
Advent Day 1 - Joy To The World

Sunday, 11/29/20 - First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 9: 6-7 - For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

What could bring the world more JOY than the coming of a Savior? In a world that is full of division and questionable leaders, we can celebrate with great JOY a Savior who has overcome this world. Jesus was not meant to save us from the consequences and circumstances of this world, but to deliver us to a world that is yet to come. A world after this one, in which great JOY will be experienced on a daily basis. How can we take the next twenty five days and allow God, through the Holy Spirit's power and guidance, provide in us a great JOY that we can share with the world?

Let us Pray:

First Sunday of Advent - Book of Common Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Advent Day 2 - Joy To The World

Monday, 11/30/20

1 Corinthians 15: 45-49 - The Scriptures tell us, "The first man, Adam, became a living person." But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man.

In Genesis 3: 1-15 we find the fall of mankind. God's good creation, made in His image has fallen to temptation and has separated themselves from the great Creator. If not for this fall, there would be no reason for us to need a Savior? The people of God tried for thousands of years after the fall to right their relationship with God but failed over and over again.

Jesus came to the earth to be our new Adam. He was from both Heaven and Earth. He was fully divine and yet fully man. Jesus' death and resurrection was to ensure that we would have that relationship righted again. There is so much JOY in knowing that Jesus is returning, and that Heaven will come to Earth someday.

Let us Pray:

Great Creator, You are the one who has made the heavens and the earth. Allow us to understand the JOY in needing a Savior. Provide in us the JOY of knowing that we need a Savior, and Jesus has come to bring us eternal life. Amen.

Advent Day 3 - Joy To The World

Tuesday, 12/1/20

Genesis 22: 15-18 - Then the angel of the Lord called again to Abraham from heaven. **“This is what the Lord says: Because you have obeyed me and have not withheld even your son, your only son, I swear by my own name that I will certainly bless you. I will multiply your descendants beyond number, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will conquer the cities of their enemies. And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me.”**

In the book of Genesis we find God, the Creator, to be a covenant God. He makes promises with His creation. In Genesis we find God rewarding the faithfulness of Abraham and making a covenant with him so that all of his descendants would inherit the earth. All of this is because of Abraham’s obedience.

Jesus came to continue to fulfill that covenant, and make a new one with all mankind. Jesus’ blood poured out on the cross is the new covenant between God and mankind. In this covenant, Jesus makes all of our wrongs disappear. He bears the weight of the guilt and shame that comes with our sin. There is JOY in knowing that Jesus fulfills the covenant.

John 8: 56-58 - **“Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad.”** The people said, **“You aren’t even fifty years old. How can you say you have seen Abraham?”** Jesus answered, **“I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I am!”**

In the book of John, Jesus is quoted as knowing and speaking with Abraham. More of the prophecy continues to be fulfilled. The JOY in knowing this Jesus, experiencing His covenant, and receiving His forgiveness is incredible. Truly this is JOY to the world.

Let us Pray:

Covenant God, be with us this day. Provide clear sight for us as we navigate this season knowing that You are who You say You are. Jesus is Your Son, and we are forgiven. Allow us to live as covenant people this Advent season, and spread that JOY to the world. Amen.

Advent Day 4 - Joy To The World

Wednesday, 12/2/20

Isaiah 7: 10-14 - Later, the Lord sent this message to King Ahaz: “Ask the Lord your God for a sign of confirmation, Ahaz. Make it as difficult as you want—as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead.” But the king refused. “No,” he said, “I will not test the Lord like that.” Then Isaiah said, “Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn’t it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).

Isaiah is one of many prophets who foretold the coming of Jesus. His interaction with King Ahaz in Isaiah 7 is where we find the claim of the virgin birth. God, speaking through Isaiah, makes it clear how the Son of God will be born. The Holy Spirit will come upon a virgin and she will give birth to a son, calling him Immanuel, God is with us.

King Ahaz had trouble believing Isaiah, and now, even after the fulfilment of the prophecy has come to pass, we still have trouble accepting it. Now imagine being Joseph? You may, or may not have the knowledge of the writings of Isaiah, and you are not expecting an angel to come to you and tell you that your virgin, betrothed wife is going to bear the Son of God.

Matthew 1: 22-23 - “All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

We can have JOY in knowing that God keeps his promises. God fulfills prophecy. God loves us enough to send His Son into the world to save us. That is JOY to the world.

Let us Pray:

Lord of all, you are a God of promises and covenant, a Lord who provides fulfilment for the prophecy. As I begin these early days of Advent help me to believe that there is JOY in knowing You. Give me the courage to listen to your voice and the freedom to open my heart to the graces you are offering me to place my trust in you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Advent Day 5 - Joy To The World

Thursday, 12/3/20

Isaiah 11: 1-6 - Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. He will delight in obeying the Lord. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay. He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited. The earth will shake at the force of his word, and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked. He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment. In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all.

Isaiah used a number of prophecies to announce the coming of Jesus. In today's text we find that Jesse is the shoot of David's stump that will produce the Savior of the world. There is so much JOY in seeing how Isaiah describes Jesus. He will give justice to the poor. The earth will shake at the force of his word, and one breath from his mouth destroys the wicked. The wolf and the lamb together, the leopard with the goat, the calf will be safe with the lion, and this child, Jesus, will lead them.

Jesus brings peace and judgment and this is a JOY with sharing with the world. We celebrate during this Advent season the coming of a Savior. The Savior who provides hope. The Savior who provides peace. The Savior who provides JOY. All of this and Jesus' confirms it.

Matthew 22: 41-46 - Then, surrounded by the Pharisees, Jesus asked them a question: "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They replied, "He is the son of David." Jesus responded, "Then why does David, speaking under the inspiration of the Spirit, call the Messiah 'my Lord'? For David said, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies beneath your feet.' Since David called the Messiah 'my Lord,' how can the Messiah be his son?" No one could answer him. And after that, no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Jesus is good at putting the religious people in their place. He confirms that he is the Son of God and yet fully man. Oh the JOY we can have in knowing the truth!

Let us Pray:

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the joy that entered the world when Jesus was born. Thank you for becoming God with us. Lord, sometimes it's difficult to live joyfully, especially in difficult or busy seasons. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Advent Day 6 - Joy To The World

Friday, 12/4/20

Micah 5: 2-5a - But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf. The people of Israel will be abandoned to their enemies until the woman in labor gives birth. Then at last his fellow countrymen will return from exile to their own land. And he will stand to lead his flock with the Lord's strength, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. Then his people will live there undisturbed, for he will be highly honored around the world. And he will be the source of peace.

Bethlehem. Just a small little village. Yet the Son of God would be born there. Far too often we see ourselves as just small town people. We do not seem to have any influence. We do not have any real power. Yet, God chose a little village like Bethlehem for his Son to be born, so that the world would not be looking to the large cities. This is humility. This is meek. This is mild. There is great JOY in knowing that even our small existence is capable of great things. When living in the Spirit of God, we are capable of anything, just like Bethlehem.

The great shepherd came from Bethlehem, that we might have a guide, a leader.

John 10: 14-16 - "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

The Good Shepherd was born to us in Bethlehem. A small village with no real importance or significance, would provide the Savior of the world. There is JOY to be found and hope to be had in that truth.

Let us Pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, Help me to hear your voice.

Touch me once again. Give me the courage to be your beloved.

Give me courage to choose joy. I need you now this Christmas.

Be born in me again. Today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

~Bonnie Gray, from "Why it Takes Courage to Choose Joy"

Advent Day 7 - Joy To The World

Saturday, 12/5/20 - Grace Day

1 John 4: 9- God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him.

Advent is a season of anticipation and celebration. We long for the promised Savior's return, even as we rejoice that He has already come to us. Use today to pause and reflect on this verse which celebrates the gift of salvation through Jesus, God's Son.

Find time to spend with family or friends and experience Joy in this life.

Let us Pray:

Saving God, we are so thankful for the salvation found in Your Son Jesus. Give us the hope and joy that we need to live a life full of promise. We know that Jesus is returning. May we be found living a joyful life full of servanthood and love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Advent Day 8 - Joy To The World

Sunday, 12/6/20 - Second Sunday of Advent

Joel 2: 12-13- That is why the Lord says, "Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead." Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish.

We do not often associate Advent with repentance. However, if we are willing to accept that Jesus is the Messiah, and he came into the world to save us from our sins, then there likely needs to be a bit of repentance involved. When we admit our need for repentance, and follow through, there is a JOY that we experience that does not seem normal.

Jesus came into the world to bring us life eternal. We celebrate his birth, not because we like cake and ice cream, but because our repentance and commitment to follow him, provides JOY in our hearts and a change in our lives.

Today we slow down to pray, and remember the sacrifice of a Savior. Today we allow ourselves to experience JOY in the midst of our failures and sin. We acknowledge our need for a Savior, and we become followers of Jesus.

Let us Pray:

Second Sunday of Advent - Book of Common Prayer

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Advent Day 9 - Joy To The World

Monday, 12/7/20

Matthew 5: 17-19- "Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

We frequently want to make Jesus out to be our genie in a lamp. He came to bear our sins and we are forgiven of those sins as long as we confess those to God, but Jesus came to fulfill the law of Moses. He does not make the commandments obsolete, or make them disappear. He is the complete work of God. He is God incarnate. Which means Jesus was fully God and fully man, and by taking our sin upon himself, he completes the work that we cannot.

We can find real Joy when we begin to live according to the commandments, not out of duty, but out of our love for God and our willingness to share in his relationship with us. Real Joy comes from following the Savior.

Let us Pray:

Gracious God, today we understand the real Joy found in following Jesus. Your Son came to give us hope and allow us to live an abundant life. Give us the strength to be all that You need us to be today. Allow us to live closer and closer to you! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Advent Day 10 - Joy To The World

Tuesday, 12/8/20

John 1: 14-18- So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son. John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'" From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

There is great Joy in knowing that the Word (Jesus) became human. He made his home with us, and He wanted to be one of us. God himself came to earth to be a man. Not to condemn us or to point out all of our faults. He came to deliver us from ourselves.

Even his cousin, John the Baptist, knew of how important his presence was to us. God is revealed to us in the image of Christ. God loved us so much that a part of Him was sent into the world to correct and right our relationship with Him. There is great Joy in to be found in the greatest gift of all, God in human form, forgiving and loving us so that we might be loving and forgiving to the world around us.

Let us Pray:

Gracious God, today we understand the real Joy found in following Jesus. Your Son came to give us hope and allow us to live an abundant life. Give us the strength to be all that You need us to be today. Allow us to live closer and closer to you! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Advent Day 11 - Joy To The World

Wednesday, 12/9/20

Isaiah 60: 1-5 - "Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the Lord rises to shine on you. Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the Lord rises and appears over you. All nations will come to your light; mighty kings will come to see your radiance. "Look and see, for everyone is coming home! Your sons are coming from distant lands; your little daughters will be carried home. Your eyes will shine, and your heart will thrill with joy, for merchants from around the world will come to you. They will bring you the wealth of many lands.

The prophet Isaiah has always been one of the more frequently used authors in this time of year because God gave him such a vision of the coming of Christ.

In this passage he likens Jesus to the rise of the sun that forces the darkness away. That when the light shines over the darkness everyone will be coming home. What an amazing feeling. "Your heart will thrill with joy"!

As we continue to look for Joy this Advent season, may we look to the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus. He makes light of our darkness and brings us to a place of great joy, for eternity.

Let us Pray:

Loving God, You have blessed us beyond measure by sending your Son into the world that we might be saved. Allow us to see His light in our darkness. Allow His light to illuminate our hearts this season, that we should thrill with joy! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Advent Day 12 - Joy To The World

Thursday, 12/10/20

Hebrews 10: 11-12- Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand.

We often forget that there are people who struggled before Jesus died to save the world. There were attempts made daily to sacrifice something so that sins would be forgiven. When Jesus came into the world, all of that changed. He offered himself as a single, once for all sacrifice for our sins. This has made a difference in how we get to face the world.

May we not forget that Jesus came to make the world a better place. He came to bring forgiveness and mercy. He came to bring joy for eternity!

Let us Pray:

Wonderful God, thank you for thinking of us. We know that we do not deserve the benefits of your Son's once for all sacrifice, but we are free to accept it. We think about what our salvation cost you today, and that we should remain joyful in our eternal home. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Advent Day 13 - Joy To The World

Friday, 12/11/20

Isaiah 53: 4-6 - Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the Lord laid on him the sins of us all.

We do not celebrate Christmas because of the great gifts that we receive. Many people that we know, do not get gifts at all, let alone good gifts. We celebrate Christmas because of who Jesus is, and what he did to save us.

He carried our weaknesses. Isaiah is explaining something to us today that would not happen for hundreds of years before Jesus would come. He knew that a Messiah would come and save us from ourselves. That is why we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Let us Pray:

Gracious God, thank you for your mercy and forgiveness. We are so sorry that you had to watch your Son be punished for our transgressions. May we have a heart of gratitude and joy that you love us enough to save us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Advent Day 14 - Joy To The World

Saturday, 12/12/20 - Grace Day

John 1:14- So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

Relax today. Make time for things you enjoy. Family, friends, games, naps! Make sure that you are basking in the joy that Christ brings. The wonderful peace that His unfailing love and faithfulness means to your eternity!

Let us Pray:

Amazing God, we thank you this day for your unfailing love and faithfulness. We bask in the glory of who you are and what you have done for us. Allow us to experience your joy today! In Jesus' name. Amen.

Advent Day 15 - Joy To The World

Sunday, 12/13/20 - Third Sunday of Advent

Zephaniah 3: 16-17- On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be, “Cheer up, Zion! Don’t be afraid! For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”

Cheer up!! Jesus has come so that God would live among us. There is Joy in knowing that Jesus is living among us, that he shared life with us. He was hungry with us, he was sad with us, he was happy with us, he loved us!

In the midst of all that we are facing we can have Joy in knowing that God loved us enough to become one of us. Through the years there have been many wars, plagues, famine, and diseases, and yet God still chose to live among us. God is not wanting us to be free from problems or troubles, but to rejoice in knowing where we are going and who is going with us!

Let us Pray:

Third Sunday of Advent - Book of Common Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Advent Day 16 - Joy To The World

Monday, 12/14/20

Malachi 3: 1-4 - "Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. Then once more the Lord will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.

God was preparing the way. There are many prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah. They were looking forward to what was coming, and the redemption and well as the judgment of the people was coming as well. This judgment would not be a condemnation, but a grace filled Jesus who would live among us and provide for us a way to be redeemed.

There is Joy in knowing that Jesus has come to save us. That his presence here on earth was meant to light the way to eternal restoration not eternal destruction. John the Baptist was the chosen messenger which was sent into the world to proclaim his coming. He was calling to the world and telling them that Jesus was on his way.

In what ways can this bring you Joy today? Is there a place in our lives in which we need to realize that Jesus is coming again, and that we are now called to be the messenger? How can this knowledge fill you with such hope to share that Joy?

Let us Pray:

Great and wondrous God, You have sent the messenger, proclaimed the coming Messiah, your Son Jesus. He came to save us from our sins and provide a restored relationship between us and you. Give us the Joy that we need in order to be the messengers of his second coming. Fill us with the grace needed to make an impact in our world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Advent Day 17 - Joy To The World

Tuesday, 12/15/20

Luke 1: 11-20- While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. And he will turn many Israelites to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly." Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure this will happen? I'm an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years." Then the angel said, "I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! But now, since you didn't believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time."

One of the great Joys of God preparing the messenger in John the Baptist, was the Joy involved in preparing the parents of John the Baptist. Zechariah and Elizabeth never thought they would have children. The angel of the Lord comes to Zechariah and tells him the plan, and he does not believe it. The consequence is found in Zechariah being unable to speak until this is fulfilled. Basically the angel tells him, "oh, you don't believe me? Ok. You won't be able to speak until this comes true".

Zechariah would be able to speak as soon as his son was born. John would go on to be the messenger to proclaim the coming Messiah. This was all to make sure that Zechariah knew the angel was telling him the truth, and that Jesus was going to be the Messiah.

There is Joy in knowing that even though we do not think God can, he will. Even when we think that we have our own limitations, God does not.

Let us Pray:

Amazing God, we are but simple yet complicated creations in your eyes. You have provided in us great Joy in knowing that your Son Jesus has come to save us from our sin. When we fail to believe you, give us the ability to see you work. Allow us to experience great Joy in knowing that you are at work now, and that Jesus is returning. Amen.

Advent Day 18 - Joy To The World

Wednesday, 12/16/20

Luke 1: 26-33- In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!" Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

God is a God of preparation. The season of Advent is all about the waiting on the coming of Jesus, and now we are waiting for the second coming of Jesus. Just as the angel appeared to Zechariah, today we see the angel appearing to Mary. Elizabeth is now six months pregnant and Gabriel appears to Mary, calls her favored by God, and lets her know that Jesus will be born from her even though she is a virgin.

Jesus will be God Incarnate, which is a big word for God in human form. He will save us from our sin, and his kingdom will never end! There is Joy to be found in the coming of our savior. There is also Joy in knowing that God laid out a perfect plan and it was fulfilled by people just like you and me. When was the last time you slowed down long enough to listen to God? Maybe he is trying to communicate with you and use you for another miracle? What Joy there is found in being an instrument of God's plan.

Let us Pray:

Creative God, come to us today and provide in us the strength and courage to slow down and listen. May you be great among us and give us the ability to be part of another great plan. Give us the strength to mobilize and be your hands and feet in the world, that others may be able to experience great Joy because of You. In Jesus Holy Name we pray, Amen.

Advent Day 19 - Joy To The World

Thursday, 12/17/20

Luke 1: 39-45- A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. 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."

The past two days we have been able to see God working through Elizabeth and Mary. They are both carrying very special humans. There is so much Joy within them, but also so much burden for the responsibility that they carry. The Joy they find is found in relying on each other.

John the Baptist is still in the womb and upon Mary (who is carrying the unborn Jesus) coming into the room, John leaps within Elizabeth's womb. There is so much Joy happening that even the unborn baby is celebrating with Joy! Mary is concerned and burdened by the honor, and yet Elizabeth assures her, "You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said".

We often forget that there is Joy to be found in knowing that God is going to do what he said. Jesus came to save us from ourselves. He is currently on the throne and he is coming back again. Our greatest Joy can be found when we allow the promises of God to overwhelm our burdens in this life. How can you find a way to let the promises of God in, and shut out the burdens of the world? How can you find Joy in knowing the promises of God?

Let us Pray:

Promise keeping God, you have provided a way for us to restore our relationship with you through the once for all sacrifice of your Son Jesus. May you provide in us the strength to see you and your promises in the middle of our mess. Thank you for providing and redeeming us that we might find your promises bringing us Joy! In Jesus name. Amen.

Advent Day 20 - Joy To The World

Friday, 12/18/20

Luke 1: 57-64 - When it was time for Elizabeth's baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. And when her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had been very merciful to her, everyone rejoiced with her. When the baby was eight days old, they all came for the circumcision ceremony. They wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, "No! His name is John! "What?" they exclaimed. "There is no one in all your family by that name." So they used gestures to ask the baby's father what he wanted to name him. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." Instantly Zechariah could speak again, and he began praising God.

We have been bearing witness to the coming birth of these two unique human beings who would both serve an incredible purpose to God. We read that an angel of God came to Zechariah and because of his unbelief he would not be able to speak until the prophecy of the coming of the messenger of God, John the Baptist

This part of the story is so unique in that we see the absolute Joy of a father who never thought he would be, listening to God, and believing that God can do what he says. They knew that his name would be John, but it did not make any sense in that culture. John was not a family name. When Zechariah motions for the tablet to write down his name, the promise was complete. Zechariah could speak, and immediately began praising God!

We have great Joy in knowing that God keeps his promises. There is Joy in knowing that God can use even simple people like us, in simple situations, to glorify the name of God. Joy comes in the form of a God who knows the end of the story, and still uses us to make his glory visible to others.

Let us Pray:

Great Creator, you have made the heavens and the earth to reveal your glory. You have made each of us to be an expression of your love for people. Give us the Joy necessary to live in your hope of a coming eternity. Give us the Joy of knowing your Son was born so that we would be able to experience it, and share it. In His holy name, Amen.

Advent Day 21 - Joy To The World

Saturday, 12/19/20 - Grace Day

Luke 1: 68 - "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people."

In this moment the author of Luke is writing what he remembers from the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah was another prophet that attempted to tell the world of the coming Savior.

During your grace day, think about how the Savior has impacted your life. How can you show the world the great Joy that He has brought you?

Let us Pray:

Great Redeemer, today we reflect on who you are. We understand that you visited us in the form of your Son Jesus and that He was here to redeem us from our sins. Give us grace that we may shine this light of great Joy in knowing what that cost you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Advent Day 22 - Joy To The World

Sunday, 12/20/20 - Fourth Sunday of Advent

Psalm 51: 1-2, 7 - "Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."

Today we reflect on the purpose of why Jesus was sent to us. God's love for us is unfailing and it provides in us a means to love others the same way. Jesus was born, to be a man. He was born to be fully human and yet fully God. He is God Incarnate. The word incarnate means, a deity or spirit embodied in flesh; in human form. In this way God was able to sacrifice a piece of himself so that mankind would be saved.

There is so much Joy to be found in Jesus washing us clean from our guilt, from the stains of our sins. There is Joy in knowing that because of what Jesus has done, God sees us as whiter than snow!

This is our Joy! This is our praise of thanksgiving during our season of Advent.

Let us Pray:

Fourth Sunday of Advent - Book of Common Prayer

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation,
that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a
mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Advent Day 23 - Joy To The World

Monday, 12/21/20

Ezekiel 36: 23 - " I will show how holy my great name is—the name on which you brought shame among the nations. And when I reveal my holiness through you before their very eyes, says the Sovereign Lord, then the nations will know that I am the Lord."

Ezekiel was another prophet that proclaimed what God was about to do, hundreds of years before Jesus was born. God wanted to make it known to the world that He was with us. He had to come and be "before their very eyes" as a physical human being.

The Joy found in Jesus is not that he is above us and judging us, but that he took the time to become one of us. He was tempted and yet resisted. He was beaten and yet forgave. He was pure and yet sacrificed for our sins.

This is the Joy in our Advent season. That God would love us enough to become one of us and die for us, even in our failures.

Let us Pray:

Wonderful God, come to us today and open our eyes. Allow us to see you as a God who loves us and desires for us to love the world around us. Give us the strength to be the light of your Son Jesus in the world, that by our love and Joy they might see you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Advent Day 24 - Joy To The World

Tuesday, 12/22/20

Psalm 98: 4, 7-8 - " Shout to the Lord, all the earth; break out in praise and sing for joy! Let the sea and everything in it shout his praise! Let the earth and all living things join in. Let the rivers clap their hands in glee! Let the hills sing out their songs of joy."

Composer Isaac Watts used Psalm 98 as the inspiration behind the Christmas hymn, Joy To The World. His heart and his mind were wanting to express this Psalm in such a way that it could be sung with great Joy. When Isaac was sixteen-years old, he complained about the hymns on the way home from church one day. His father told him if he didn't like them, he should write something better.

We have the opportunity during this season to read the Scriptures and make them come to life. Our Joy can be expressed many ways. Maybe you are a great artist and would love to paint or create a nativity. Maybe you are a musician and you could play Joy To The World for your family. Whatever you do, try to make the Scriptures come to life and share your Joy with the world.

Let us Pray:

Amazing God, we are your most lovely creation. You created us to know you and acknowledge you in all that we do. Knowing and celebrating the birth of your Son, give us the ability to share that Joy with the world around us. Give us peace and hope in this strange and unusual season. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Advent Day 25 - Joy To The World

Wednesday, 12/23/20

Luke 2: 1-5 - " At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child."

I have often wondered if Roman emperor Augustus knew that he was taking part in fulfilling the prophecy of the birth of the Messiah? It was his decree for a census to be taken that made Joseph and Mary go back to Bethlehem and there is where the Messiah was to be born.

I do not imagine that Joseph and Mary were experiencing an abundance of Joy on their travels. Mary was very pregnant and due at any moment and Joseph was likely walking as Mary was riding on a donkey. This was not comfortable. This was not easy. Sometimes God calls us to experience tough times so that we can get to the Joy that he is promising us.

Let us Pray:

Merciful and loving God, we acknowledge your hope in the midst of our circumstances. Just as Joseph and Mary did not have an easy journey, they were still carrying the light of the world. Provide in us a glimpse of the future, so that we may endure our current circumstances and approach them with Joy! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Advent Day 26 - Joy To The World

Thursday, 12/24/20

Luke 2: 6-12 - “ And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them. That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

Who does not love listening to Linus tell the story of Jesus’ birth in the Charlie Brown Christmas Special? When he stops and says the words, “lights please?” he goes into this very story. He tells of how the son of God was born and how the angels appeared to the shepherds.

This is the good news of great Joy! The Messiah was born on a night just like this. It may not be the correct calendar night, but as we celebrate the birth of Jesus let us not forget the great Joy that the angels announced his arrival. Let us also not forget that the angels appeared to common shepherds and not the royalty, kings, or the religious elite. God chose the angels to speak to the lowly shepherds that they might spread the message of Joy! May we find the courage today to be just like the shepherds.

Let us Pray:

Joyful and loving God, today we celebrate the coming birth of your Son Jesus. We realize that he was sent into the world to save us, and reconcile our lives to you. Our Messiah is born this night, what Joy we have to share with the world! In Jesus name, Amen.

Advent Day 27 - Joy To The World

Friday, 12/25/20 - Christmas Day - First Day of Christmas

Luke 2: 15-20 - "When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them."

Christmas morning is always exciting. How many of you have gotten up so early to open presents that it is still dark outside? We do not know the exact time that the shepherds finally made it to the manger to see Jesus. We know that the angels appeared to them at night, so assuming that it took them a few hours to get to Jesus, it is quite possible they were seeing the Messiah early in the morning as the first Christmas gift.

Just like those shepherds were excited about the gift that they were able to see the Messiah, we too can be excited about our gifts this morning. We do not all get the fancy, expensive earthly gifts that we want, but we all get the opportunity to see Jesus this morning and know that the Messiah has come to bring us eternity.

Enjoy your day with your family and friends. Make the most of your time together. No matter what earthly gifts you may have gotten, or not gotten, you already have the greatest gift of all; Jesus. Let the world know your Joy today!

Today begins the first day of Christmas of the twelve days of Christmas that lead to Epiphany on January 6th when the wise men visit the newborn Jesus.

Let us Pray:

The Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Day

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, Amen.

Advent Day 28 - Joy To The World

Saturday, 12/26/20 - Second Day of Christmas

Luke 2: 21-24 - "Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived. Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. The law of the Lord says, "If a woman's first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the Lord." So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—"either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

On the second day of Christmas my true love gave to me, two turtle doves. This text comes eight days after the birth of Jesus and he was part of the fulfillment of the prophecies. He was given the right name and Joseph and Mary took Jesus to present him to the Lord. They offered the appropriate sacrifice of two turtledoves.

There is Joy in the sacrifice and there is Joy in the coming eternity. There is also much joy to be found in the fulfillment of prophecy. Sometimes our common and normal worship traditions can be boring and stale. I am assuming that this tradition followed by Joseph and Mary was far from boring and stale. Our ability to experience Joy in our traditions and worship is found in us, and not in the task. How can we continue to experience Joy in our traditions and celebrations after Christmas?

Let us Pray:

God of great love, You have provided for us the greatest of gifts. You have given us the gift of eternal life and it is brought through your Son Jesus.

Advent Day 29 - Joy To The World

Sunday, 12/27/20 - Third Day of Christmas

John 1: 14 - "So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son."

On the first day of Christmas we remember what Christmas is all about. The Word of God became flesh. God was born in human form. He was born out of God's unfailing love and faithfulness for us.

Often we get a gift for Christmas and the enjoyment of that gift lasts for a few days. It is not long before you have played all the levels of the video game. The toy or game has been played with and the gift loses its ability to bring us joy. Thankful for us, Jesus never loses his ability to bring us Joy.

When we have seen the glory of the "Father's one and only Son", we have experienced a gift that is greater than any physical gift we may receive. Jesus is a life changer. His gift never gets old.

Let us Pray:

First Sunday after Christmas Day - Book of Common Prayer

Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Advent Day 30 - Joy To The World

Monday, 12/28/20 - Fourth Day of Christmas

John 1: 16-18 - "From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us."

God is always a God of great gifts. Sometimes we look at our lives and we do not see the gifts that we are wanting to see. The world constantly reminds us of our shortcomings and failures. We are pushed to compare ourselves to someone else and the gifts they have and we wonder why God does not love us like He loves them. Unfortunately, this is the way of the world and not the way of God.

God has loved us with an unfailing love. His faithfulness to us and to provide for us into eternity has been made evident in Jesus. He is God revealed to us. Everyday we have a choice to believe this to be true, or to live according to the world.

From God's abundance we have received one gracious blessing after another, assuming that we are willing to look for those blessings.

Let us Pray:

Great and unfailing God, thank you for blessing us with a gift that will never end. Thank you for blessing us with gifts that do not tarnish, break, or fade over time. Thank you for providing the very life of your Son so that we might experience eternal joy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Advent Day 31 - Joy To The World

Tuesday, 12/29/20 - Fifth Day of Christmas

Luke 2: 25-32 - "At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

Simeon was another player in the fulfillment of prophecy when it came to Jesus being the Messiah. It was revealed to Simeon that he would be alive until he was able to lay eyes upon the Messiah. When Simeon finally gets the chance to see and hold Jesus, the Spirit of God comes upon him and he understands who he is looking at. He declares that this child is the light to reveal God to the nations!

Simeon was able to die in peace knowing that this prophecy had come true. He was able to hang on and persevere in life until the moment came when all was revealed. We often treat Christmas like a let down if we do not get what we want. We do not see the gift of God that is being revealed in front of us. Our pain is too great, and our circumstances are too much. Jesus is our light. He reveals God to us, and brings us a Joy that the world could never understand.

Let us Pray:

Great and unfailing God, thank you for blessing us with a gift that will never end. Thank you for blessing us with gifts that do not tarnish, break, or fade over time. Thank you for providing the very life of your Son so that we might experience eternal Joy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Advent Day 32 - Joy To The World

Wednesday, 12/30/20 - Sixth Day of Christmas

John 15: 9-11 - "I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!"

As we get close to the end of 2020 and we are attempting to bring Joy to the World, we reflect on the words of Jesus.

Jesus came to us so that we would have a glimpse of who God is and what God looks like. Jesus was born so that we could share in the love of God. When we obey Jesus' commands to love God and love others, we are remaining in His love and we are continuing the work of Christ here on Earth.

When we live according to those commandments, we will be filled with Joy. A Joy that we cannot experience from any other thing on Earth. A Joy that will overflow into the world. We will have no other choice but to let that love and joy flow out into the world around us.

Let us Pray:

"Father, Today I celebrate the reality of Your presence in my life. I celebrate Your birth, Your life, Your death, and Your resurrection. And as I celebrate, Lord, help me to be "God with skin on" to those in need around me. Open my eyes and let me see them as You see them! I love You. Happy birthday Jesus! In Jesus name, Amen." — Mary Southerland

Advent Day 33 - Joy To The World

Thursday, 12/31/20 - Seventh Day of Christmas

John 16: 31-33 - "Jesus asked, "Do you finally believe? But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."

2020 has been a strange time to be alive. I am assuming that the disciples understood that they were about to embark on a strange time themselves. Jesus was going to leave them physically, but he would never leave them in Spirit.

We are like the disciples today. We often feel alone, left to face the evil of the world. Just like the disciples, we are not alone. We are able to face this new year with a new hope. We are able to overcome the world, because Christ has already done that for us.

Our 2021 will not look like our 2020, thankfully. We have the ability to put the past behind us, and make the most of our new year. Take heart, you are not alone, Jesus is with you.

Let us Pray:

Dear Father, I thank You that throughout the season of life, there are endings and new beginnings. I bless Your Word that reminds us that there is a time for every purpose under heaven. So, I thank You for the things that have ended in my life and I bless you for new beginnings. In Jesus' Name I pray, Amen. — Ecclesiastes 3:1

Advent Day 34 - Joy To The World

Friday, 1/1/21 - Eighth Day of Christmas

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."

Congratulations, you made it to 2021. There is a new hope, and a new joy that lies ahead of you. Today we reflect on the praise that Mary laid upon God. We reflect on how her words might be our words this new year. The thankfulness to God for using us, the mercy found in forgiving us, the power that he still has in the world.

We are all children of Abraham. We are all sons and daughters of a God who loved us enough to send His only Son into the world to die for us. As much as it hurt, Mary understood the praise that is due to her God for choosing her as a servant.

May we find ourselves facing servanthood with praise in 2021. Let us look for ways to be useful and to love the world around us.

Let us Pray:

Father, I abandon myself into your hands. Do with me whatever you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you. I am ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures. Into your hands I commend my spirit. I offer it to you with all the love that is in my heart. For I love you, Lord, and so want to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands, without reserve and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father. Amen.

— Charles de Foucauld

Advent Day 35 - Joy To The World

Saturday, 1/2/21 - Ninth Day of Christmas

John 19:16-18 -“Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.”

Jesus' birth was only the beginning. We celebrate the birth of Christ not because it was perfect and life was easy because of his birth, but because of what Jesus had come to accomplish.

The entire culmination of Jesus' 33-years on Earth was this moment. It seems pretty anticlimactic. Thousands of years of waiting for the Savior and now He dies? This was Jesus' purpose. This child was born to bring us life. In order to accomplish that Jesus had to die.

This Savior had to sacrifice himself in order to save us. May we find ourselves living in this new year with a purpose of letting others know about the Savior.

Let us Pray:

God of new beginnings, you wipe away our tears and call us to care for one another. Give us eyes to see your gifts, hearts to embrace all creation, and hands to serve you every day of our lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

- Revised Common Lectionary

Advent Day 36 - Joy To The World

Sunday, 1/3/21 - Tenth Day of Christmas

Revelation 21: 1-4 -“Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Jesus was born to be the Savior of mankind. Salvation is present for all who believe now that Jesus has risen from the grave and ascended to heaven. However, Jesus is not done.

There will be a second coming. We should be looking forward to this second coming and preparing for it, the same way we prepare each year for the celebration of his birth. This new heaven and new earth will be without death, mourning, crying, and pain. All things will be made new.

Allow yourself to understand that there is hope to be found in what is coming. If we are willing to celebrate Jesus’ birth, remembering Jesus’ death and resurrection, then we should be willing to have hope in what is to come.

Let us Pray:

Second Sunday after Christmas Day - Book of Common Prayer

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Advent Day 37 - Joy To The World

Monday, 1/4/21 - Eleventh Day of Christmas

Matthew 1: 18-25 - "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."

Initially Joseph did not want to believe what Mary had told him. He was not believing what Mary was trying to explain and doubted what God was doing. How many times have we doubted what God was doing in our lives? Maybe we have doubted because we cannot see what God has promised through our circumstances.

We can wait our whole life for an angel to appear and tell us what we already know, or we can choose to believe what we know about God through his word. As we begin a new year, may God provide in us the strength and wisdom to believe that he is who he says he is. May we have the ability to hear his call in our lives, and the willingness to follow where he leads us.

Let us Pray:

Father, sometimes it does feel that you have left us in the battle. We know that you are with us, but so are our feelings of aloneness. The Enemy seems to be taking ground. Our crying out to you seems to go unanswered. We know you are at work, but help us trust you in the midst of our questions. In Jesus' Name, Amen. ~ Ron Moore

Advent Day 38 - Joy To The World

Tuesday, 1/5/21 - Twelfth Day of Christmas

Hebrews 3: 3-4 - "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs."

It really is not a coincidence that Jesus' birth is celebrated at the end of one year, and beginning of a new one. Jesus is meant to give us new life. He is our King. He sacrificed himself as our lamb that our sins would be forgiven. He is the radiance of God's glory that we could never achieve on our own.

As we near the end of our Advent journey and get to Epiphany we can recharge our spiritual life and rely on the power of Jesus. He is the beginning and the end. He is the alpha and the omega. He is coming back.

How can our lives look like the radiance of God's glory thanks to what Jesus has done for us? How can we hope in a new life that looks more like Jesus?

Let us Pray:

God of new beginnings, you wipe away our tears and call us to care for one another. Give us eyes to see your gifts, hearts to embrace all creation, and hands to serve you every day of our lives. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Revised Common Lectionary

Advent Day 39 - Joy To The World

Wednesday, 1/6/21 - Epiphany

Matthew 2: 1-12 - "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route."

Epiphany is known as the day in which the wise men find Jesus and worship him. There are many reasons for this. These men were foreigners. They came bearing gifts that were very specific to tell of the Messiah, including his need to sacrifice himself for the world.

We are like the wise men today. We are foreigners in a land that does not know us. We know about his death for our sins, and we know about his resurrection. We are called to be and to live differently. We are called to worship our King, and let the world know.

Let us Pray:

The Epiphany - Book of Common Prayer

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the Peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

You made it. You have studied a daily passage all the way from the first Sunday of Advent all the way to Epiphany. I hope that you have prayed every day. I hope that you have found yourself digging deeper into Scripture every day. I pray that you have allowed the Holy Spirit to live within you.

This can be the end of the Advent study, but it does not have to be the end of your study. You have hopefully built a new habit and have formed a new disciple of study and prayer time during this season. My prayer is that you will keep it going. There are many options available through the church as well as online.

Do not take this moment and give up on God simply because he did not speak to you the way that you wished. Maybe he is speaking to you but maybe it takes more listening. He might be speaking to you through people that you do not want to listen to. He works in mysterious ways.

I pray that if you have read this far you will save this and keep it. Next year we can go through it again and look at how our spiritual lives have changed and how these passages can mean something new and fresh to us again.

Here is to 2021, the changes we need to make, and the way we need Jesus more than ever!

In Christ,

Michael Mitchell