



Russellville First United Methodist Church
2025 Advent Devotionals

What Can't Wait?

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PREFACE

During the season of Advent, we wait in hopeful anticipation for the coming of Christ—but Advent is not a passive waiting. It is an invitation to prepare our hearts, to reflect deeply, and to participate in God's ongoing work in the world. This Advent devotional booklet, written by members of Russellville First United Methodist Church, grew out of that invitation.

Each writer was asked to reflect on the question "What Can't Wait?"—the guiding theme for our Advent sermon series. Using scripture, our contributors prayerfully explored what God calls us to do now, even as we wait for the fulfillment of God's promises.

The devotions that follow are the result of this shared spiritual practice. They weave together scripture, reflection, and prayer, offering glimpses of grace through the personal faith journeys of our congregation. As you read each day's devotional, may you find space to listen for God's voice, to respond with compassion, and to rediscover the urgency of love, forgiveness, and hope.

May this season remind us that while we wait for Christ's coming, there is much that can't wait—because God is already at work among us.

Sunday, November 30

The Mountain of the Lord

Written by Joy Vickers

Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 2:1-5

As Advent begins, we also enter the first season of the Christian church year. This is an appropriate time, as we wait for Jesus' arrival, to reflect upon how we have accepted God's love for ourselves and shared it with others.

There is a lot that can be unpacked in our scripture in Isaiah. Verse 3 spoke to me: *"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."* When I go to the mountains, they speak to me. Being in God's creation, mountain paths encourage me to be quiet and notice the beauty all around me. The stillness helps me focus on what God's love teaches me.

Where should I focus my energy? When should I speak and when should I listen? Where should my time and resources be spent? These are just a few of the questions I seek to answer with the Lord's instruction through prayer and reading God's word. Walking in the mountains of God's love encourages me to interact with others with love, grace, and forgiveness. By slowing down and listening for God's guidance, my hope is to walk in the light of the Lord and be able to then focus that light upon others.

Prayer

*Lord, thank you for the mountains. Help us seek your ways
and reflect your light in our world. May your love surround us not
only during this Advent season, but always. Amen.*

Monday, December 1

The Blessing of Belonging

Written by Jim Tarvin

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 122

"I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'" (Psalm 122:1). These opening words capture the joy and anticipation of worship. David's heart overflowed with gladness at the thought of gathering with God's people in Jerusalem. Worship was not a burden or an obligation, but a privilege and delight.

This psalm reminds us of the blessing of belonging to God's family. Just as the tribes of Israel went up together to Jerusalem, we too are called to unity as the body of Christ. In a world filled with division, the church stands as a testimony that Christ has broken down walls of hostility, making us one in Him. When we gather to worship, we proclaim our shared faith, celebrate God's goodness, and encourage one another to stand firm.

David also prayed for the peace of Jerusalem: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May those who love you be secure" (Psalm 122:6). For us, this points forward to Christ, the Prince of Peace, who gives peace not as the world gives but as a lasting gift to His people. As believers, we are invited to pray for peace in our homes, churches, communities, and nation.

Psalm 122 calls us to delight in worship, seek unity with fellow believers, and lift up prayers for peace. May our hearts echo David's joy, and may we look forward with longing to that final day when all God's people will gather in His eternal city, rejoicing in His presence forever.

Prayer

Lord, I thank you for the gift of worship and the joy of gathering with your people. Place within me a heart that delights in your presence and longs for your house. Teach me to walk in unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ, showing love and humility. I pray for peace—peace in my heart, peace in my home, peace in my church, and peace in this world. Keep my eyes fixed on the eternal city where we will rejoice in Your presence forever. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Tuesday, December 2

Preparing the Way

Written by Lorrie Ellis

Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 40:1-11

"Comfort, comfort my people," says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed...The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together." Isaiah 40 opens with this message, offering hope after a long season of sorrow. These words come after years of exile when Israel felt abandoned and forgotten, but God had not turned away. He was preparing to come to them.

The heart of the passage is not just comfort, but the promise of God's arrival. "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord!'" The Lord Himself is on His way...coming to rescue, restore and dwell in His people again. Nothing can stand in the way of His mercy.

Yet, His coming also calls for waiting. Before the glory of the Lord is revealed, there is preparation—quiet trust, repentance, and hope in what is not yet seen. Waiting can feel like living in the wilderness—dry, uncertain and slow. But in that waiting, God shapes our hearts. The waiting is not wasted... it is where our trust deepens and our vision clears.

Where do we find comfort when our lives are full of struggles and challenges? The same God who comforted Israel still speaks comfort to us today. Whatever uncertainty we face, His promise remains: He is coming to meet us in our times of loneliness, in our fatigue, in our fears. His comfort is not distant; it draws us near.

So, we wait—not in despair, but with assurance. The God who once came through the wilderness still comes through for His people.

Prayer

Lord, teach me to wait with hope. In the dry places of life, remind me that you are near. Speak comfort to my heart and help me prepare the way for your presence. Amen.

Wednesday, December 3

Waiting with Purpose

Written by Dan Pote

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 130

I recently read the fascinating historical record of Alexander Selkirk, a young Scottish sailor who in early October 1704 found himself marooned alone on a small, uninhabited island in the Pacific Ocean. Psalm 130 reminds me of Alexander's experiences there, beginning with the desperate feelings of hopelessness and loneliness described in his account of his first few weeks on the island. He was barely surviving, mostly just waiting despondently on the shore, hoping some ship would come and rescue him. One day, among his personal belongings, he found a Bible that his mother must have slipped in with the linens when she was tenderly packing his sea chest. Finding this, Alexander was filled with remorse as he looked back on his life and saw how self-centered he had been. He recognized that his pride had kept him far from God and that his quarrelsome temper had caused most of his problems in life.

He began reading the encouraging words in Psalms about God's love, forgiveness, and redeeming power, and he suddenly knew those words applied to him. For the first time in his life, he felt God very near. Hope replaced his despair, his spirit rose, and the loneliness faded. He realized that with God's help and a grateful heart, he could have a good life, even a joyful life, regardless of his earthly circumstances. Instead of languishing near the shore just waiting idly to be rescued, he left his cave and set to work building a thatched hut on high ground. He caught and domesticated some wild goats and cultivated a vegetable garden. The island became home to him, and he waited patiently for over four years until finally being rescued by an English ship.

Advent is also a time of waiting, but as Alexander found, it is not good to sit idle as we wait. What do we need now to prepare our hearts for receiving Christ? Psalm 130 shows the way. We need to put our hope in God and be earnestly praying that God will forgive our trespasses and help us serve him with reverence and gratitude for His unfailing love and full redemption. Our present circumstances may not be as dire as those faced by Alexander, but the message of the psalmist is timeless. As it guided Alexander to God in 1704, it can still help guide us in preparing for Christ's coming.

Prayer

As we eagerly wait for Christ's arrival, help us remain focused on preparing our hearts and lives to meet Him. Please forgive us of our sins and help us to carry no grudges against anyone. Thank you for all of the blessings that we have received. May we always be a light for you by showing your love to others and representing you well in everything that we do. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

Thursday, December 4

Waiting in the Silence

Written by Lisa McElroy

Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:5-25

For hundreds of years, the Israelites waited for the Messiah, the one they'd been promised. But it seemed God had forgotten, and they struggled to remain hopeful. Like the Israelites, Luke gives us a closer glimpse at the desperate waiting of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Righteous and blameless, they followed all the commandments of the Lord. Yet they felt the silence of heaven, too, as they longed for and prayed earnestly to have a child. Even though they felt alone, Zechariah and Elizabeth actively waited...living, working, praying. Zechariah served faithfully at the temple, his hands busy but his heart weary. It is not a coincidence that as he worked the angel appeared to him with the good news. After such a long wait, we can certainly understand his doubt, his unbelief that their most fervent prayer was coming true. While Zechariah had been doing ordinary things, God had been working on something extraordinary.

Where in your life are you waiting for God now? Maybe you are waiting for a reconciled relationship, a healthy body, peace in a loss, financial stability, or even a baby. The stories of the Israelites, as well as Zechariah and Elizabeth, reassure us that we can trust God is at work even when we don't see it. Like their examples, we should continue to serve and love our neighbors...those needs simply cannot wait. Could it be that while we serve and wait and trust, God is preparing something even greater than we can imagine? In this season of Advent, we as the Church are also in a time of waiting, doing God's work, and preparing our hearts for the joyful birth of the Christ Child. May we trust that while we continue to do ordinary things, God is at work on the extraordinary.

Prayer

Lord, help us remember that even in the waiting when hope seems dim, you are still at work. Move us to serve and love our neighbors as we await the birth of your Son, and always. Amen.

Friday, December 5

Wanting to Want

Written by Alan Ward

Scripture Lesson: Romans 5:1-11

Some time ago I was listening to a comedian doing a routine about relationship issues that I found quite humorous. Part of his act was a story involving his mandatory attendance at a wedding shower for a friend of his significant other. He had not expressed any disdain about attending the shower and, in his mind, had been quite agreeable about spending his time, probably on a weekend, attending the shower when he would have preferred to be doing something else.

For reasons unknown to the comic, he noticed that his partner was upset on the way to the event and gave him the silent treatment. When he asked what was wrong, his partner responded: "I want you to want to go to the shower." Apparently, his pleasant demeanor and attendance were insufficient by themselves...he had to want to be there!

In Romans 5:1-11, Paul speaks about the abundant love of God that is poured out for us even though we are sinners. We do not deserve Jesus's sacrifice, and yet we receive God's grace and strength anyway. In reading this passage, I cannot help but wonder how much more fulfilling our walk with God would be if we set our hearts and minds on living lives that are pleasing to God. Unlike attending a wedding shower we'd rather avoid, I believe most Christians would agree that they want to be more devoted to Christ. Think about it...have you ever regretted attending church, praying and reading scripture, serving a ministry, giving your time and financial resources, or being respectful and kind to others? Probably not! Christ died for us so that we may have life and have it abundantly. We can achieve abundant life by willingly submitting to Christ and demonstrating that we want to commit to him.

Prayer

Dear God, please help me willingly submit to your will for my life each day. Thank you for pouring out blessings and grace upon me even though I do not deserve them. Help me demonstrate my commitment to you and further your kingdom by being the husband, father and person you are calling me to be. Amen.

Saturday, December 6

New Day. Same God

Written by Randy Moore

Scripture Lesson: Lamentations 3:22-33

The Lord has shown me mercy. Without my Lord I couldn't have made it without his mercy. Indeed, I have a merciful Lord even when I didn't deserve it. We all have a past. Without his mercy I would not still be alive. The Lord has shown me great compassion. I try to show compassion, but sometimes I don't, but I do try.

I welcome every day and thank the Lord every morning for the Lord's faithfulness and mercies are new every morning. The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will hope in him. The Lord gives me my portion every day and I hope and trust in him.

I will wait upon the Lord. I know you are good to me when I wait. As I wait upon the Lord I will seek his guidance. I don't wait very well, and I am not very quiet, but I have found salvation in the Lord. The Lord is still working on me. I am not where I was, and I am not where I am going to be as I wait upon the Lord.

I think about God a lot. While I wait sometimes my mind wanders. Sometimes it is difficult to focus. There is a lot going on all around me, but early every morning I seek God. His mercies are new every morning. That is the time I set aside to prepare for my day.

I have turned the other cheek to those who came against me. I have put my mouth in the dirt. It is hard to turn the other cheek and let the Lord fight your battles, but the Lord doesn't cast off forever. The Lord allows grief; I know from personal experience. I have sought the Lord many days over grief, but God has always been good to me.

Prayer

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for waking me up today. I know your mercies are new every morning. I have read your Word, and I know your great love and compassion will be with me all my life. I do not know what the day will bring, but I know you are with me. You are my portion and my rock. Amen.

Sunday, December 7

Restorative Peace

Written by Anne Harelson

Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 11:1-10

This scripture highlights the hope, peace, and messianic role of Jesus. Isaiah 11 describes a picture of hope springing from what seems like emptiness or ruin. Israel, broken by judgment, is described as a stump—cut down, humbled, and lifeless. Yet from this stump, a shoot emerges. A branch begins to grow. This is no ordinary branch—it is a prophecy of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who springs from the lineage of Jesse, King David's father. Verse 1: *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*

When life feels like a stump—when our plans are cut down, our hope seems lost, our faith feels dry—God reminds us through Isaiah that He is not finished. We should be rooted in Christ. He's our root. He brings life where we see only death. His work often begins in hidden, humble places.

Verses 2-5 describe this Branch as Spirit-filled, wise, understanding, powerful, and righteous. This is the very nature of Jesus, the perfect King. The Messiah rules with justice and compassion, especially for the poor and lowly. In Jesus, we have a ruler who knows our hearts. For us today, during trials in our life, we can turn to Jesus, who we should be rooted in. Then during the tough times, find peace and comfort. In a world often marked by injustice, this vision is both comforting and convicting. We are invited not only to trust in His rule but also to live in ways that reflect His character.

Verses 6-9 describe something extreme: wolves living with lambs, leopards lying with goats and children playing near dangerous animals. This imagery speaks to the deep peace—the shalom of God's Kingdom. Christ always comforts us in hard and scary times. The peace of Christ is not only the absence of conflict; it is the restoration of all things to God's perfect order. It is the reversal of fear, the healing of nature, and the acceptance of enemies. Even now, we are called to be peacemakers—people who live out the reality of God's Kingdom in a world still waiting for full healing and spiritual well-being.

Verse 10 reminds us that the hope offered in the Messiah, Jesus, is for all people of every nation, language, and background. The gospel is global, and our hearts should be too. When we are rooted in Jesus we can stand firm against tough times. This verse involves God's act of mending, healing, and renewing. We should look to Christ for guidance and can rest in his peace and love.

Prayer

Father God, in seasons of loss or brokenness, remind us that you are always working, even when we cannot see it. Fill us with the Spirit of wisdom and understanding that we may walk in your ways. Let your peace rule in our lives and through our actions. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Monday, December 8

Wisdom Comes Hard Learned

Written by Jim Montgomery

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 3:1-12

We all knew the Christmas presents were hidden on the top shelf of mom and dad's closet, but we didn't dare go there. At first, we all pretended to not know about the hiding spot, but the first time we let slip that we knew about it we were met with "if you know what's good for you..." followed by sharply raised eyebrows, then "...you'd better get your head screwed on straight or you'll ruin Christmas."

Excitement fueled anticipation turned to dread. How could it ruin Christmas? Mathew 3:1-12 telegraphs the message loud and clear. "Change your hearts and lives!" Adjust your attitude. Get ready!

The message was clear: good things are coming, but you need to straighten up. Wisdom comes from learning, experiencing, mistaking, and a host of other things we learn to call "adulting." It doesn't come easy when we are young. But the truths we knew were that mom and dad loved us a lot and, in that love, came trust and a sense of security, although we came close to blowing it at times. Pillaging for gifts in the closet would not have caused them to stop loving us, but oh, the disappointment. Unbearable. The thought of it was crushing. Welcome to hell.

Repentance doesn't mean we've failed; it just means we're off track and need to make an adjustment, i.e. get our heads screwed on straight. We left the closet alone, and instead invested time in being good, trying our best to put it out of mind. I imagine God's disappointment when I get off track. Love not lost, but oh, the disappointment.

Christmas happened all the same, and the knowledge of the closet didn't diminish the result. The wait was worth it after all.

Prayer

Father God, I sense your love for me must be like the love a parent has for a child. You want your gifts for us to be special. But I want the shortcut. I want it now. And I don't want to put in the effort. Help change my mind to see that good things are worth waiting for and that when I put in the effort to prepare, the result is much more meaningful. Help me understand that the things you are bringing will be grand, but what you need from me right now is to get ready.

Amen.

Tuesday, December 9

An Unexpected Blessing

Written by Steve Osborne

Scripture Lesson: Numbers 6:22-27

This is a stirring passage of scripture for me personally. I recall it used as the benediction for church services when I was young. It was always included in the closing prayer for Sunday evening Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) meetings.

It is known as the Aaronic Benediction or Aaronic Blessing. God gave these words to Moses to share with the nation of Israel through Aaron and his sons over 3,000 years ago. It was during 40 years of wandering as the children of Israel searched for the Promised Land. They were homeless and for many there was a sense of hopelessness. God gave this blessing to them for encouragement and protection.

Recently, I was asked if I could provide transportation for a homeless person to the Little Rock Compassion Center. This faith-based facility provides food, shelter, and comfort for homeless persons in Central Arkansas. Arrangements had been made for Jonathon. I picked him up in Russellville and could see he was weathered and worn from life with no roof over his head. At first, he was quiet but slowly began to open up, sharing burdens on his heart. A friend had accompanied me, and together we listened and gently witnessed to him, offering words of comfort and encouragement. My friend and I were in agreement: we would pray with him once we reached the shelter. In thinking about how I might pray, I was reminded that God had given words of protection and encouragement to Moses to be shared with the homeless nation of Israel. Certainly, these words would be a parting comfort for Jonathon. It turns out that our prayer time in the shelter parking lot was a generous blessing for all of us.

Prayer

Father God, we celebrate this Advent Season, grateful for the love poured out to us through your Son Jesus Christ. He came to live among us to teach us about true love. Please open our eyes to the needs of those among us who are hurting and in need of comfort and support. Lord, we ask that the love you pour out on us would pass through us on its way to someone else. And we ask these things in your precious name Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday, December 10

Holiday Cleaning

Written by Chris Becnel

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 51

Polish the silver. Set out the Christmas dishes. Clean the baseboards... get the house ready for our guests!

How often do thoughts similar to these run through our heads as we gear up for the big family Christmas gathering? It's normal to want to have everything pretty perfect to impress our visitors. It's the one time of the year we dust the mantle and shelves as we swap out our everyday décor for our Christmas garlands and collectibles.

In Psalm 51, David is directly confessing his sin to God, without making excuses or denying wrongdoing. David's experience with Bathsheba illustrates how sin stems from a corrupt inner self. This psalm is an honest outpouring of his guilt and shame after his sin was exposed. David even cries out *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."* Psalm 51:10.

In addition to decorating and preparing our houses for the holidays, what if our annual Christmas preparations included taking time to *deep clean* our hearts for Christ? David's story with Bathsheba shows how sin often starts deep inside us—when our hearts get off track. Psalm 51 is David's honest cry after his sin came to light. He's broken, ashamed, and desperate for God's forgiveness. Like David, we're invited to bring our whole selves to God—our mistakes, our weariness, our regrets—and ask to be made clean. And God doesn't meet us with condemnation, but with compassion. In this psalm, we see God healing what's broken, renewing spirits, and restoring community. That's still the work God is doing through Christ, the One who makes all things new.

What Can't Wait? Our repentance and renewal can't wait. Advent is our chance to get real with God; to let God do the work of transformation in us. The first step is spiritual honesty: naming where we need God's mercy and learning to offer that same mercy to others.

So, as we continue in this Advent season, put the Windex down, take time to reflect on your own sins and shortcomings, and ask God to create in you a clean heart.

Prayer: "Change My Heart, O God" song by Eddie Espinosa, 1982

Change my heart, O God. Make it ever true.

Change my heart, O God. May I be like You.

You are the Potter. I am the Clay;

Mold me and make me. This is what I pray.

Change my heart, O God. Make it ever true.

Change my heart, O God. May I be like You.

Thursday, December 11

Practice What We Preach

Written by Christy Cranor

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 5:1-11

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|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Unity | 6. Faith |
| 2. Love | 7. Hope |
| 3. Forgiveness | 8. Kindness |
| 4. Prayer | 9. Joy |
| 5. Putting others before yourself | |

These are the things that can't wait!

I taught school for 37 years, mainly in kindergarten. As I thought about this devotion a poem came to mind. I didn't write it, but it is very relevant to what can't wait! All of the above is mentioned in this poem by Robert Fulghum.

"All I really need to know...I learned in kindergarten. Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that are not yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life – learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some. Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the Styrofoam cup. The roots go down, and the plant goes up, and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that. Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the Styrofoam cup—they all die. So do we. And then remember the Dick-and-Jane books and the first word you learned—the biggest word of all—LOOK."

To me, the message from this poem is how the world would be improved if adults adhered to the same basic rules as children.

So, what can't wait? We've known it since kindergarten; it's what we tell our children. Now we as adults must practice what we preach.

Prayer

Dear God, please help us to be able to understand the Beatitudes and live our lives following the lessons they teach. Amen.

Friday, December 12

Keeping the Faith

Written by Rob Stevens

Scripture Lesson: John 14:15-21

God is reminding us through this scripture that his spirit is always with us. We have to believe and open our eyes to the ways that he is with us always. We have to keep the faith that God is not only with us but will be there for us in both the good and bad times of our lives. We just have to trust and believe in him always. We have to know and trust God's love and word are always living within us. We cannot lose sight of this on the days that are more challenging for us in the world we live in. God is always at work for us and within our soul if we allow God inside our hearts. We, as Christians, are able to show God we love and trust in him by following his word and living a Christian life. We can also show God our trust in him by spreading his word to others who may need our love and support and to know God as well.

We all have times when we question our own faith or have doubts. I know I have had multiple times when I have questioned if God was really working with me. A good example of this was when my cousin, whom I loved and treated more like a sister, died suddenly from complications of COVID-19. I really struggled with why God would take her away from us so suddenly but then realized there was a lot more health issues going on that my cousin was now sharing with us. She was now at peace in heaven and no longer dealing with those health issues. God always has a plan, even when we do not see his plan at first.

Prayer

God, please help me to stay strong in my faith and believe in you when I do not always understand your plan. Help me keep the faith during challenging times that you know what is best for us and are always with us in our heart and soul.

In your name I pray, Amen.

Saturday, December 13

A Baby Is Coming

Written by Kris DeLano

Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:67-80

A baby is coming!?! Yes, during this advent season, we are preparing for the birth of Jesus Christ. But there is another baby whose arrival was an important part of God's plan. That baby is John, John the Baptist.

Zechariah, John's father, had been unable to speak because he did not believe the angel who said his wife would have a baby. When John was born, Zechariah's voice returned and he was filled with the Holy Spirit, transforming a previously mute man to a bold prophet. He praised God with powerful words in a scripture passage called "The Benedictus." The promises made to Abraham and the prophets of the Old Testament were finally coming true. The long-awaited Messiah was arriving, and Zechariah's son was to be a prophet preparing the way for the Lord.

The long wait was over, and God had not forgotten his people. God was faithful; God is faithful. He is working through us right now and is counting on us to create God's kingdom here on earth.

We were recently awaiting the arrival of a baby, a new grandson. It was a time filled with joyful anticipation and intentional preparation. We prayed, we loved, and we hoped expectantly. That did not stop once our precious grandchild arrived.

During Advent, as we await the birth of Jesus, we are called to take a similar approach. Turn our hearts toward God, help others see his love, and live in a way that brings peace and light.

Prayer

Gracious God, in this season of waiting, we thank you for your faithfulness. Just as you fulfilled your promises through Zechariah and John, help us prepare the way for Jesus with open hearts and willing hands. Fill us with your Spirit, that we may speak truth, share love, and awaken hope in those around us. Amen.

Sunday, December 14

Comfort and Joy

Written by Pastor Cindy Bright

Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 35:1-10

What beautiful images of God's kingdom we see in this scripture passage—rejoicing, feeble hands strengthened, weak knees steadied, hearts made glad, sorrow and sighing will be no more. In the NIV, this passage is entitled "Joy of the Redeemed," and in the NCV it is called "God Will Comfort His People." Both joy and comfort are celebrated in this season, perhaps nowhere as familiar to us as in the hymn, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" as we offer glad tidings to one another. In the hymn we are reminded of all the blessings we receive as a result of Christ's birth.

We are not, however, relegated to celebrating and sharing those blessings only during this time of the year. In fact, God is at work in every moment, in all seasons, and we as God's people, need to partner with what God is doing to bring the Kingdom to life here and now.

We see this lived out as we serve together in ministry, preparing and sharing meals, distributing food, teaching, learning, and loving one another. We see it each week as we gather for worship and learning, for fellowship and support. We see it weekly as we gather for Bible studies, small groups, and service to our community. We see this as we come together to offer a Thanksgiving meal, to celebrate each summer at VBS, and as we are sent out in mission.

Spend some time this season looking for signs of God's kingdom here on Earth and seek ways you can bring it a little closer for yourself and others during this special time of year.

Prayer

God of comfort and joy, you brought your Kingdom to us through the birth of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us to celebrate that truth in word and deed. Allow the gifts of His coming to bring about the change needed in us and in the world. Amen.

Monday, December 15

Without Hesitation

Written by Darla Embry

Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:26-38

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel departed from her." Luke 1:38 (NIV)

In this story, Mary declares herself to be "the servant of the Lord" and courageously accepts God's will. We must appreciate the power and work of the Holy Spirit, especially in this mystery. It is a profound example of faith, love, obedience, and humility.

During this season of Advent, Mary's calling resembles that of a prophet: a messenger from the Lord comes to tell her that God has a task for her. Her devotion in saying "Yes" becomes the way God brings salvation into flesh and blood. Mary becomes the first to literally welcome Christ and invite Him to make His home within her. Rightfully so, she has become a model for Christians of all times and places—a living example of what it means to bear God in obedience and devotion.

I'm reminded of the words of a modern-day writer who said that faith isn't just about feeling God's presence or sensing His will in our lives—it's about offering ourselves to God without hesitation. That is exactly what Mary did. No one knows what our call will be, and we should always remain open, willing, and attentive to God's voice. It might be a whisper; it might be a mighty wind. It's like tracking a star through the darkness without knowing where it will lead. Ultimately, it comes down to being called to follow and trust in God amid our everyday chaos, even when we don't know where that journey will take us.

Mary is a powerful example of what true faith looks like. Be open to God's word, plan, or request—whether it seems insignificant or seemingly insurmountable. We all have a place in God's plan as He weaves His great heavenly tapestry.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for allowing us to live another day. Each day is a new opportunity to grow nearer to you and to fill ourselves with your immense love, your infinite kindness and your great mercy. Amen.

Blessed Among Women

Written by Virginia Berner

Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:39-45

God's outlook is a mystery to us. Why did God choose Mary to be the mother of our Savior? It seems there would be more capable women to do such a big job. Instead, God selects a young, poor, vulnerable girl. The Biblical image painted of one of the most important persons in history is fuzzy, with sparse details. Certainly, no Hallmark movie buildup is provided. We get a golden nugget, though, revealing an amazing spirit. Her reaction to Angel Gabriel's message that God has chosen her to be Mother of the Christ-child is gloriously brilliant. Her song vibrates with such magnificence the rocks must have cried out. In this moment, all she is and all she does magnifies her Lord. She is ready for the holy work of being a mom. That is how God paints a picture!

Like many new mothers, Mary quickly sought good counsel by visiting her cousin Elizabeth, an older Mom-to-be. Both were radiant with the recent bliss of God's touch but did not know they shared this calling. Christ's new presence energized Mary's being, infecting even the air around her. Elizabeth's baby, John, recognized this miracle within Mary, just as he later did in Jesus. He leapt for the pure joy of it. Elizabeth joins in with her own unrestrained Magnificat about Mary's blessed state. Mary is now equipped by God. Her heart mothers the earthly Jesus all the way from his birth to his death and beyond. Though we have only a few of her words, Mary's life is an unparalleled example of devotion. Her legacy, all that we have to remember her by, is her love.

Mary is handpicked by God to be Madre de Dios, Mere de Dieu, the Mother of God. Elizabeth helped when Mary needed it most. I pray that you, like Mary, will come to know that God sees, believes, and chooses YOU for miraculous and holy work. Look around at the unlikely people next to you. See the magnificence within them. Tell them about their holy brilliance. You may not be able to stop yourself from singing.

Prayer

Lord, I shy away from hurtful four-letter words. But your best words are HOPE and LOVE. I shy away from change, but your touch leaves me brilliant, shimmering, transformed. Thank you for seeing and still choosing me for your miracle.

Wednesday, December 17

Praising God

Written by Avigail Phillips

Scripture Lesson: Luke 1:46-55

Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands. He has helped his servant Israel and remembered to be merciful. For he made this promise to our ancestors, to Abraham and his children forever." (Luke 1:46-55 NLT)

In this passage, Mary reflects on God's past victories and His faithfulness to His people. Remembering what He's already done fills her with joy and anticipation for what's to come. When I read this scripture, I couldn't help but think about all the things God has done for me—the blessings I didn't deserve, yet He gave them anyway. That's Love.

And that, my friends, is the moment we should pause, seek His face, and praise Him! When Mary sang her song, she was pregnant with Baby Jesus. She was in awe of the miraculous gift growing inside her—overjoyed even before the promise was fulfilled. She knew something incredible was coming. She waited with a song flowing from her heart.

It reminded me of when I was pregnant with my daughter, Nora. I remember the excitement and the gratitude. I thanked God daily for giving my husband and me this beautiful gift. But even in the joy, I was nervous—afraid of what could go wrong during and after pregnancy. Still, I chose to keep my eyes on the Lord. I chose to reflect on what He had already done for me, to praise Him through my fears, and to lay my worries at His feet.

He knows my heart—what hurts me, what scares me, and what comforts me. And He knows yours too. In your waiting, take time to remember what God has done for you. Reflect, praise, and trust that the Mighty One is holy and faithful. He will see you through the waiting. And just like Mary, your promise—your gift—is on the way.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for all the wonderful gifts you've given me throughout my life. Your provision over my life does not go unnoticed. I'm forever grateful. May my life be a reflection of your goodness and love, for you are so, so, so good to me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thursday, December 18

Sharing Your Gift

Written by Peggy Stratton

Scripture Lesson: Philippians 4:4-9

Hurry Up and Wait.... The Great American Pastime.

What does waiting do to you? Make you anxious, nervous, agitated or just plain mad? Waiting comes easier when we have something to do ...visiting, reading, catching up on correspondence, even playing on our phone.

The apostle Paul wrote these words from prison, no less, advising us to "Rejoice in the Lord always." And to "Not be anxious in anything."

Advent is not just the celebration of Jesus' birth, but also the future hope of his second coming. I get lost in the manger scene, the music and the candlelight. When Christmas is over, I put all the decorations away, return to my humdrum life of worry and anxiety, and the joy I had fades away.

I'm going to try this year, with God's help, to keep my rejoicing ongoing by remembering, like Paul, that no matter what happens in my life, Jesus is with me right now and every moment and he is coming again for all time. Like Paul, I have a job to do. And that is using my spiritual gifts to be a witness to what Christ has been and done for me. Sharing **MY** Jesus story!

You have a gift! Ask your friends and they will tell you what it is. But once you know, there is no excuse for not using it. Waiting without activity is discouraging. Paul admonished the Philippians to turn their worries into prayers and I'm sure he intended for them to read his letters more than once and act on them.

Want a little peace and Christmas joy to reign in your life? You're not going to get it with positive thinking, in the absence of conflict, or in feel-good stories. It can only come from knowing that God is in control.

Prayer

Make me your ambassador, Lord. Help me to carry the good news of your kingdom to everyone I meet today. Give me new opportunities and new relationships that I may not normally notice, so that I can reach more hearts for you. Let me set aside worries and live a joyful life. Amen.

Friday, December 19

Hope in the Darkness

Written by Pastor Lauren DeLano Grosskopf

Scripture Lesson: John 16:16-24

The start of something new often happens in the darkness. A seed being planted in soil. A child growing in the womb. Grief that turns into joy. Darkness envelops us. And in this season of Advent, as the days get shorter and the nights longer, the darkness of the morning and evenings can keep us from feeling like we can find Christ's joy.

In this passage, the disciples are in a season of darkness—or at the very least cloudiness and confusion. Jesus has been warning them that he will no longer be with them. They are stuck in this limbo of waiting, trying to understand what he means when he says he will leave them. After all, he is here with them right now and as far as they can imagine, this will always be the case. He still has much to teach them about how they might bring God's kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. Yet in the confusion and darkness, Jesus is shining a light of hope. He is saying—don't worry about what you don't know or you can't see—I know that is unclear right now. What you should know, what you should be utterly sure of is that I will be with you and my joy will never run out.

In this season of waiting—whatever it is you're waiting for—you may be experiencing grief. This grief may feel paralyzing. Yet, there is hope in the darkness. This season it comes in the form of a child. This season, it comes in the form of stars lighting up the darkest night skies. This season it comes in the smile of a loved one or a friend at church who shares God's joy with you. Look. Listen. Trust. Christ's joy isn't just coming. It's here.

Prayer

Gracious God, as we wait for your son to enter our lives, may we see you in the darkness. May we trust that you never leave us. And may our joy be complete in you despite our circumstances. Amen.

Saturday, December 20

Hope Can't Wait

Written by Cole Shamblen

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 146:5-10

Advent is a season marked by anticipation, waiting for the celebration of Christ's birth and the promise of his return. But not everything can wait. In a world filled with brokenness, injustice, and despair, hope can't wait. Healing can't wait. Justice can't wait.

Psalm 146 reminds us that God is not distant in our waiting. He is a God who supports the cause of the hurt, gives food to the hungry, and sets us sinners free. This scripture paints a picture of a God who acts now, who sees the suffering and steps in. This is not a slow waiting. It is an active trust in a living, present God.

When we put our hope in the Lord, we're not just counting down days until Christmas, we are living for a kingdom that is trying to break through into our hearts. In a world that tells us to hurry, buy more, do more, this psalm calls us to put all effort into the One who reigns forever, whose faithfulness reaches beyond generations. The kind of faith and hope that will remain powerful to spread all around for the one God who delivers all.

What can't wait this Advent? Most importantly, not just my hope, your hope. Our hope. Your trust, your voice for the voiceless, and your kindness to the unfortunate are not signs for a future kingdom, they are signs of it living here and now.

Prayer

God of hope, in this Advent season, teach us to have faith and wait, not with still hearts, but with active faith and open hands. Help us to live into Your kingdom even now, trusting that You are at work in the world around us. May we bring light where there is darkness, justice where there is wrong, and peace where there is pain. We place our hope in You, now and forever. Amen.

Sunday, December 21

Faith and Obedience

Written by Aaron Lensing

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 1:18-25

In this scripture, Joseph learns of Mary's pregnancy and quietly decides to end their engagement. Yet this was not God's plan. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph, telling him not to be afraid, for the child Mary carries is from the Holy Spirit. When Joseph awoke, he obeyed the angel's command, took Mary as his wife, and later named the child Jesus. This passage reminds us that the Advent season is not simply about waiting but about actively trusting and preparing for what God is doing.

As I reflected on this story, I was struck by Joseph's response. The angel asked him to trust in God even though his situation would have been misunderstood by family, friends, and his community. Joseph's decision to believe and obey, even when the future was uncertain, shows the depth of his faith. Trusting in the unknown can feel daunting, yet Joseph embraced God's plan. His willingness to obey not only altered the course of his life but also gave him the incredible role of being the earthly father of our Savior.

In my own life, I have experienced similar moments of learning to trust God. One of the most significant was when I first chose to become an Impact leader. I was still in college, unsure if I was ready for such responsibility, but I felt called to step into this role and guide a group of young men in faith. I relied on God's strength to help me be an example, and for five years I had the privilege to lead and serve. Since then, I've led two more groups, each time seeing God's faithfulness. This season, if we pause and place our trust in Him, we too will find that God has great things in store.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Joseph's example of faith and obedience. Help us to trust You even when the path is uncertain, knowing that Your plans are greater than our own. Teach us to wait actively and faithfully this season, so we may experience the fullness of Your promises. Amen.

Monday, December 22

But the Stars

Written by Rebekah Stuck

Scripture Lesson: John 1:1-18

This past May, Curtis and I hiked at the Grand Canyon. Like true ~~fools~~ adventurers, our descent into the canyon began at midnight. As we traveled, we would stop intermittently to rest our legs and take in the night. We got to "Ooh, Aah Point" (google it) and saw...nothing. I have never felt a physical darkness and silence so deep and profound. There was no moon. There was not a sound to be heard. We were completely alone.

...But the stars.

In the midst of the deep darkness, stars pierced the darkness in a way that I could not see when my headlamp was on. I didn't recognize the stars until I put away my own light source and looked up.

In today's passage, we are reminded that Jesus has been present with God since the beginning. His light is unchanged, though human experience of the light necessarily changed when He made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory; we have received his grace. He has come—the light is no longer far away.

Let us remember that the darkness surrounding us is not new. No matter how bleak, the light shines in the darkness and cannot be put out.

Prayer

This advent season, may we bear witness to the light of Jesus. May we testify to the hope that anchors our soul and does not let the darkness win. May we wait with anticipation of his return while recognizing that he is with us and has not left us alone in the dark. Ever present God, your light has been piercing the darkness since the beginning. As we wait in anticipation for the arrival of Christ, may we be reminded that your light has always been there to guide us. Give us eyes to see your light and ears to hear of your faithfulness. Amen.

Tuesday, December 23

The Sound of Hope

Written by Diane Pearson

Scripture Lesson: Isaiah 9:2-7

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
(Isaiah 9:6 NIV)

On a cold wintry December evening in Chicago, I stood among over 2,500 people in the grand Orchestra Hall. We were participating in a "Do it Yourself Messiah." The 2,500 people were the choir; the Chicago symphony orchestra provided the music and the soloists. The introduction "For Unto Us" started, the sopranos entered with a long run of beautiful notes. The other parts joined in the rich tones with long runs of this magnificent music. It was an unbelievable heavenly sound. As a believer in Jesus as Savior, it was a very memorable time. It was not just the beauty of the music, but the message, the promise of hope.

For the Jewish people the message held the hope of a new king to lead them. For me today, I believe this passage was the foretelling of the birth of Jesus. The people of Israel must have wondered how a child could fulfill the role of Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. We know that nothing is impossible with God. The hope this passage provides is that the Wonderful Counselor will listen to us and answer our prayers. The mighty God is a powerful Warrior, strong, able to protect and save. The Everlasting Father is eternally present for us to guide us on the right path. The Prince of Peace will provide unity and spiritual harmony now and forever. During the time of waiting and preparation let us spend time in God's word. Take a few minutes each day to meditate on the message of Christ's coming. Read, reflect, pray.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and giving us your son. Help us to take time to meditate on your word and take action to be better followers of your word.

O come, O come, Emanuel. In Jesus' name. Amen

Christmas Eve
Wednesday, December 24

The World Turned Upside Down

Written by Pastor Tony Griffin

Scripture Lesson: Luke 2:1-14

In an obscure place and time, amidst the business-as-usual of a Roman census under Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, the world was forever altered by the birth of a child. It's a profound irony that the seemingly important figures of that era are now largely forgotten, while the small child born in Bethlehem is remembered throughout the world.

God chose a different path for announcing this earth-shattering event. Instead of gathering the world's leaders or the rich and powerful, the message was delivered to shepherds working in the fields. The marginalized knew first, while those we might expect to be in the know were oblivious.

That night must have been the most peaceful, yet joyful, imaginable. God's anointed didn't arrive with the trappings of power. He came among ordinary people and was laid in a feeding trough—complete and utter humility.

My prayer for you this season is that you feel the profound peace and joy of that moment. Understand that this One, who comes with peace and humility, reveals the true way to life and hope. May you feel a renewed sense of calling to embody that life and hope every day.

He has come, and he is coming again. Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks for this holy night. Renew our sense of peace and joy at the revelation of your birth, and renew us to be life and hope to all we encounter. We ask this in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christmas Day
Thursday, December 25

Come and See

Written by Abigail Greggs

Scripture Lesson: Luke 2:15-20

Many times in my life, I've put off spending time with God. I told myself, "Maybe this Sunday I'll hear a really good sermon that will make me want to read my Bible." I made excuse after excuse, and no matter how good the message was, nothing changed because I kept waiting.

But the shepherds didn't wait. When the angels brought them the good news, they said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see Christ." They didn't wait for a convenient time; they didn't "sleep on it." They trusted God's word and dropped everything to see the miracle he had promised.

We live in a world that loves to wait until later. We push off prayer, discipleship, and time with God, thinking there will always be a better moment. But today, we remember: God didn't wait. He came to us right into the mess of the world. Jesus' arrival was not how Mary had planned, but Jesus came anyway. Now, it's our turn. It might not be how we had planned, but Jesus doesn't care.

The shepherds didn't just believe that Jesus had come. They acted on it. They left what was comfortable, went to see the Christ child for themselves, and returned overflowing with joy and praise. Faith isn't just believing that God exists. We should live through faith because Jesus' presence changes everything.

So today, what if, like the shepherds, we dropped everything to follow God's calling? What might change in your life if you trusted Him enough to move now, not later? Faith can't wait, because the Savior has already come.

So don't wait for the right moment to draw near to God. Come now just as you are. Take the step of faith you've been putting off and see what joy he has waiting for you.

Prayer

Dear Lord, please help us to have faith like the shepherds, faith that helps us to go when you call, no matter the timing. Lord, please remind us that you came into the world just as it was, chaotic and beautiful, to meet us just where we are.

Please give us the courage to seek you now, and to live in the overflowing joy from your presence. Amen.