



LET  
EARTH  
RECEIVE HER  
KING

A Daily Devotional for Advent



Morrison Heights  
BAPTIST CHURCH

© 2022 by Morrison Heights Baptist Church.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for commercial purposes, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without written permission of Morrison Heights Baptist Church.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated into any other language.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are from the New American Standard Bible. © The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Edited by Reva Daniel, Tim Peabody, Erin Stache, and Laura Busby.

Designed by Tom Rowden.

Printed in the United States of America.

# CONTENTS

*Introduction* .....v

## **WEEK ONE: Hope**

**Day 1:** Isaiah 11:1-10 ..... 2  
**Day 2:** Jeremiah 33:14-16 ..... 4  
**Day 3:** Isaiah 9:1-7 ..... 6  
**Day 4:** Isaiah 7:10-15 ..... 8  
**Day 5:** 2 Samuel 7:12-16 ..... 10  
**Day 6:** Isaiah 53 ..... 12  
**Day 7:** Jeremiah 23:1-6 ..... 14

## **WEEK TWO: Faith**

**Day 8:** Isaiah 40:1-5 ..... 18  
**Day 9:** Luke 1:5-25 ..... 20  
**Day 10:** Luke 1:26-38 ..... 22  
**Day 11:** Luke 1:39-56 ..... 24  
**Day 12:** Luke 1: 57-80 ..... 26  
**Day 13:** Psalm 25:1-10 ..... 28  
**Day 14:** Psalm 80 ..... 30

## **WEEK THREE: Joy**

**Day 15:** Luke 2:1-7 ..... 34  
**Day 16:** Luke 2:8-20 ..... 36  
**Day 17:** Luke 2:21-40 ..... 38  
**Day 18:** Matthew 2:1-12 ..... 40  
**Day 19:** Matthew 2:13-23 ..... 42  
**Day 20:** Jeremiah 31:7-18 ..... 44  
**Day 21:** Isaiah 2:1-5 ..... 46

## **WEEK FOUR: Peace**

**Day 22:** John 1:1-18 ..... 50  
**Day 23:** John 1:19-34 ..... 52  
**Day 24:** John 3:16-21 ..... 54  
**Day 25:** John 3:22-36 ..... 56  
**Day 26:** Philippians 2:1-11 ..... 58  
**Day 27:** Hebrews 1:1-14 ..... 60  
**Day 28:** Romans 15:4-13 ..... 62

## **WEEK FIVE: Christ**

**Day 29:** Matthew 1:18-25 ..... 66  
**Day 30:** John 14:1-7 ..... 68  
**Day 31:** John 14:25-31 ..... 70  
**Day 32:** Matthew 24:36-44 ..... 72  
**Day 33:** 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 ..... 74  
**Day 34:** 2 Peter 3:1-13 ..... 76  
**Day 35:** Revelation 21:1-4 ..... 78



# INTRODUCTION

Merry Christmas! The very words invoke a number of responses as we hear them. The birth of Jesus Christ was long forecast by the prophets of Israel, and today we celebrate His coming among us. We rejoice that God has not forgotten us and that He loves us with a great, grand love, as evidenced by the gift of His Son.

Jesus was born in humble circumstances to insignificant parents in one of the smallest countries in the world. And yet, He was the Son of God sent to be the Savior. His coming was testified to by shepherds, innkeepers, magi, and kings along with the heavenly host. His coming was long expected and essential considering our great need. The birth of Jesus Christ was, and is, the greatest possible news.

We hope this Advent Guide will be a help to you each day during this season. We have prepared it with you in mind, seeking to point you to the love and faithfulness of God and the obedience of His Son to stoop to earth to save us. Without Him we are in more trouble than we realize, but with Him we are at peace with God and have the promise of eternal life. For that, we say Merry Christmas!

Dr. Greg Belser  
Senior Pastor



WEEK ONE

# Hope

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadows put to flight.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.*

*“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”  
Latin hymn; translated by John Mason Neale (1818–1866)*

DAY ONE

# Advent: Expecting Jesus' Coming... and Second Coming

Dr. Timothy Peabody

*In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.*

ISAIAH 11:10

## Read Isaiah 11:1-10.

Advent is the season leading up to Christmas. It is a season of hope, a time to remember just how much changed when God became flesh.

However, Advent is also a time when Christians anticipate Jesus' second coming. For hundreds of years, the people of Israel anticipated the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah prophesied, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit" (Isa. 11:1). The reign of the Branch would be a reign of wisdom, righteousness, and faithfulness. Two thousand years after the arrival of the Branch, His reign continues.

Yet, as we read Isaiah 11:6-10, we find promises that suggest Isaiah's foresight extended beyond Jesus' first coming—promises about a wolf dwelling with a lamb, or a nursing child playing in the hole of a cobra. If you feel confused when reading Isaiah the prophet, you are not alone. As the Ethiopian eunuch read the scroll of Isaiah,



he asked Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” (Acts 8:34).

Old Testament prophecies about Jesus sometimes leave us asking a similar question: Is the prophet talking about Jesus’ first coming or his second? Was this prophecy fulfilled at Jesus’ incarnation, or should we expect it to be fulfilled at his glorious appearing?”

Advent season is a reminder of all that changed with Jesus’ first coming and all that will change with His second. It is a reminder that God’s people must wait for God’s timing. Sometimes the veil is thin, and our hearts swell with joy to the point of bursting. Other times we join all creation in groaning with eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.

In Isaiah 11, the prophet anticipated the advent of Jesus—both His incarnation and His second coming. As we remember Jesus’ incarnation, let us take heart in all Christ accomplished with His first coming. Let us also find hope, knowing that His second coming will arrive when few expect it.



Father, thank You for the salvation Jesus brought with His first coming. Fill us with hope as we wait for His glorious second coming.

DAY TWO

# A Greater Hope

Ken Dillard

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made ... In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land ... Jerusalem will dwell securely.*

JEREMIAH 33:14-16

## Read Jeremiah 33:14-16.

Today our world is in turmoil. Every day there is a new idea or focus coming from the vocal and powerful. Traditional Christian morality is no longer valued by our society. It would be easy to think Satan was winning, be discouraged, and lose hope.

Jeremiah prophesied to the nation of Judah from the reign of King Josiah until after the destruction of Jerusalem. Like our society, Judah was in turmoil; sin was rampant. Jeremiah prophesied destruction. Yet, instead of returning to God, the people of Judah turned to themselves, their king, or an alliance with the right neighbor nation.

Jeremiah prophesied not only destruction but also hope. In Jeremiah 33:14-16 God reminded his people that the day was coming when He would fulfill the promise He had made that a righteous branch would come from the house of David. That branch, which today we know is Christ, would execute justice and righteousness. He would give Judah security and hope in the midst of turmoil.

We can have that same hope today. Many think our solution is in

politics, the courts, the government or even themselves, but it is not. This is a spiritual battle, and it will not be won by politics or the government. God has a plan and is in total control. Yes, we must stand up for Christian morals and values, but more importantly, we must trust in His plan and control. We must be students of His Word and keep our nation in prayer.

We are not necessarily meant to understand why God is doing what he is doing. Isaiah 55:8 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.” Romans 11:34 asks, “For who has known the mind of the Lord.” God has a plan that He is carrying out. He has a purpose for everything He is doing or allowing. He has given us hope that in the end He wins. Let’s hold on to Him.



Lord, thank You for your promise. Help us to always place our hope and trust in You and Your plan, not in the things of this world.

DAY THREE

# The Zeal of the Lord of Hosts Will Do This

Chesney Stevens

*Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

ISAIAH 9:7

**Read Isaiah 9:1-7.**

What do you hope for? When we try to answer this question, our thoughts scatter. At times we hope for frivolous things: nice weather or a great parking spot. Then there are days we hope for big, life-changing things: relationships to be mended, a child to call our own, or the salvation of a parent.

All of these hopes have one thing in common. When we hope, we hope for what is to come. We are looking beyond the present, and to the future.

We receive hope when we don't forget to remember. If we skip back just one verse before Isaiah 9 begins, we read, "And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish" (Isa. 8:22). The children of Israel were in despair. In utter darkness,

no one has hope. But if we look forward, while remembering the past promises of a Redeemer, then we find hope in chapter 9.

The light has shone, the darkness has fled, and hope has come. Sinners (those who walked in darkness) now have access to the grace of Christ. Oppression of man has been defeated. Raging wars and broken nations will cease and be united under the banner of Christ. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.” Hope is alive!

The promise of this child was their hope, and today He is ours. We live in a time when we have already seen this promise of a child fulfilled. We already have the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

We can hope because our hope lies with the Lord. He will fulfill every promise spoken. We trust in Him; we trust that “the zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.” He is the one who overtook the darkness and gave us light. In Him we find our HOPE.

As we look to the future, while remembering the past promises of God, we still hope. We hope for the day of Christ’s return. The One who has come is still coming. We can trust that “the zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (Isa. 9:7).



Lord, we thank You for the fulfillment of Your promises. May we lean into the hope that is found in Christ alone today.

DAY FOUR

# The Sign of Immanuel— Jesus, Our Only Hope

Bill Jones

*Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*

ISAIAH 7:14

## Read Isaiah 7:10-15.

All of mankind live in hope of something. For most down through the ages, their hope was in themselves or some other higher earthly authority. That remains to be the case even today. Unfortunately, this hope only leads to destruction.

We see this clearly during the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah (731-715 B.C.). Ahaz was one of many kings who “did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Kings 16:2) by leading the nation astray and deeper into idolatry. Syria and Israel joined forces to overthrow Ahaz. Ahaz knew he couldn’t save himself or the nation of Judah, so he chose to depend on Assyria’s king and mighty army. 2 Chronicles 28:20 informs us that the king of Assyria “came against [Ahaz] and afflicted him instead of strengthening him.” And so go the plans of men who trust in anyone other than the Lord God for deliverance.

During their struggles against Syria and Israel and their misguided allegiance to Assyria, Judah still had the option to cling to God for salvation and deliverance. In Isaiah 7:10-15, the Lord offered Ahaz

an opportunity to request a sign to reorient his faith. Ahaz refused, causing Isaiah to denounce the whole nation for wearying God.

When it seemed there was no hope, Isaiah proclaimed in verse 14 “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Ahaz’s failures illustrate why we need a Savior. Left to ourselves, we will always go astray and worship other “gods.” The greater need for all the nations is God’s sovereign plan to provide a Savior to free us from the bondage of sin. This prophecy reached well into the future as confirmed by the fact Matthew quoted this passage when he wrote of Christ’s birth: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.” He is Immanuel, God with us, forever for those who believe.

In our own sinfulness, God stays true to His promise. During this Advent season, may we remember well the covenant relationship we experience with God through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us joyously celebrate the free gift of saving grace provided by Immanuel.



Father, thank You for the assurance and the hope of eternal life guaranteed by Your Son. Enable us, Lord Jesus, as only You can, to live out our days with great anticipation of heaven and Your promised return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

DAY FIVE

# A Greater Plan, A Greater Gift

Rev. Tim Rowan

*He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

2 SAMUEL 7:13

**Read 2 Samuel 7:12-16.**

There is no other season or holiday like Christmas. On one hand, it is a time for grand expressions of joy and celebration—rightly decorated trees, lights strung on the house, and themed music playing all around. Christmas is proudly on display for the world to see! But, on the other hand, Christmas also has many hidden secrets. Boxes are camouflaged, disguised so that those receiving the gift are left wondering about its contents. The secret of the content of the box builds excitement, wonder, and even an element of hope for what may be inside.

In the passage read today, David reveals his intentions to give God a gift. His gift would be a “house,” a structure built to provide a permanent place to keep the ark of God, which was the most holy and respected item of Israel. It seemed to be a respectable gift and a thoughtful gift from David to honor God and protect Israel. But God had other plans, a secret of His own that would include an even greater gift.

It wasn't that God didn't appreciate David's intentions. It's just that



God had a greater plan, a greater gift. You see, David's gift would be temporary, while God's was eternal. David's gift would benefit Israel; God's would benefit the world. David's gift would be built of gold and precious stones. God's gift would be built on the shoulders of His own Son. God shared a secret with David that day, a secret for him and for you.

The secret God shared with David was His plan to provide not only a house for Israel but a King for the world. Solomon would build a temple; God would establish a kingdom whose "throne shall be established *forever*" (2 Sam. 7:16; emphasis added). God's greater plan, His greater gift—Jesus, the hope of all eternity.



Thank You, Lord, for establishing Your kingdom that will last forever and for a compassionate King who rules over us. In Him we place our trust and hope for our eternity.

DAY SIX

# Born to Die, So That We May Live

Stephanie Cunningham

*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 53:5

## Read Isaiah 53.

Reading through Isaiah 53 can bring a sense of guilt upon a believer with the realization that it was our sin that sent Jesus to the cross. However, this was all God's plan to redeem man. By His wounds we are healed (Isa. 53:5). In this season, as we look forward to His birth, may we not forget the reason He came—it was for our freedom. What hope that is to the weary heart. No matter where we find ourselves this season, remember that Jesus is our Hope. He didn't stay in the manger, nor did He stay in the grave. He is alive!

In this Advent season, as we celebrate the birth of our Messiah, may we spend time reflecting on what His birth truly means for each of us. Because of His birth we have a way of being made right with God. Because of His birth, Jesus was ultimately able to go to the cross on our behalf.

Jesus wasn't just some cute, cuddly baby. He was the Savior of the world. It is easy to get caught up in many things surrounding Christmas, but may our focus be on the fact that Jesus came to be our Hope and our Salvation.



Father, thank You for Jesus and the everlasting hope that we find in Him.

## DAY SEVEN

# Hope Sprouts Eternal

Dr. Ivan Parke

*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

JEREMIAH 23:5

## Read Jeremiah 23:1-6.

Light appears the brightest when the dark is darkest; the reason that a night in the country offers the best panorama of the starry host.

Hope, in like manner, becomes more hopeful when hopelessness intensifies. We tend to ignore our need for hope whenever all seems well.

During the ministry of Jeremiah, Judah had been misled by wicked kings and misinformed by false prophets. The politicians, referred to as “shepherds,” had destroyed their sheep (Jer. 23:1-2). The prophets had filled the people with vain hopes (Jer. 23:16). As a result, the Lord expressed his exasperation: “I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied.” (Jer. 23:21).

At such a dire time, God’s prophet declared, “Behold, the days are coming” (Jer. 23:5), Jeremiah’s distinctive way to make a big announcement (see Jer. 7:32; 9:25; 16:14; 19:6; 23:7; 30:3; 31:27, 31, 38; 33:14; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52). Six centuries passed before those days came! Only hope could last that long.

Jeremiah announced that God would raise up a righteous Branch for David. The Hebrew noun translated “branch” can be rendered “sprout” (Isa. 61:11; Ezek. 17:9). Anything big starts small. Consequently, to notice it and believe what it will become requires hope. The righteous Branch—correctly capitalized in English Bibles—was nothing less than the Son of God in the flesh, born as a Son of David (Matt. 1:1) in a manger!

In Romans 8:24, the apostle Paul reasoned, “Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?” No one knowingly places hope in that which cannot be trusted.

During this Advent, may the Hope of the gospel lift your spirits. Read Colossians 1:27. The birth of the Savior proves that God keeps his promises, a reason to hope during the living of these days, as you face your own trials.



Father, thank You for your precise plan to send Your Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in the fullness of time. We know by name what Jeremiah could not fully see. We worship Jesus. Amen.



WEEK TWO

# *Faith*

*O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by;  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem!  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in,  
Be born in us today!  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Immanuel!*

*“O Little Town of Bethlehem”  
Phillips Brooks (1835–1893)*

DAY EIGHT

# Faith to See the Way of the Lord

Vickie Mascagni

*Comfort, comfort my people ... “In the wilderness  
prepare the way of the Lord;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God..”*

ISAIAH 40:1, 3

**Read Isaiah 40:1-5.**

What comes to mind at the mention of the word comfort? A relaxing spa day? A day of resting on the couch? A special delightful food? In this passage, we see God’s love for His people and His concern for their comfort. After 39 chapters of warning His people of judgment, God instructed Isaiah to speak tenderly to the people of Jerusalem, to comfort them, and to assure them that He was preparing the highway to their God. He was planning for the glory to come.

I have a dear mentor who has taught me the truth of the word “both.” Many of us want our Biblical truth to be singular, but God is a God of many “boths.” God is both judging His people and tenderly comforting them while preparing for the future, even if that path involves “uneven ground” and “rough places” (v. 4).

God’s comfort is quite different from worldly comforts. Isaiah’s prophecy foretold of John the Baptist’s comforting voice as he prepared the road for Jesus. Have you been delayed by road



construction lately? The disruption of “normal” brings stress. Our reading today speaks of what God is doing during those times of disruption and discomfort. The comfort in such delays is found in the hope of a better road to come. We find lasting comfort in this life as we look forward to the glorious joy that is coming. Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “For the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”



O Father, produce in us faith that looks forward to the joy set before us, just as Jesus looked forward to the joy set before Him.

DAY NINE

# Trusting God for the Unspeakably Impossible

Rev. Drew Dabbs

*And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.*

LUKE 1:16-17

**Read Luke 1:5-25.**

Life rarely goes as planned. Although many blessings come our way, life also throws us unexpected curve balls. We may imagine one future for ourselves, only to find an insurmountable obstacle in front of us. In those moments, we may even wonder, where is God?

Zechariah and Elizabeth likely felt as if they had encountered an insurmountable obstacle. In verse 6, Luke called this couple “righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.” Yet their hoped-for future had not arrived: they had no child to call their own.

Even as God unfolded his cosmic plan to buy back his people from sin and death, he stopped to bless an unremarkable couple. Their only qualification was their faith—their willingness to trust God’s Word enough to obey Him.

Even with his strong faith, when promised the impossible, Zechariah doubted. He was no more remarkable in his faith than you or I. He desired proof. The proof: he was unable to speak. His miraculous silence could only be remedied by the unimaginably impossible—the birth of a child in his old age.

Today, we hope for no less than the unspeakably, unimaginably impossible. We were dead in our sins; and yet, through a promised child, God provided a way for us to be made alive! But we have not been silenced. Instead, we are called to proclaim the glorious praises of our God, who does the unspeakably impossible for his glory and our good.



Father, teach us to trust You when we face the impossible. Thank You for the example of Zechariah and Elizabeth, reminding us that Your plan accomplishes great things through unremarkable people of faith.

## DAY TEN

# Faith in Uncertainty

Melanie Lenow

*And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”*

LUKE 1:28-30

*And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”*

LUKE 1:38

**Read Luke 1:26-38.**

What challenge has God brought to you lately? Whatever comes to mind, it probably wasn't planned or expected. Many times, when challenges come our way, they hit us out of the blue. If this is your experience, take heart! Mary was the same way. Mary had no prior knowledge of what was going to happen to her. And even though the news was good, “The Lord is with you,” it caught Mary off guard. When this happens in our lives, we can look to Mary as an example of how to have faith in unexpected, challenging times.

Interestingly, Mary's first response was to be “deeply troubled.” When we face a challenge, the question isn't whether we are troubled, but what to do with the troubled feelings. 1 Peter 5:7 prescribes “casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” We immediately

take it in faith to our Lord because He cares for us and promises to sustain us. (Psalm 55:22)

After Mary received the news of her coming Savior, she listened, questioned, and listened again. From scripture, it seems as if this conversation happened in a matter of minutes. However, in many situations, this process can take much longer. Sometimes the challenges God brings us require years of listening, questioning, and listening again. While it seems that Mary had the answers at the end of the dialogue with Gabriel, we know that it took her all of Jesus' life to fully grasp the calling that God placed on her. However, at each step she acted in faith with the information she was given. She listened to what the angel was saying. She asked questions because she knew God cared for her and would sustain her. Then she listened in submission once more.

Lastly, Mary acted in submission by saying, "Let it be to me according to your word." We always have the choice to fight against a challenge with our own rebellion or to submit to that challenge as coming from the Lord. Mary chose to acknowledge that she was ultimately the Lord's servant (as are we) and accepted the unexpected situation as a blessing and an opportunity to act in faith.



Thank you, Lord, for the challenges You place before us. Use them to grow us into a deeper relationship with You. Thank You for Your promise to sustain us and care for us always.

DAY ELEVEN

# God Keeps His Promises

Mary Sanders

*“Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said.”*

LUKE 1:43-45 NLT

**Read Luke 1:39-56.**

The promised miracle had happened! Mary, a godly young virgin girl, was pregnant with the promised Messiah. The angel Gabriel told Mary that her older, childless aunt, Elizabeth, was pregnant too. It was a good distance away, but Mary had to go and visit her. What a glorious meeting that would be!

A greeting like no other! John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth’s womb when Mary entered the room! Surely they rejoiced deeply at what happened and at all that God had revealed to Elizabeth. Mary’s faith was soaring! It was all true! God was using these simple, godly women to fulfill His promises to all mankind. The promised Savior, Jesus, was on his way!

How edifying and amazing Elizabeth’s words must have been to Mary. By calling Mary “the mother of my Lord,” Elizabeth confirmed

that Mary was blessed above all women! Mary was carrying her Lord, the Savior of the world!



Lord, may we walk daily with the joy and faith that these ladies had. Thank You for Your promises to us. You have called each of us to daily bear witness of Jesus our Lord and Savior who is living in us too! Amen.

## DAY TWELVE

# Extraordinary Faith // Extraordinary Life

Dalton Frasier

*And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.*

LUKE 1:64

**Read Luke 1:57-80.**

Faith opens the door to God's power. Jesus told his followers that, if they have faith, they will speak and move a mountain (Matt. 17:20) or uproot a mulberry tree (Luke 17:6). Now, I would venture to guess that none of us have ever moved a mountain into the sea. If we had, surely it would have been covered by every media outlet. But what the media doesn't cover are the small faith moments. When we wake up with breath in our lungs or witness a moment of healing powered by prayer, we catch a glimpse of God's faithfulness to His people.

When Zechariah questioned the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:18), God took away Zechariah's ability to speak. We could chalk this moment up to a lack of faith on Zechariah's part. However, when his wife gave birth, Zechariah had the faith to obey the angel's command and name his child John. He trusted that God would not only restore his body by returning his speech, but also make his son a great prophet who would prepare the way for Jesus (Luke 1:76)!

Zechariah's imposed silence may have hindered his ministry as a priest. However, despite the threat to his livelihood and career,



his faith grew stronger. He began with a question that revealed his apparent doubts, but he renewed his faith and found redemption.

How do we react when faced with what we believe to be impossible? Do we question God's direction, or do we follow Christ in faith? This Advent season, let us remember the faithfulness of God and maybe move a mountain or two while we are at it.



God, give us the faith to move a mountain or uproot a mulberry tree. Help us to see the everyday miracles You put in our daily lives and overcome every challenge through faith.

DAY THIRTEEN

# God Leads the Humble

Lisa Gunn

*He leads the humble in what is right,  
and teaches the humble His way.*

PSALM 25:9

**Read Psalm 25:1-10.**

The humble. God leads them. God teaches them. We all want to be them. The humility that pleases God is a heart that hears the word of Christ and responds in faith (Rom. 10:17) in spite of the trials and tribulations that come from His hand.

Imagine with me. You've been thinking about the future and made a plan. Excitement builds, expectations mount.

Now, imagine your plan comes crashing down around you through no fault of your own. A trial. A tribulation. You have lost control of the situation. How do you respond? Fall apart? Blame others? Have a pity party? Lose faith in God? Scramble to regain control? Or is there another option?

One Message. Two Responses.

Herod was planning for the future. He was building, designing, and reigning in Jerusalem. But Wise men came with unimaginable news. How would he respond? He scrambled. He schemed. He killed. He bowed his back and stiffened his neck and refused to submit to God's plan. He was not led by God in what is right or taught His ways (Ps. 25:9).

Mary was planning for the future. She had been preparing, organizing, and thinking through her life with Joseph; then the unimaginable news came. How did she respond? She bowed her head in humble submission to the plan that God laid out before her in spite of the relational and societal difficulties that lay ahead. She was led by God to what was right and taught His ways.

Her heart responded in faith that God would do all He had promised (Luke 1:45). She knew that “All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies” (Ps. 25:10). Even the path that led a virgin to bear the Christ child.



Father, grant us faith to trust Your promises that we may not bow our backs in pride but bow our hearts in humility. Lead us in what is right and teach us Your ways.

DAY FOURTEEN

# Let Your Face Shine That We May Be Saved

James Warren

*Restore us, O LORD God of host! Let Your face shine, that we may be saved!*

PSALM 80:19

## Read Psalm 80.

They hid! In a moment of disobedience, Adam and Eve went from a state of fellowship with their Creator to one of cowering in the shadows. God's face and light were present, yet they dared not look upon it. Genesis 3 relates the story of Adam and Eve's fall and, by extension, ours. However, in that moment when God could have justly destroyed Adam and Eve, He stayed His hand. How could Adam, Eve, and their descendants be restored? How could we once again see and fellowship with God?

Over the next thousands of years, God unfolded His great plan of salvation. God saved Noah and his family from destruction. God took Abraham from a pagan land and formed His people. Through Moses, God rescued His people from slavery in Egypt. God gave His people a land that was already developed. In all these stories, God was teaching His children about their utter dependence on Him. In every story God was the hero, the Savior. In every story men thrived when they placed their faith in God. In every story men suffered when they trusted in other things. And in every story, people of God

failed and eventually returned to the dust.

God's mercy not only shows us that we need a Savior, but also that He provides one. God sent His Son so that we might have life through repentance and faith in Him. In Psalm 80, the psalmist pointed us again and again to our need for salvation through God. This psalm compares God's people to a vine He planted and caused to prosper. The psalmist taught us that the preservation of the vine is dependent on God. Every inch of this psalm calls us to place our faith in God. "Restore us, O Lord God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!" (Ps. 80:19). God fully accomplished this through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Messiah, Jesus. Through the work of the Christ, we are truly restored. God's face shines on us as never before.



Father, we are humbled by Your mercy to us. Day after day, moment after moment You give us grace upon grace. We thank You for Christ our Savior. We thank You that You did not leave us in the dark, but You caused Your light to shine upon us through Christ so that we might be saved.



WEEK THREE

# Joy

*Joy to the world! the Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let ev'ry heart prepare him room,  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.*

*Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns;  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of his love,  
And wonders of his love,  
And wonders, wonders of his love.*

*“Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come”  
Isaac Watts (1674–1748)*

## DAY FIFTEEN

# An Exact Moment in Time

Dr. J. Clay Norton

*And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.*

LUKE 2:6

**Read Luke 2:1-7.**

Have you ever waited on something or someone? Looking at your watch or the clock, willing time to move more quickly? The anticipation—stirring our hearts, controlling our thoughts. Time... .

Time was clothed in darkness for many years. For hundreds of years before Christ's birth, God seemed silent. Prophets had foretold the coming Messiah, yet time produced nothing. Mankind was found waiting, wanting for the fullness of time, for the Word to become flesh—the promised Savior, who would empty Himself (Phil. 2:7).

This time, an exact time, was planned before time. The moment when our Savior came to this world, leaving His throne in Heaven, the glory of His righteousness, to save humanity from our frailty, that we might redeem the time. God's love traveled far, so we could be near. The Incarnate who can relate, the One who knows our hearts, saving us from a temporal realm and offering us eternity.

As time moved toward the moment of Christ's birth, we find more than wood, hay, and a manger. We find and experience God, stepping into time, giving humanity life and hope in His rich mercy and love—all in one scene.



Time, now measured with the Heart of Heaven. A heart that now beats wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. A cry now heard where our Savior's divinity met His humanity—humility at its core, providing everlasting life.

The time when Mary gave birth—this one moment—shaped the Christian faith for all time. The Advent of Christ, a time when the Nativity is brought to life, is a perpetual sight to be remembered. A time to celebrate God's Son, the Love worth giving, His time.



Dear God, thank You for entering time as we know it. Please stir our hearts for the time we have to live with grace and mercy and prepare our hearts for eternity.

DAY SIXTEEN

# Incomparable News... Immeasurable Joy

Paige Atkinson

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of  
the heavenly host praising God and saying,  
“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace  
among those with whom he is pleased!”*

LUKE 2:13-14

**Read Luke 2:8-20.**

“While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground, the angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone around.” The time had finally come for the Father’s most joyous news to spread far and wide: Jesus, the promised Savior, had arrived! Where does one start? A palace? A banquet? Who does one tell first? A king? A prophet?

Of all the places we might expect God to choose for the announcement of His Son’s birth, the least likely place would be a dark sheep field; and the least likely audience we might expect would be the lowly shepherds protecting the flock. Shepherds were considered least among men, yet they were given the privilege of being the first to hear the announcement: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11).

Luke's passage provides pause for reflection—not just on the story itself, but also on our lives as believers. First, we reflect on the joy of the shepherds who left with haste to find Jesus and spread the news of His birth. Have we found the same joy in sharing the news of Christ? Second, we reflect on the joy we have in knowing we have a Savior who values us, not based on worldly standards, but because of who we are in and through Christ. Third, we reflect on the joy of seeing a promise fulfilled by our faithful God. Jesus lived a life of humility, so it is no surprise that the news of His birth was first shared with humble shepherds who celebrated with a host of angels unable to contain their own joy. He humbled Himself by coming to earth to give us the joy He alone can provide. The town of Bethlehem did not realize what had happened on that dark night, but the shepherds knew. It was the most important, joyous night in all of history because Jesus was born.



Father, thank You for the gifts of love and joy. Please guard us from becoming so distracted we miss the chance to celebrate the gift of joy You sent us on that first Christmas.

## DAY SEVENTEEN

# Worth the Wait

Nancy Dent

*And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*

LUKE 2:38

**Read Luke 2:21–40.**

Terry and I were both teaching in a Catholic middle school in New Orleans when we found out we were expecting. Our pregnancy became a school project for our students, fellow teachers, and the parents at the school. Everyone was waiting expectantly for this baby to be born. Sam was originally due on December 16, but he did not arrive until December 30! We waited, and we waited! We were anticipating all the joys of parenthood that would come with a new baby. And finally, the waiting was worth it! Sam arrived and was the fulfillment of what we were waiting for.

In Luke 2:27–32, Simeon also waited. He waited for the coming of another son, the Messiah! The Holy Spirit had whispered to Simeon that he would not die until he had actually seen the Messiah. When he saw Jesus in the temple with his parents, Simeon praised God and announced that he could die happy for salvation was at hand! What joy! It had been worth the wait! Anna too had waited for the coming of the Messiah. In Luke 2:36–38, we discover that Anna was an eighty-four-year-old widow who spent her days and nights praying and fasting in the temple. She trusted that Messiah would come

soon. When she saw the baby Jesus, she first gave thanks to God and then prophesied that He would be the redemption of Jerusalem. For Anna, the wait was worth it!

One of my all-time favorite Advent hymns is “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.” The first stanza reads:

Come, Thou long expected, Jesus  
 Born to set Thy people free;  
 From our fears and sins release us,  
 Let us find our rest in Thee.  
 Israel’s strength and consolation,  
 Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
 Dear desire of every nation,  
 Joy of every longing heart.

Is your heart longing for a Savior? Simeon’s and Anna’s were, and God answered their longings. Just as He does today. May the God of peace and consolation find you seeking Him during this Advent season!



Father, thank You for loving us so much that You sent Jesus into this sinful world to redeem us. Fill us with the anticipation of an eternity spent with You!

DAY EIGHTEEN

# The Joy of God Leading Us to Christ

Dr. Jerry Rankin

*When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.*

MATTHEW 2:10

**Read Matthew 2:1-12.**

There is a great deal of obscurity and intrigue in the narrative of these magi from the East, who are sometimes even referred to as kings. They were not Jews, but as scholars and astrologers, they must have been acquainted with the Jewish Scriptures and prophecies. Where did they get the idea that a star would indicate the fulfillment of a coming king? How could they comprehend that this king would not be revealed by ascending to the throne of a prominent kingdom, but as a baby born in humble surroundings?

The Jews, who had all the knowledge of a coming Messiah, did not recognize Christ nor accept Him, even after a life of miracles and teachings that testified to His divine identity. John 1:11 says, “He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.” Yet here were foreigners who made a long, perilous journey to find Him and recognized this baby was worthy of worship—God Himself, who had come into the world!

Certainly, being rewarded with finding the object of their search in a remote village, after their travel over inhospitable terrain and the

deception and conspiracy of Herod, brought great joy to them. In fact, Matthew 2:10 expresses this with a double superlative: “They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” Note their joy did not come when they arrived at their destination but when the star appeared before them. Apparently, the star was not a constant guide on their journey. Why did they rejoice? Because it was the star that would lead them to Jesus.

Could this not be a metaphor for what led you to know Jesus? Was that star godly parents who led you to trust Him as your Savior? Perhaps it was a convicting sermon that resulted in your abandoning a self-centered life and pursuit of worldly values to discover an eternal hope when you found Christ. God is still providing a star—His divine leading—to guide us to Christ. When we go through trials, doubts, or discouragement, He will always use something to lead us back to Jesus—He is the answer.



Father, help us to realize that just as You used the star to guide the wisemen to Jesus, You are using people and circumstances to lead us to Jesus each day. Help us, as the wisemen, to be obedient and follow faithfully.

## DAY NINETEEN

# Trust and Obey

Alicia Dunn

*Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.”*

MATTHEW 2:13

## Read Matthew 2:13-23.

In this passage, God spoke clearly, even supernaturally to Joseph. All three messages (Matt. 2:13, 19, 22) provided clear direction, but the messages were not good news of great joy. The messages, instead, provided warnings, commands, and change. Each time Joseph’s response was the same: immediate obedience.

So often we think, “If the Lord would tell me clearly what he wants me to do, I would obey.” We believe that the hard part is figuring out what to do. Yet the hard part is usually submitting ourselves to the known will of God and trusting him for the results.

We have the benefit of seeing the rest of Joseph’s story. After three commands and three acts of immediate obedience, Matthew recorded three fulfillments of prophesy (Matt. 2:15, 17–18, 23). When the dreams came to Joseph, he faced the choice to trust and obey or do it his own way; he did not have the benefit of knowing the end of his story. Yet, it is obvious by his obedient actions that Joseph trusted God.



Every day, like Joseph, we have been called to action. Our callings are not usually delivered by angels in dreams—more often they come through abiding in His word and listening to the Spirit. When God directs us, do we choose immediate obedience and trust God for the results?



God, thank You for the picture of Your faithfulness in Joseph's life. Help us to be willing to immediately obey when we know the direction that You are leading. Help us to trust You for the results.

## DAY TWENTY

# Mourning Turned to Joy

Erin Stache

*They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall languish no more.*

JEREMIAH 31:12

## Read Jeremiah 31:7-18.

At the beginning of Exodus 1, we learn that Joseph's family has been reunited, survived a famine, and is still living in Egypt. There are initially seventy family members, but they "were fruitful and increased greatly" (Exod. 1:7). I'm always struck by the faithfulness of God. He preserves the remnant of His people at every twist and turn of the Old Testament. Prior to Joseph and his family, God permitted Adam and Eve to continue a family line. There was the preservation of Noah and his family. There was a childless Abraham, and so on. Later, Esther stood up for her people, and God preserved her. Always a remnant in mind. Always a people for Himself.

Here, in Jeremiah, we are met with much grief and mourning. The Israelites have been exiled to Babylon. But wasn't a king supposed to come out of Bethlehem? Isn't that what the prophets preached year after year? I imagine the strain of a prophet's voice as he pleaded with Israel to return to the Lord. It was a dire situation that seemed rather bleak with promise. Notably, Jeremiah 31:15 pictures Rachel, Joseph's favorite wife, crying from her grave over the angst and grief

of her people who are no more.

However, the tide will turn. Our passage today provides the soothing, healing balm that we all need in the midst of our mourning. Slowly reread our passage today, and write a few phrases that stand out as a beacon of hope. The greatest line of hope is found in verse 17: “There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country.” Rachel need not grieve any longer. God’s promises would be fulfilled. The remnant would return. The remnant had not been forgotten. Rachel had not been forgotten. Her children had not been forgotten.

And yet, *we* have not been forgotten. Though Rachel longed for the return and restoration of her children. We long for our returning King Jesus. We wait expectantly during this Advent season, and every other day of the year, for Jesus to come quickly! We know that our sorrows and mourning will not turn to joy until we see Him face to face. Our salvation is our restoration. That is our joy. That is our hope.

In closing today, turn to Psalm 98 and slowly read this song of praise. This psalm provided inspiration for Isaac Watts’s “Joy to the World.” The psalmist praised God for the salvation He would bring to all the world. God has made known His salvation. He will carry that to completion surely, wholly, and finally. This God, our God who has brought salvation to all the earth, brings us hope.

Let Earth Receive Her King!



Father, thank You for Your salvation. Thank You that through Christ we have hope in this world, and our mourning will turn to joy. Amen.

DAY TWENTY ONE

# God, Our Righteous Judge and Savior

Christian Kyser

*He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;  
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war anymore.*

ISAIAH 2:4

**Read Isaiah 2:1-5.**

God is an awesome God and a powerful and righteous judge. He is the only one worthy to judge and decide disputes for all mankind. His unwavering love for us does not cloud His judgement, and this love that He has for us is worth every heartache and torment we go through.

We should rejoice knowing that Christ is coming back to right every wrong and destroy all evil. We should rejoice for Christ when He answers our prayers and is good to us. Yet, we should also have joy in our suffering, knowing that we are pleasing God and that all our obedient times will be counted for us when He returns.

Verse 4 clearly says that there will be a time where we will not have to fight or dispute. God will decide disputes for all people. There will be no war in the United States, in Iraq, in Ukraine, or anywhere else in

the world. We are not called to be anxious about these things because God will deliver us from these wars. Our anxiousness shows our lack of faith in God's word and power over us.



Lord, we come to You humbly today to praise Your name and to realize how amazing and powerful Your holy name is. Thank You Lord for always being there, even when we reject You and disobey Your commandments. Thank You for being our righteous Judge and wonderful Savior. Amen.



WEEK FOUR

# Peace

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild;  
God and sinners reconciled.”

Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With angelic hosts proclaim,  
“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King.”

Christ, by highest heav’n adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord:  
Late in time, behold Him come,  
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail th’incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus our Immanuel.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King.”

“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”

Charles Wesley (1707–1788), alt. George Whitefield (1714–1770)

DAY TWENTY TWO

# Sons and Daughters of a Loving God

Jeff Purvis

*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God.*

JOHN 1:12

**Read John 1:1-18.**

Amid the turmoil of his day, the apostle John took his reader all the way back to pre-creation. He then condensed the centuries from “In the beginning” to his present time in the latter stages of the first century. In 18 verses, known as the prologue, John started with the Word’s eternal pre-existence, then concluded by declaring that the law only convicts us and brings death, but that the Word, the only Son from the Father, gives us grace—and the peace that comes through it.

Calling on scriptural themes, John chose phrases like “In the beginning was the Word,” “the Word was God,” “All things were made through him,” “In him was life ... the light of men,” “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” “He came to his own,” and, “But to all ... who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” In doing so, John illustrated how God’s progressive revelation of Himself and His redemptive plan for all people have played out together since even before the beginning—that we might see from the Scriptures, and now in human form, the love of God



manifested in the flesh.

Yes, as the Word dwelt among men, John personally witnessed the fullness of mercy, grace, patience, faithfulness, and steadfast love—the very words God used in Exodus 34:6 to describe Himself as His glory passed before Moses. In Colossians 1:19-20, Paul put it this way: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... making peace by the blood of his cross.” Therefore, all who believe in His name may rightly expect to receive the fullness of this mercy, grace, patience, and steadfast love—the peace of becoming children of God.



Father, thank You for revealing the fullness of Your grace through the life of Your only Son—that we might see and truly know the peace that only comes from becoming a child of God.

## DAY TWENTY THREE

# The Lamb of God Satisfied God's Wrath

Sara Renick

*The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

JOHN 1:29

**Read John 1:19-34.**

In a broad sense, the Bible is a narrative of war...and, due to God's infinite grace, peace. Since Genesis 3:15, enmity has been a predominant theme: the wrath of God would be poured out against ungodliness for the duration of the earth's existence. But in an ultimate reversal that would make the earth literally tremble in protest, He would pour wrath upon His own Son on behalf of those who trust Him for protection against the consequences of their own rebellion. In the very same chapter where sin upended creation, we see a picture of God killing a blameless animal to make "coverings" for Adam and Eve so they could regain fellowship with their Maker.

Thus the stage was set for how sinful man would be able to relate to his holy Creator: blood must be shed, for death is sin's wages. The Passover initiated a ceremony that would cause God's works to be remembered long after the pain of their slavery faded: a spotless, innocent lamb would be slaughtered to "cover" the Israelites from His wrath. Year after year, animals' blood ritualistically provided a "covering"—the literal rendering of "mercy seat." Every time a

throat was cut, it was a painful reminder that life should have been taken from someone more deserving of punishment. But all the ceremonial sacrifices could not take care of the real issue—their guilty consciences attested to that (Heb. 9:13-14; 10:4).

Tradition says the Passover lambs were raised in Bethlehem. When a certain Bethlehemite appeared on the scene, John identified Him as the Lamb of God, the long-ago promised Seed of the woman, who would take away sin. During the Passover celebration, it was His innocent blood that would be spilled in order to satisfy the wrath of God and eradicate the need for a covering: the veil separating sinful man from a holy God would be torn in two. He would not just “cover” over sin, but take it completely away. It was a glorious and unthinkable promise that only God could have imagined: for those who trust Him, the sacrificial Lamb would become their peace (Rom. 5:1).



Thank You for providing the Lamb to take away sin completely, giving us the possibility of peace and fellowship with You.

## DAY TWENTY FOUR

# The Ultimate Choice

Percy Thornton

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

JOHN 3:16

**Read John 3:16-21.**

This Advent devotional begins at John 3:16, which is a very well-known verse that Christians love and cherish. John 3:17-21, however, is less familiar but no less necessary. In these six verses, we find in Christ victory, glory, grace, joy, salvation, light, and, especially, inner peace. In the next three verses, we learn the results of turning from Christ Jesus: sin, love of darkness, unbelief, condemnation, doom, and war against God.

John 3:16 has been called the “Gospel in a nutshell.” It reminds us that Christ died on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. Putting our total trust in Christ fulfills all our needs for this life and for the next. Salvation is a gift of grace through faith in Christ by which we have peace with God and abundant life. The next verse (v. 17) bolsters our joy and peace of mind by assuring us that God intended the whole world to be saved by Christ’s life, death, burial, and resurrection. Verse 18, however, reminds us that, since people have some degree of free will, they can either trust the Lord Jesus or not do so. It is tragic when they don’t, but that is why we witness and evangelize. Some hear the Gospel and yawn, some think they are

good, some think they don't need Jesus, others wage war with God, but most do nothing at all. Verse 19 brings a terrible charge against the human race: "People loved the darkness rather than the light." We might ask, why would people possibly love darkness rather than light? The answer is that they avoid the light because their deeds are evil—they don't want them to be exposed. Verse 20 gives a second reason they prefer darkness rather than light: they resent being reviled, lectured, or denounced as bad people for their dark and evil deeds. The alternative is found in the last verse, which speaks of those who trust Christ and come to the light. They do not fear having their deeds inspected, because their deeds have been "carried out in God" (John 3:21).



Thank You Lord for allowing us the opportunity to choose between light and darkness with the death of Your Son, Christ Jesus. Thank You for allowing us to have peace in our lives because of the ultimate sacrifice made by Jesus our Lord. I praise You for the peace we have in knowing we will spend eternity with You in glory. In Christ's name, Amen.

## DAY TWENTY FIVE

# The Peace of Eternal Life

Anna Gipson

*And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.”*

JOHN 3:26

**Read John 3:22-36.**

When I was first given this passage, I asked Mom, “They know I’m only 12, right?” I thought I had to write about everything in the passage. I mean it goes from talking about baptisms to jealousy, to bridegrooms, and then to eternal life. But eventually, I got my head on straight, and I took the passage bit by bit.

As someone that got baptized this past year, I know the peace you feel with salvation. But I also know the worry you feel before. I spent so many days sitting on my bed, praying, crying, and talking to my parents about all my sins. I would confess everything. I felt awful about people I might have hurt by my sins. Confessing to mom and dad brought peace for the moment, but not for the long run. Praying and asking the Lord to forgive me of my sins and doing Bible study with my dad gave me peace knowing that God sent Jesus to pay the price for my sins.

Just because you become a Christian doesn’t mean you won’t sin anymore. We are still human. We still sin. In this passage, John’s disciples’ sin was jealousy. John used the story of the bridegroom to explain why they shouldn’t be jealous of Jesus. I had to ask my mom

what bridegroom means. Turns out the bridegroom represents Jesus, and we are his bride. John is his groomsman who was just there to help. John knew he was not the important person in this story; Jesus was. He was there to cheer Jesus on. John explains it in verse 30, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

John finished the passage by saying, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life” (John 3:36). Having eternal life with Jesus sounds incredible. Through my faith, I know that one day I will have eternal life with Jesus. When that glorious day comes, whether He comes or I go, I know that I will have fulfilled the life God wanted me to live. And I hope you will too.

If you want to have the peace of eternal life and take the next step with Jesus, talk to an adult, like your mom or dad, or one of your leaders at church.



Dear Lord, thank You for giving us eternal life. Thank You for sending Your only Son to save us. I pray we all find peace with You in this crazy busy season. In Jesus' name, amen.

## DAY TWENTY SIX

## Selfish or Servant?

Mary Ann Parke

*[Jesus] emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:7

**Read Philippians 2:1-11.**

Paul was in prison. He was joyful despite his circumstances because he had learned how to be joyful (Phil. 4:12-13). He exhorted the Philippians to humility and unity and used Jesus as his example. What we read in Philippians 2:3-4 is countercultural and certainly against what our flesh desires. We are selfish, always have been, always will be.

What is the secret to overcoming selfishness?

First, “With humility consider one another as more important than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3, NASB). We all think we are more important. We are not. We are not to merely look out for our own interests, “but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4, NASB).

Second, we must humble ourselves. Jesus modeled that for us. He could have stayed with God in Heaven, or He could have come to earth and been powerful and famous because He was God. He did not choose either of those options. Instead, His advent displays how He humbled Himself, being a servant on earth, and dying a shameful death on a cross. Why? That is what God asked of Him. More than anything, Jesus wanted to be obedient to the Father.



Advent is about the coming of Christ. We see such love in His coming to us—becoming like us. He gave us not only a model of humility, unselfishness, and unity, but also a model of love. His is the very promise of love. His love is divine, perfect, and complete. If we know Him, we can love like He does (Gal. 5:14). Let us practice unselfishness today and let our joy be seen.



Father, thank You that You knew we needed a model, One who could show us what humility looks like. You displayed Your love toward us, and one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that You are Lord. Let that day come!

## DAY TWENTY SEVEN

# God Has Spoken a Word of Peace

Dr. Jerry Reagan

*... in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ... He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature ... After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

HEBREWS 1:2-3

**Read Hebrews 1:1-14.**

Imagine a world rife with chaos, confusion, and uncertainty—a world full of anxious and drifting people. In such a world, the hopelessness and frustration created by vain efforts to solve problems and overcome feelings of despair could be alleviated by the words and actions of an authoritative and capable leader. But what if that potential leader chose to remain silent? What if he chose to allow mankind to sort things out for itself and to wallow in its self-inflicted pain and misery? What if he chose to remain distant and aloof? If he chose this course of action, mankind would have no solution, no hope, and no peace.

Thankfully, as an act of love, grace, and mercy, God did not remain silent or distant. He, with absolute power and authority, spoke into such a world during the reign of Herod the Great in Judea over 2000 years ago. He spoke a word—the Word (John 1:14). In so doing, He provided a solution to the problem at the root of mankind's misery

and need—the problem of sin. The Word spoken by God is perfectly qualified and able to deal with this problem; He is the heir of all that God created, the agent and upholder of all creation, the image of God, and the reflection of His glory. And he currently occupies a majestic seat at the right hand of God. Consequently, it is He, and He alone (Acts 4:12), who can purify us from sin, cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and restore a sense of peace.

In our fractured, chaotic, confused, and volatile world, we must listen to the voice of God as spoken through His Son, Jesus Christ. This Christmas, let us go to the manger and hear the voice of God as He speaks to us through His Son. Let Him purify us from sin and cleanse our unrighteousness. While our circumstances may not change, and our world may remain chaotic, the hopelessness and despair will be replaced by peace—a perfect peace—a peace that passes all understanding.



Lord, give us ears to hear and a heart to embrace the Word that You spoke into the world. Help us to see that genuine peace only comes when we are purified of sin and cleansed from all unrighteousness.

## DAY TWENTY EIGHT

# Glorifying God Together

Sonya Auston

*Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*

ROMANS 15:7

## Read Romans 15:4-13.

The beauty and awe of Advent season draw our minds to reflect on the One who was, and is, and is to come, the Almighty, Christ Jesus. If we were asked to describe the season of Advent in one word, undoubtedly, the words joy, hope, peace, anticipation, and expectation would be at the top of the list. However, many people would not describe the season this way. Their words would be sadness, hopelessness, loneliness, and separation.

Separation can be physical, spiritual, cultural, and ethnic. The Jews and Gentiles in the early church faced all four types of separation, just as we do today. The prospect of long-term peace and acceptance of one another seemed impossible. But God provided a sinless sacrifice and mediator so the Jews and Gentiles could have peace with God and peace with one another.

In Romans 15:8-9, Paul testified, “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God.”

As we ponder the Advent season, let us look to the word of God

for our instruction and hope in Christ. Let us reconcile broken relationships and seek peace. May we encourage those who are lonely and without hope. Finally, welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed us for God's glory. As Paul reminded us, "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14).



Father, thank You for sending Jesus to preach peace to us who were afar off and peace to those who were near. Fill us with all joy and peace in believing.



WEEK FIVE

# *Christ*

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet the words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along the unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head;  
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,  
“For hate is strong, and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good will to men.”

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”  
Henry W. Longfellow (1807–1882)

## DAY TWENTY NINE

# Born to Save

Dr. Greg Belser

*But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”*

MATTHEW 1:20

## Read Matthew 1:18-25.

The record of the birth of Jesus Christ details the miracle of a virgin giving birth to a son. That is an incredible event! And yet, nothing is beyond the power of a God who created all things, even us. And while the miracle is an essential truth, the purpose is clearly the point. This baby is the Savior, prophesied for centuries, now appearing in human flesh to save those He loves.

His very name, Jesus, means “God is my salvation.” The news of the birth of Jesus is more than a birth-of-a-baby story. It was the culmination of the plan of God to rescue a people gone astray, lost in sin and self-righteousness. And yet, God sent His only son to bring us back to Himself. Some have characterized it as the greatest story ever told, and indeed it is. But the story means nothing if we do not recognize that it is personal for our own lives.

Christmas is many things in our culture. But we must not lose sight of its true meaning. While the world struggles with innumerable problems, God steps in. While people wander intellectually and emotionally seeking answers, God steps in. While you and I struggle



for peace and purpose, God steps in. While sin abounds in our lives, the grace of God is demonstrated in the gift of His son to bear our sins upon Himself. This is the love of God on full display in the miracle of Christmas. We celebrate the love of Christ this Christmas, born to save, born for us!



Father, in the name of Jesus, we ask You to save us from our sin. Christ, we worship You today and celebrate the salvation You brought to us.

## DAY THIRTY

# God Chooses to Be With Us

Rev. Michael Cole

*In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*

JOHN 14:2-3

**Read John 14:1-7.**

One of the astonishing and unique aspects of Advent is found in Isaiah 7:14—the prophesied name of Christ. It is Immanuel, which means God with us. God chose to dwell among us when He was born in a simple stable just over 2,000 years ago. What a blessing for those that encountered Jesus during the 33 years He walked on this earth!

In John 14, we see Jesus and His apostles at the Last Supper. Knowing that He would soon be separated from them, Jesus spoke words of comfort. He told them He was going to prepare a place for them, and He would return to take them there. We know this place to be Heaven, where God the Father dwells with Jesus at His right hand. Jesus shared these words so that when the apostles faced uncertainty over the next many days, they could cling to the hope that the Savior would return for them, and they would be with Jesus forever.

Have you thought about this? God wants to be with us! He chose to be with us and came to this earth when He was born in Bethlehem.

Jesus will come again for all those that place their trust in Him, to take us back to Heaven. We have this eternal reward before us. Take comfort in the midst of what you face in this life. God wants to be with you!



Father God, thank You that You want to spend eternity with us. May we be comforted in this life knowing that, because of salvation given to us through the cross, we can be with You forever.

DAY THIRTY ONE

# Peace in the Silence

Stephanie Peabody

*These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*

JOHN 14:25-27

**Read John 14:25-31.**

“Mrs. Peabody, when I got nervous, I remembered what you told me!” These were the words a dear student spoke to me when she finished her state reading test.

For most students, state testing season is a time of stress. Adding to that stress is a strictly enforced rule: While the test is in progress, I cannot speak any encouraging words to my students. So in the weeks leading up to a big test, I prepare them for my silence. I tell them again and again, “Don’t worry! I have already taught you everything you need to know to pass this test.” I remind them that, even in the silence, I’m cheering for them with words of encouragement and peace. “You got this!” I say.

In John 14, Jesus comforted His disciples before His departure. “I will no longer talk much with you,” He warned them (John 14:30). He knew how this news might affect them, so He prepared them for

His absence saying, “Let not your hearts be troubled” (John 14:27). He gave them two promises to sustain them. First, He promised to send them the “the Helper, the Holy Spirit” to remind them of everything He had taught them. Second, He promised to leave with them His unique peace.

In times when God seems silent, Jesus can offer us peace—a peace that cannot be found in this world. When I think of peace, I tend to think of experiences that give me a brief escape from the world’s challenges...a trip to the beach or a Sunday afternoon nap. But the peace Jesus gives is not simply an escape from the world. It is a victory over the world. This peace can be ours through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



Father, thank You for the peace You give. By Your Holy Spirit, teach us to trust You when our hearts are troubled.

DAY THIRTY TWO

# Hopeful Anticipation

Kalaishi Johnson

*But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

MATTHEW 24:43-44

**Read Matthew 24:36-44.**

As we read this passage, we may feel uncertainty as we see that even the Son does not know the day or hour of His coming. This uncertainty may evoke anxiety in some. With so much happening in the world that we cannot control, this can be disheartening to read.

In verses 37-39, we see references to the story of Noah which started in the sixth chapter of Genesis. The world was becoming corrupt, and the Lord set Noah apart to be the man to gather and prepare for the coming flood. Noah was not given a certain time or day that this would take place. He was given the knowledge of his relationship with the Lord and the ability to trust Him in this time of uncertainty.

The Lord is calling His people to trust Him. He is faithful and true. We His people can take heart and experience peace as we wait on the Lord. This peace is not based on blind faith, but on our knowledge of the past. Our Lord has been the same throughout history. He has never broken a promise, and He never will.

He promises a second coming, and only the Father knows the exact time of this coming. As we wait, we are to live in hopeful anticipation. We are not waiting in ignorance, but with the knowledge that the God of the universe has prepared a place for us and will come again for His people. When our Father sends the Son, His people are expected to be ready and waiting for Him. While we wait, we take heart, knowing we have access to the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. His peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6).



Father, thank You for being all-knowing. Help us to experience Your peace as we seek You daily and wait on Your second coming.

DAY THIRTY THREE

# Christ's Second Coming... Hope Fulfilled, Righteous Judgement Arrives

Alan Terry

*For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:5-6

**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.**

As believers who have accepted the Lord Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior, we possess hope and peace beyond any measure that heaven is our eternal home. True believers possess an enlightened joy, assurance, and confidence anchored by faith and directed by the Holy Spirit. It is by Christ living and working through us every second of every day that we can judiciously go about our earthly lives. We are thankful and living humbly in God's grace without fear and apprehension, but rather in great anticipation of Christ's second coming whenever it shall be according to God's timing and purpose! To God be the glory! In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2, the Apostle Paul provides clear affirmation this is the case.

However, for many, the Second Coming will mean hope is lost—the opportunity to receive God's grace will have reached expiration and God's wrath and righteous judgement will have arrived. Paul



provided a clear and sobering picture in this passage. Unbelievers are in darkness, deceived that all is well, until “sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” (1 Thess. 5:3). Paul’s words are a stark reminder to believers as well as unbelievers that Christ’s second coming will arrive “like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2), unbeknownst to all but God. Paul is therefore presenting a call to action for believers and a warning to those who are without Christ as Lord and Savior.

The call is for believers to get busy spreading the life-changing Gospel of Jesus to the lost. Never complacent nor anxious, we are rather to encourage one another and build one another up” as we do the work of Christ (1 Thess. 5:11).



Father, thank You for the peace and assurance of eternal life provided by Jesus. Help us to encourage and love all so the harvest is bountiful to Your honor, glory, and power.

## DAY THIRTY FOUR

# Be Patient

Rev. Chris Cunningham

*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

2 PETER 3:9

**Read 2 Peter 3:1-13.**

Patience. This is not a word we like to hear today. In our society, we want everything now, in an instant. We struggle with patience. Think of your drive to work. How many times do you get frustrated at the slow driver in front of you? What about trying to post on social media? We get aggravated when the internet is slow and our post will not load.

In the text we just read, we see a few things to remember when struggling with patience. First, we see that in our waiting, we must remember the promises of the Lord. In verse two, we read how we are to remember the predictions of the holy prophets. Second, we know that in the waiting, scoffers will come. Some will question the Word of the Lord because God's promises fail to occur in their timing. Finally, we see the Lord is ultimately the Patient One. The Lord is patient towards us.

As we walk through this Advent season, may we look to the manger, where the sinless babe was laid—our Hope and our Salvation, born of a virgin 2,000 years ago. While we look to the manger, we also look to the heavens, patiently awaiting the return of our King.

Friend, the days may be long and hard, times may seem overwhelming, your faith may be tried, but hold fast, the King will return. His promises are true! Stay faithful in the waiting. Be patient.



Lord, thank You for Your patience towards us. In the waiting, may we hold fast to Your promises, seeking to advance Your gospel. Oh, how we long for the Day of Your Coming.

DAY THIRTY FIVE

# The New Heaven... The New Earth

Rev. Billy Allen

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”*

REVELATION 21:3

## Read Revelation 21:1-4.

In chapter 9 of his book, *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn asks, “Why is earth’s redemption essential to God’s plan?” Alcorn’s answer begins with the reminder that we were created to glorify God, but “humanity rebelled, and the universe fell under the weight of our sin.”

Man’s rebellion was no surprise to God. As Alcorn reminds us, “He had in place a plan by which he would redeem mankind—and all of creation—from sin, corruption, and death.”

“For behold, I create new heavens  
and a new earth,  
and the former things shall not be remembered  
or come into mind” (Isa. 65:17).

“For as the new heavens and the new earth  
that I make  
shall remain before me, says the Lord,  
so shall your offspring and your name remain” (Isa. 66:22).

“But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens  
and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet. 3:13).

I am in debt to Alcorn for clarifying one of the implications of these verses: God’s eternal plan of redemption not only applies to men and women, “he promises to renew the earth itself.”

God will restore His original act of creation. It is good to be reminded that the Bible drives this point home using “an entire biblical vocabulary” Alcorn says we have overlooked: Reconcile. Redeem. Restore. Recover. Return. Renew. Regenerate. Resurrect.

These words emphasize that God always sees us in light of what he intended us to be, and he always seeks to restore us to that design. Likewise, he sees the earth in terms of what he intended it to be, and he seeks to restore it to its original design. (Alcorn)



Lord, thank You for the comfort of these words. May our hearts rejoice as we look forward to dwelling with You in Your new heaven and Your new earth.

# HOW CAN I BE SAVED?

How does one become a Christian? The Bible tells us that God made a perfect world. Man and woman were created to rule of that world under God's authority. But those first persons rebelled against God's perfection and earned His judgment and the curse of death. All of history tells us of the tragic effects of this broken relationship and the stain of sin and rebellion upon every generation of mankind.

Romans 6:23 says our sin has earned us death as God's punishment. But, at just the right time, and because of His love, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ. He brought the good news of reconciliation between God and mankind. Jesus' message is good news because His salvation and eternal life are free gifts. Jesus was the Son of God, yet He humbled Himself and became a man. He lived a sinless life and deserved no punishment, but He was crucified on a cross and took our punishment upon Himself. Because of His perfection, death could not hold him, and He was raised from the dead three days later.

By this powerful witness of resurrection, God declares His love for you and His victory over every enemy, including death. Jesus is alive and reigns over the earth and all its inhabitants. He calls us to repent of our sins and trust in Him for forgiveness and eternal life. He alone has defeated death and brought life to those who trust in Him.

Many people think that God saves those who do enough good deeds or have good intentions. But that's not what Jesus taught. Jesus taught that salvation comes by faith alone. Faith means trusting Jesus alone for salvation and eternal life. This good news demands a response from us. The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Do you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead?

Are you ready to confess with your own lips Jesus is Lord? If so, call out to Jesus, surrendering your life to His plan and asking Him to forgive your sins. The Bible says, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).

The day you trust Jesus as Savior is the biggest day of your life. By His power, you escape judgment and receive complete forgiveness. Jesus taught that every person who has faith in Him is born again (John 3:1-21). Your new life in Christ begins today.

If you have trusted Christ today, share this great news with your family and your church. On Sunday morning, find one of our pastors or counselors and tell them, “I’ve placed my trust in Jesus.”

## AM I READY TO BE BAPTIZED?

When you place your trust in Jesus, one of the first acts of obedience is to be baptized. Baptism identifies us with Jesus Christ and with His people, the church.

Baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to your faith in the final resurrection of the dead (Baptist Faith & Message 2000).







