Looking back, my parents showed me so much grace, especially in situations where I was caught in my own webs of deceit. But they didn’t just want me to know that there is a right way and a wrong way of doing things – they wanted me to know the Way. The best part about Jesus being *the* Way, or Door as John 10 illustrates, is that God doesn't expect you to go in or out based on your own abilities, because he is also the Good Shepherd who loves, leads, and lays his life down for his sheep. This Advent, may you listen to his voice – rejecting all others – and enter by the Door (not the window).



MONDAY, DECEMBER 16

John 10:11-21

GOOD SHEPHERD

After the recent hurricane and flooding disaster that has wracked our neighbors and countrymen in the wake of Hurricanes Helene and Milton, there have been countless videos that have come out detailing the destruction of homes, roads, bridges, and all manner of critical infrastructure. The death toll is likely to be very high, particularly as many places remain inaccessible, without power, fuel, or utilities. Among these videos, however, there have been some glimpses of light and many stories of resilience.

One example I saw showed a family who was able to return to their property. When they arrived at their property line, they discovered many of their animals and livestock all huddled on higher ground where they could escape the flood waters. As they rolled the windows down and called out to the animals, I was honestly astonished by how they responded—the donkey, sheep, and cows all began running around in excitement, some even making leaps into the air as if they were rejoicing to hear the sound of their caretakers again.

It was a beautiful picture, in the midst of horrible devastation, of the kind of relationship that God created us to have with the creatures of the world. Animals are created helpers to us, not only by becoming nutritious food but also through providing wool or assistance as beasts of burden (in fact, many of the local relief efforts in Tennessee and North Carolina have been using trains of donkeys to get supplies where other vehicles and helicopters can't reach).

Seeing instances like these in our daily lives make the biblical metaphors that use these kinds of images all the more compelling. The scriptures use metaphors and symbols like these to illustrate spiritual principles precisely because God intends us to think of him as we catch glimpses of revelation reflected in the world around us. God made us to care for the good creatures he made so that we each would thrive together and God calls himself our shepherd who leads us beside still waters and makes us lie down safely in green pastures (Psa. 23).

In our passage for today, Jesus takes upon the name of Yahweh and the designation of a shepherd for himself—"I AM the good shepherd." In contrast to the other leaders and rulers in Israel who were "hirelings" or "wolves" themselves, Jesus is the owner of his sheep and stands firm when wolves or thieves threaten his flock. Sheep, by their very nature, are the easiest targets of all. Without constant care, they easily become disoriented and lost. Without proper grooming, their wool can become so overgrown that they are easily caught in thorns and brush, even making it impossible for them to eat.

Admittedly, comparing us to sheep isn't all that complimentary to us, but if we're honest about our own spiritual condition when we're left to ourselves, the shoe fits. If God didn't intervene in our lives, calling us to new life in Christ and rescuing us from our weaknesses, sins, and infirmities, we would be utterly helpless—and the worldly leaders around us don't offer any true solutions. When the dam breaks, when the wolves are circling, Jesus, unlike so many others, never fails to stand firm and to uplift his weary and harassed people. Even more, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was willing to become a Lamb like us, even giving his own life so that we might be free.

This Advent, may we rejoice in our Shepherd!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17

John 6:22-51

BREAD OF LIFE

The Bible is a book about God's relationship with humanity, which means that the Bible is a book about food and feasting. From the very first chapter, we're introduced to the concepts of family, food, agriculture, and harvests—fruitful trees, grains for bread, grapes and wine, and fruitful families to share it all with. “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food” (Gen. 1:29).

“Feasting,” Peter Leithart has somewhere said, “is the effective sign of life.” When God “rested” on the first Sabbath, we would understand this much better if we thought of God throwing a coronation feast, than if we imagine God taking a nap. God celebrated his completed work, and feasting is the image the Bible gives us as the culmination of human dominion and flourishing. God created humanity to be fruitful in marriage, to raise livestock and crops from the fertile ground, sowing and reaping and sharing what we have with one another, giving thanks to God who supplied the rain. There are few things more satisfying than sitting down to a delicious meal, surrounded by the ones we love, grateful for the hard work we've done and the blessings that God has given to us. Doing just that, day in and day out, would be a life well lived.

When evil reigns feasting is difficult. Tyrants create scarcity and famines, robbing their people of the fruit of their own labors. Where the wicked reign, the wine and oil run out when God's judgment falls (Deut. 28:39-40). But God redeems his people, calling them out of bondage, because God intends “to hold a feast” (Ex. 5:1, 10:9). Bread has been a basic staple in every society, strengthening every nation for the hard work to conquering and taming the harsh wilderness of the early world. But “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). In many places, bread is used as a symbol for speech. Jesus warns the disciples to beware “the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. 16:6). To eat bread leavened by them is to consume corruption, for they lived in disobedience to God.

However, in our passage, Jesus identifies himself as the true bread that God has sent from heaven: “I am the bread life.” To “eat” of Jesus is to eat the bread of immortality: “This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.” Comparing himself to the manna that God supplied to Israel in their wanderings after escaping from Egypt, Jesus speaks of himself as the true manna of God bringing a far greater redemption. Jesus is the Eternal Word of God, the Word through whom all things were created, the Word which has taken on flesh. In order to “eat” Jesus, the bread of life, he tells them that they must believe: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.”

Jesus came so that we might feast again in peace with God and one another. By faith in Christ, we are made one with him and with everyone else who calls upon the name of the Lord. Jesus has given himself freely for us, offering us all the abundance of his own inheritance, bidding us to come, eat and drink at the table prepared for us.

This Advent, may you come to him who offers the bread of life. Come, all you who are hungry. Come, eat, have your fill. Join the feast of God's kingdom, where love and joy and hope and peace reign supreme. And may your feasts at home, and that buttered bread, remind you of the good news of your salvation. Christ Jesus, the bread of life, has come for you. Rejoice!

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18

John 8:12-30

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

One of the greatest joys and insights that parenting brings is remembering how wonderful, colorful, and enchanting the world is, which our tired, jaded adult eyes often fail to see, but which children grasp instantly. Our son is at the age when he's just beginning to make his way toddling in the world and his understanding—and delight—in the world is only increasing.

One of his greatest joys is turning lights on and off. Sometimes this is serious business—when he's trying to color and realizes that not enough light is coming in through the window. Other times turning the lights on is for sheer pleasure—he just loves that he can turn a dark room bright and he's excited to finally be tall enough to barely reach the switch. But when you think about it, he sees this situation rightly. It is amazing that he can declare, “Papa, light!” and with the click of a switch or the press of a button, this little one can experience a dim recreation of the first time God himself said, “Let there be light!” God is the bringer of light and even our little ones, in God's image, can become light bringers themselves.

Light is the first thing called good in the Bible (Gen. 1:4). In a world without sin, light is synonymous with glory—it glistens gold, sparkles dew, and shines faces anointed with holy oil. Light is a precondition for human activity. We rise to conquer our day by the light of the sun, to build our lives and tend our land, our children, and our affairs. But in the presence of sin, the same light called good in the beginning becomes a source of fear and danger. Adam and Eve's first impulse was to hide and cover themselves, concealing their bodies from view. Dark deeds flowing from darkened hearts often occur under cover of darkness—crimes committed under masks and disguises or during nocturnal hours. For a burglar, the appearance of sudden light is a great fear. Light robs us of our ability to hide.

In our passage today, Jesus again takes the name of Yahweh upon himself, declaring—“I AM the light of the world.” A recurring theme in John's gospel is the theme of darkness and light. Beginning in John 1, Jesus is identified as the very one through whom the world was created. In Christ, the very God who burst into resplendent glory as the words, “Let there be light” were first uttered, was born as a man like one of us. Many doubted or decried him as a deceiver. They claimed they could see the truth, yet the appearance of Jesus exposed that it was *they* who were spiritually blind.

A friend of mine once said that most of us are just like Adam and Eve. In fear, we cower away from God, seeking to hide ourselves. But God is waiting for us in the Garden, so to speak. Ultimately, our destinies are determined by how we respond to God's call, “*Where are you?*” Will we flee *from his light*, fearing the truth that he would expose? Or will we flee *to his light*, willing to heed his calling although we would have to stand before him naked and ashamed? Make no mistake, the pain of honest exposure and genuine repentance is real. It feels like death precisely because that's what it is—death to our pride, death to our excuses, death to our false image of ourselves, death to the way things were, death to the future we would have had otherwise. But Jesus is the light that God the Father has provided us.

This Advent, may we flee toward the light. Jesus, the Light of the World, was willing to be overcome by darkness and death. He went to the grave in our place to shine his light into the deepest and darkest depths, bringing our sin right along with him, rising again in victory. His light is the only true light for our path, the only light that leads to life.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19

John 11

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

God does many things we wouldn't do, don't want him to do, and don't even understand why he might do it, but he is God and we are not. Remembering God's *character*, however, helps. The God who demonstrates his love for us by sending Christ to die to redeem us (Rom. 5:8) is the same God who works out everything that occurs according to the purposes of his will (Eph. 1:11). He is trustworthy. Our passage today shows one example of God doing things we wouldn't have done were we in charge. After receiving word that Lazarus was dying, John tells us, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he *stayed two days longer in the place where he was*" (John 11:5-6). In this life-and-death situation, Jesus has the sense of urgency of cold honey. But Jesus reassures them, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified.... Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe" (John 11:4, 14-15).

Everything seems backward. Jesus loved them, so he *waited*. Jesus loved them, but he was *glad* Lazarus had died. Doubtless, the disciples wondered if Jesus had begun cracking up. To make matters more confusing for his disciples, once they arrived—only three days too late—"Jesus wept" (John 11:45). First, he tells them not to worry and carries for days as if there really were nothing to worry about, only to arrive and be utterly overcome with emotion. How do we square these contradictory responses?

Resolving these two responses is, I believe, the greatest source of comfort available to us. How can Jesus be unconcerned? Because, as God, he has all the knowledge and power necessary to orchestrate events in order to produce the best possible outcome. In a world where sin is real, when evil has infected humanity, and where human morality is a true frailty, we live in a world of death and tragedy. But in this very sort of world, we also have a Creator who made the world and humanity for good purposes and will stop at nothing until the world he created is restored in full.

Then how can Jesus weep? What would it have been like to understand God, yet the emotions of a man, walking in our midst under the shadow of death? Who could understand the great depths of evil more than the Holy One of Israel? Who else could weep the purest of tears and rage with the holiest of hatred at death than he who calls himself "the Resurrection and the Life"? In a world of sin and death, Jesus isn't after our immediate happiness or comfort, at least not on its own. If we remain perfectly happy but lack faith, we're as dead as Lazarus was even if we're still breathing. Jesus is far more concerned about our eternal security than in our feelings of temporary security. Jesus didn't want Lazarus to live, but to live *again*, and for his disciples to grasp without question that Jesus alone has power over death.

The same is true for us. I don't know what traumas you've suffered, what losses you've sustained, or those bleak moments when you begged God to act—to just do *something, anything*—and yet found that God had no answers for those desperate prayers. No one's ever going to be able to give you a satisfactory for why it had to be this way instead of another. But what I do have, I give to you: cling to the Lord Jesus.

Although there are times he carries, he does so for the sake of your salvation. All that our weeping Savior does is for your good. Though you suffer under the darkness of death's shadow, this Advent know that the Lord—He who is the Resurrection and the Life—has come to shed tears and stain the blood with ground to make all things new.

I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

Today we continue to reflect on the coming of Christ, the One who declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). As we anticipate celebrating His birth, we remember that Jesus is not only a babe in a manger but also the King of the world and the only source of eternal life and salvific truth. What was one of the cardinal tenets that makes Christianity so controversial and deemed by many as countercultural, even in Jesus’ day? The answer is its exclusivity. Greco-Roman culture, like our own, was tolerant of many belief systems, but it wasn’t tolerant of exclusive claims regarding faith and religion. Jesus claims to be the exclusive way to God.

John 14:6 is a powerful declaration from Jesus during His final moments with His disciples before the crucifixion. In preparing them for His departure, He offers this profound truth: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” This statement not only brings clarity to the nature of Jesus but also reveals the purpose of His incarnation. First, Jesus says, “I am the way.” This speaks to the fact that salvation comes through Christ alone. All saving faith is consciously focused on Christ, who alone could restore a relationship torn asunder by sin. During Advent, as we reflect on His birth, we celebrate that God sent Jesus to be the way to Himself. Without Christ, we would be lost in sin, separated from God. His coming offers us the way back to the Father.

Next, Jesus declares, “I am the truth.” In a world filled with confusion and deception, Jesus stands as the embodiment of divine truth. He came to reveal the nature of God, bringing light into darkness. His words and actions show us the character and will of God, and His life is the ultimate expression of truth in action. This Advent, we are reminded that in the birth of Jesus, amidst a world riddled with deception and darkness, truth and light came to Earth.

Finally, Jesus states, “I am the life.” He came not only to show us the way to the Father but also to give us abundant, eternal life. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus conquered death, offering life to all who believe in Him. Advent is a time of joy because we celebrate the gift of abundant life bestowed by Christ and him alone. He is the source of eternal life, and in Him, we find hope beyond this world.

Isn’t it amazing that at this moment in John’s Gospel, in John 14, the moment of the disciples’ deep distress, Jesus didn’t say something like, “Believe whatever you want to believe as long as it brings you comfort, as long as it makes you happy?” No. Jesus told his disciples what they needed to hear—the truth. And the beautiful thing is that after he had accomplished his cross work, they would be commissioned to take that message into a dark world that so desperately needs to hear that same truth. This is what makes Christianity unique. Religion says, “I have the truth and I can be saved by performing that truth.” Christianity declares that truth has come down in the person of Jesus Christ, and he has come to set us free from slavery to sin and death. We’ll never be able to live well enough to achieve salvation. That’s the whole point. Jesus became our substitute. Out of his love for God and for us, he lived a perfectly righteous life before the Father. He died the death of deaths so that we don’t have to. And he rose again that we might have the abundant life, both now and forevermore.

As we prepare for Christmas, John 14:6 challenges us to center our hearts and lives on Jesus. Let us take time to evaluate where we are placing our hope and trust. As we anticipate His second coming, let us recommit ourselves to following Him wholeheartedly.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21

John 15

I AM THE TRUE VINE

Our neighbor across the street had over-planted their garden this Spring, so we inherited a watermelon and tomato plant, each already planted in giant pots. Regrettably, I didn't give either of them anywhere near the attention they needed. Some water here, maybe a bit of fertilizer there, but, with lots of travel and other concerns, those poor plants largely languished. Yet, even without my best efforts, we still ended up with at least fifteen or twenty cherry tomatoes and two tiny watermelons (I should say, our toddler ended up with twenty tomatoes, having eaten them off the vine before I could get to them). I'll admit that my efforts as a "vinedresser" became more pronounced when I saw the first watermelon forming on the plant I'd neglected the last six weeks. But I didn't reinforce the vine. After a heavy rain, I came out the next morning and found that lovely little watermelon on the ground and cracked open; nothing left to do but leave him for the birds. The experience was helpful because it provided a visible witness to the meaning of this passage. Jesus introduces himself as "the true vine" and calls the Father the "vinedresser." With such a simple image, Jesus has given us everything necessary for a life of power and godliness.

In the first case, he establishes our security upon the love of God for Jesus. It is this love into which we've been invited—eternal love from before the foundation of the world. The "Father is glorified [that] you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love" (John 15:8-9). It is the love of the Father for the Son that motivates all the actions of God on our behalf. And God intends to make us fruitful in good deeds, in godly children, and in a multitude of converts won for Christ.

But we must *abide*. The Lord speaks of himself as the source of our vitality. All growing power, all spiritual nourishment, and every good grace from God that we experience flows through *him* to us. We are not the vine. We cannot hold ourselves against the storms that rage, nor even provide for ourselves the basics of what we need to live. We are branches, useful only when we are connected to the broad strength of the central vine. Without this, we can do nothing but shrivel and die.

But what a glorious vine we have, more fruitful than we could ever have imagined. From those eleven gathered with Jesus, the first branches that extended from Christ, now—twenty centuries past—*billions* have come to know Christ, taking their place among the ever-emerging blossoms of converts and covenant children. In our day, things are turning dark once again as our cultures are abandoning their Christian heritage. Even in formerly Christian societies, the hatred of the world that Jesus warns about is beginning to heat up and may boil over. We have hated our fathers and their ways and, therefore, brothers will now turn against brothers. In the midst of worldly rage, we must abide in the vine and the love that he has given us for one another. Just as the disciples lived amidst the devastating persecution of their day, we must sacrificially serve our brothers and sisters as we weather the difficulty with courage, knowing that Jesus has said, "Take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

In your life, there isn't anything more important than abiding in Christ. There isn't anything more important for your family than you abiding in Christ. There isn't anything more important for your neighbors than you abiding in Christ. Christ has given you his all! This Advent, may we all give back to him everything that is his due.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22

Hebrews 4:11-16

GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Despite my pale complexion, I am, in fact, Italian (and a bit salty about that complexion). Some of my most cherished memories growing up were those random Wednesday nights: everyone sitting around the table, Chianti in glasses, Mario Lanza singing in the background and my mother brandishing her wooden spoon like a conductor; pasta sauce splashing as she gestures and laughs. Sitting around talking and eating with family is a simple pleasure, and one we often take for granted as it is happening.

My son is now learning to cook a bit. He climbs up his little kitchen tower so he can reach the counter, stirring and pouring, cracking (and spilling) eggs, along with over-seasoning everything with salt. In the playroom at church, he always runs right for the stove. He's learning to do adult things. He's playing at reality before one day being called to step into that reality as a man. At times, it's easy to believe that the old covenant religion was a bit more substantial and real than what we're doing today. It makes some sense. Seeing priests drain the blood from bulls and goats, flaying and dissecting their bodies with sacrificial blades, before offering the flesh up to the Lord in flames seems a bit more serious than our Sunday get-togethers—singing some songs, hearing some teaching, praying some prayers, and eating a bite of bread and wine or juice, shaking hands and giving hugs before we're off for a leisurely sabbath.

This is one reason why the book of Hebrews is so critical for Christians to wrap their minds around. It can feel like a whirlwind, with obscure references to Old Testament figures and even temple furniture. But the basic point of Hebrews is that the coming of Christ Jesus into the world means that the old covenant, along with its system of worship and sacrifice, was about to end with a bang. But this is no problem because the close of the old covenant isn't really an end, but the launch of something far more glorious.

Hebrews describes the old covenant as an era of shadows, darkness, and obscured vision. The law was "but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form" (Heb. 10:1). Even the temple and tabernacle were mere replicas of the true heavenly temple, a mere "copy and shadow of the heavenly" (Heb. 8:5). Indeed, the very design of the tabernacle and temple, the author says, was intended to clue us into the fact that the "way to the [heavenly] holy places" had not yet been opened to us so long as the earthly temple remained standing (Heb. 9:8). And this is true of the priesthood as well. Every sacrifice had to be repeated because those very serious sacrifices of the "blood of bulls and goats" could "never make perfect those who draw near" because "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:1, 4). Every priest, no matter how faithful his service, would eventually die and his ministry would pass to another—the work never fully completed. This is because the temple, the priesthood, the rituals, the sacrifices—they were all play-acting, like a young child working at his cookstove imagining that he is crafting Michelin star quality. The coming of Jesus into the world signaled that the time for childlike living was over.

With Jesus coming into the world, the true Priest has arrived. Unlike the old priests, Jesus is the eternal priest who has died but defeated death. Unlike the old priests, Jesus does not offer the blood of animals but offers up his own blood once and for all. Unlike the old priests who ministered in the earthly temple, Jesus is God-the-Priest, Lord of the Heavens and Earth, who has made us, his servants, to be the living temple of God. And he has made us fit for the very presence of God, sinners stained with bloodguilt, because he has washed us in his own crimson flood, made us spotless forever. Now every aspect of our lives is worship. Now, every moment of our day, we walk surrounded and filled by the same Presence that filled the Holy of Holies.

This Advent, may we draw near to God with great confidence, knowing that our High Priest has opened the way before us.

LAST ADAM

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶ But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

—1 Corinthians 15:42-49

As we near the end of our exploration of the names of Jesus, we turn to Him as the last Adam. This concept may initially seem strange—after all, the term “Adam” signifies being the first. How can Jesus be both the last and first, especially when he is truly the first, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and the creator of the first Adam? How is he last?

To understand this, we can look to the words of Paul. Adam represents the beginning of humanity, the earthly father of every earthly human being. By God’s hand, he was formed from the dust, and in his own power, he returned to dust upon his death. As his descendants, we share this fate: ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Apart from Christ, this is our family, our history, and our destiny; we are people of dust who return to the dust, hopeless for anything more.

However, Paul tells us that this does not have to be our only family. Christ is a second Adam, but he is also the last Adam because he initiates a new, imperishable, eternal humanity. If Adam is our only father, we live in peril until death. Yet, if Christ is our Adam, we find permanent protection, assured of an unending spiritual life and a resurrection like his own—in bodies that endure forever on a renewed Earth.

This new beginning, this “second” first, is last because it can never be outdone or undone. Through his incarnation, Christ became the first of a new human race destined to live with Him eternally. And so while he was second, he was more than the first could ever have been. The first Adam was a human made alive by God; the second Adam is God making humanity alive. By faith in this coming king, we become his image bearers, bearing the image not just of the short, dusty life of our beginning, but of the blessed eternity of our God and Lord Jesus Christ, the second, last, and forever Adam.



MONDAY, DECEMBER 24

Isaiah 9:6-7

PRINCE OF PEACE

Once I was doing a juggling show at an elementary school. The teacher, after the show was finished, asked the children to say what they liked about me or the show. There were typical answers like: “I liked the rabbit puppet,” or “I liked the knife juggling.” Then one boy approached the microphone like a pro and belted out, “I like his shiny bald head.” It was not my favorite compliment, but it was meant as a nice statement. All of the comments were meant to build me up and let me know how much my show was appreciated.

In today’s passage, we see such a list of names and comments from the Prophet Isaiah about the coming Messiah. Many of these titles have become a part of our language and are heard often. Look at a few of these names and see how they fit into the life of Jesus.

One thing that overrides all these names is “protection.” Most of the titles can be seen as that of a protector and savior of the people. He is the “Mighty God” who controls the entire world and all that is in it. He is the “Everlasting Father” who loves his children and does everything to protect them. It’s important to note that “father” is not used in any kind of a trinitarian sense, but only as a sign of a person who cares deeply about his “children.”

He is the “Prince of Peace.” At this time of the year, a little peace is often longed for. With all the parties, the traveling, the gift giving, and the loud family members who come to stay at your house, a bit of peace is a welcome change. Jesus offers this peace; in fact, he owns it. He is the “Prince” of this peace.

The last line of this passage ought to greatly encourage us. It tells us why and how God’s Kingdom will be wonderful for us. In v. 7 Isaiah tells us that the Lord’s “Zeal” (intense devotion, loyalty, extreme love) is the reason for the greatness of the coming Kingdom. God loves us and does not give up on us no matter what our problems.

Amid the noise, chaos, and hustle of this season, we look forward to a place and time when all will be put right. I long for that day and even if I am disappointed with the celebration in our culture, I know that there is a better party coming. Look forward to that! I’ll see you there with the “Prince of Peace.”



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.

1 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.

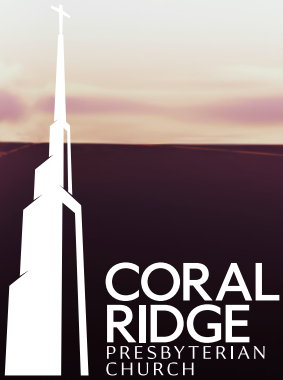
Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

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!



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