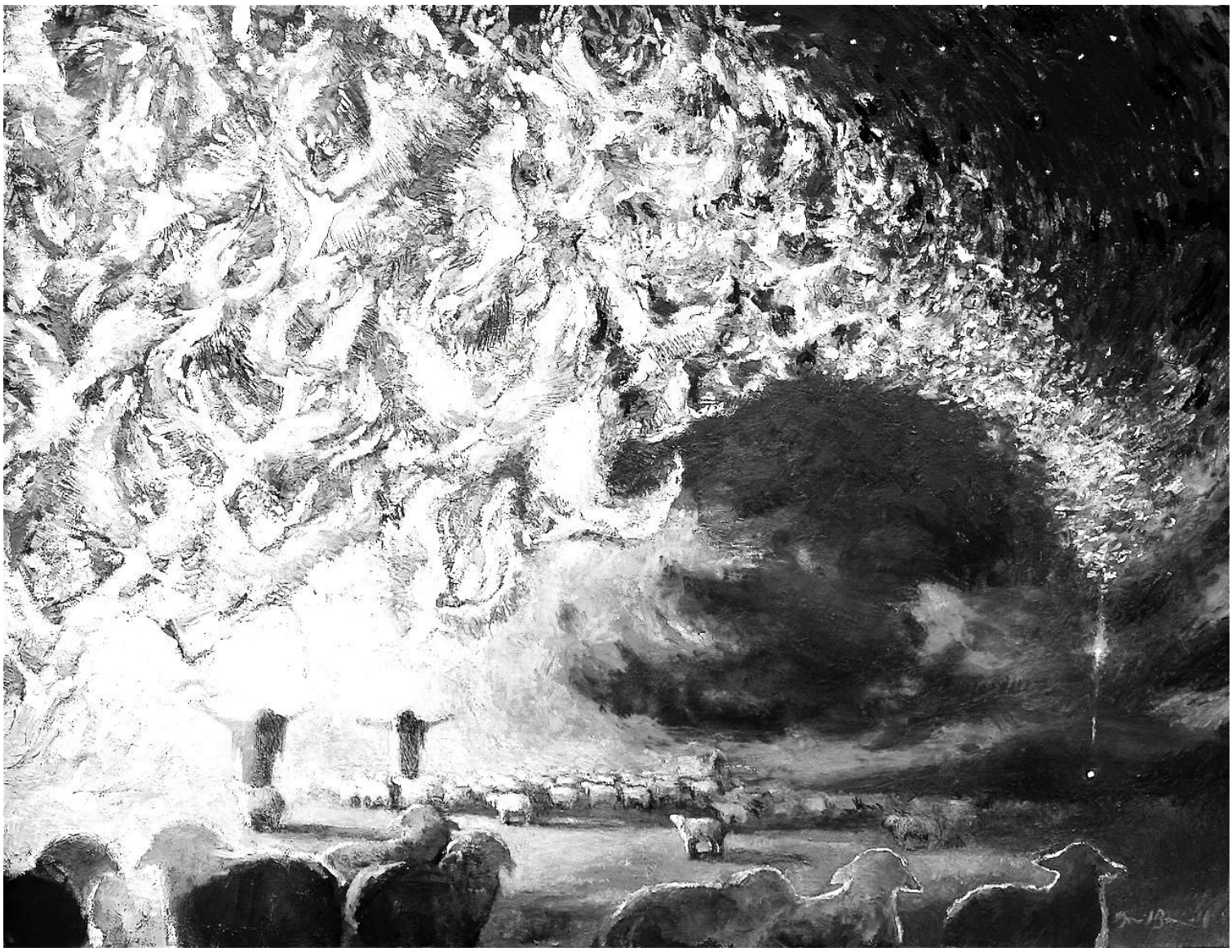
And On Earth...Peace

Advent 2026 Devotional Guide



Trinity Presbyterian Church, USA

Hendersonville, NC

Cover art: "Seeing Shepherds" by Daniel Bonnell, Winner of the Brother Nathan Cochran Award in Sacred Arts for Best of Show at the 2018 Catholic Arts Biennial. Bonnell's works have been exhibited at venues including Saint George's Cathedral, Saint Paul's Cathedral, the National Cathedral, and the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine.

. . . and on earth peace

Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors! ~ Luke 2.14

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2026

SUN 29 NOV ~ First Sunday of Advent

Sunday worship at 8:30 or 11:00 am throughout Advent

WED 2 DEC ~ 9:00 am ~ Christmas Decorating Day

Join our decorating team from 9:00 am to noon as we deck the halls (and the sanctuary, and the narthex, and . . .)

WED 9 DEC ~ 5:00 pm ~ Service of Prayer for The Longest Night

Sometimes the commercial excess of the holidays is too much. In our annual Service of Prayer for the Longest Night, we embrace the truth that Jesus brought healing to a broken world and walks with us still, even in our darkest moments. All are welcomed for this service of quiet contemplation.

SUN 13 DEC ~ 3:00 ~ Blue Ridge Symphonic Brass Concert

A free concert of classical brass at its finest; to learn more about BRSB, visit blueridgesymphonicbrass.org.

SUN 20 DEC ~ 12:30 pm ~ Soup, Socks, and Sweets

A fun family Christmas tradition continues! Delicious soups, a gift exchange, and more. (For more information, contact Mary Haskins.)

THU 24 DEC ~ 7:00 pm ~ Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

A warm and joy-filled service that proclaims the promise and hope of Christmas. All are welcomed!

REMEMBER THE MITTEN TREE & BLACK MOUNTAIN HOME FOR CHILDREN

trinity presbyterian church

A Congregation of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

ADVENT: WEEK ONE



Hope (Purple), the Prophecy Candle
The first Advent candle represents expectation and the Old Testament prophecies foretelling the coming of Christ.

First Sunday of Advent
November 29, 2026
1 Isaiah 64: 1-9

Yet, All
by Linda Morris

We begin our Advent journey together with a passage from Isaiah. We, like Isaiah, are waiting for the Lord: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down (v.1)." But the people of Israel have moved away from God. Verse 6 portrays them (like us) as faded leaves, blown off course by sin. It was, and can seem today, a dark time for God's people. But Advent is a season of hope, as we await the light of Christ. As I lingered with this reading, I discovered two little words, seemingly inconsequential on their own, that transformed this scripture for me into one of anticipation.

The first begins verse 8 for us: "*Yet*, O Lord, you are our Father." *Yet* provides a critical pivot for the entire passage. Despite our iniquities, we claim an intimate relationship with God. God is our parent; God has molded us, shaped us, and has the ability to reshape us into the people we are meant to be.

Yet directs us to a deep realization of our personal connection with God. The second little word, **all**, expands our understanding of God's power and intention. The phrases, "we are **all** the work of your hand (v.8)" and "we are **all** your people (v.9)" announce God's omnipotence and God's inclusivity. On these words we are allowed to lift a glorious hope of the angels' proclamation of "on earth peace." Come, Lord Jesus!

Monday, November 30, 2026
Psalms 25:1-10

Let it Begin with Me
by Esther Hider

The violence nationally and worldwide, the disregard for the Earth's precious resources, and the divisive nature of our country has discouraged me. When I looked at the scriptures available for writing Advent 2026 devotions, I was drawn to the topic "prayers for guidance and peace" because I need to do some soul searching this Advent season.

Psalm 25 offers some important lessons to review:

Lord, I offer my prayer (v 1) – I am not alone in my struggles.
In you, my God, I trust (v 2) – I am definitely not in charge, nor do I have the blueprint.
Teach me your ways, O Lord (v 4) – I need to be aware, focused, and open to instruction.
You are my Savior and my hope (v 5) - Despite my doubts, "Good" will triumph.
Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love (v 6) – God is faithful.
Forgive the sins and errors of my youth (v 7) – I need a grateful and contrite spirit.
He guides the humble (v 9) – Lord, help me to listen and follow.

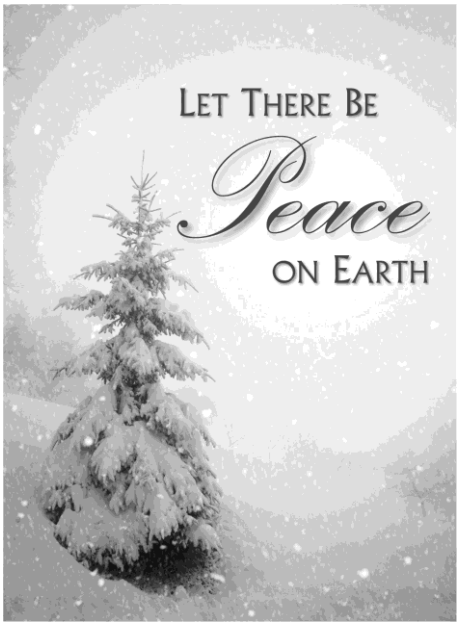
This psalm has reminded me of a well-known lyric, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me…" As I prepare for the coming of the Prince of Peace, I will be reflecting how I can, with God's help and the assistance of fellow believers, better contribute to peace on Earth by changing my thoughts, words, and actions.

Tuesday, December 1, 2026
Mark 24-37

The Coming of the Son of Man
by Pam Villanti

Our seasonal theme, And on Earth Peace, connects Christ's first coming at Christmas to today's reading of Christ's second coming. Christ's humble birth, where peace entered the world, connects to Christ's return, where peace and justice will be fully established. Christ entered a dark and troubled world bringing hope and redemption and Christ's return will bring joy, deliverance and the establishment of global peace.

Knowing Christ will return calls us to stay spiritually alert, "But concerning that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father". So live each day through faithful active living by serving His people, watching and praying. Live this day in light of that day. Celebrate Christ this Christmas knowing each day is a gift in preparation for that day when He returns again and gathers His elect.



Wednesday, December 2, 2026
Isaiah 2: 1-5

Down By the Riverside
by Billie Hicklin

In Isaiah 2, our eyes are lifted above the disputes of human conflict to a mountain of divine light. There God's justice does not arrive through war or force, but through truth that invites the nations to lay down their arms. The tools are not just discarded; they are redeemed. Swords are reshaped into the very tools that break ground for planting; spears are transformed into pruning hooks that encourage the growth of plants. What once destroyed life is refashioned into the tools to cultivate it.

This ancient promise proclaims to our weary world the true meaning of "and on Earth, Peace." This peace is an active, deliberate turning away from hostility to nurture the very soil where battles were once fought. We are reminded of the spiritual "Down by the Riverside" which echoes this passage:

"I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside; I ain't gonna study war no more."

Isaiah concludes with an urgent invitation: "Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord." In today's world, the message is that genuine peace begins now, in the quiet choices of everyday life. When we trade resentment for grace; when we reshape sharp words into encouragement and supportive healing; when we refute the feelings of cynicism for walking in quiet, transforming light, we embody Christ's call to not merely wait for peace, but to embody it.

Thursday, December 3, 2026
I Cor 1: 3-9

Peace that Rises Triumphant
by Friends of The Neighborhood

5 For in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind… 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fred Rogers, Presbyterian minister and creator of "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," spoke about God-given gifts during his 2002 commencement speech at Dartmouth College:

"It's not the honors and the prizes and the fancy *outsides of life* which ultimately nourish our souls. It's the knowing that we can be trusted, that we never have to fear the truth, that the bedrock of our lives from which we make our choices is very good stuff.

When I say, 'It's you I like' I'm talking about that part of you that knows that life is far more than anything you can ever see or hear or touch: *that deep part of you that allows you to stand for those things without which humankind cannot survive*. Love that conquers hate, peace that rises triumphant over war and justice that proves more powerful than greed. So, in all your life, I wish you the strength and the grace to make those choices, which will allow you and your neighbor to become the best of whoever you are."

Lord Jesus, we are grateful for all the ways in which we've been enriched in you. Help us to actively – rather than passively - wait for your return, and use our many gifts <u>from</u> you, to <u>honor</u> you. Amen.

Friday, December 4, 2026
Jeremiah 33: 14-16

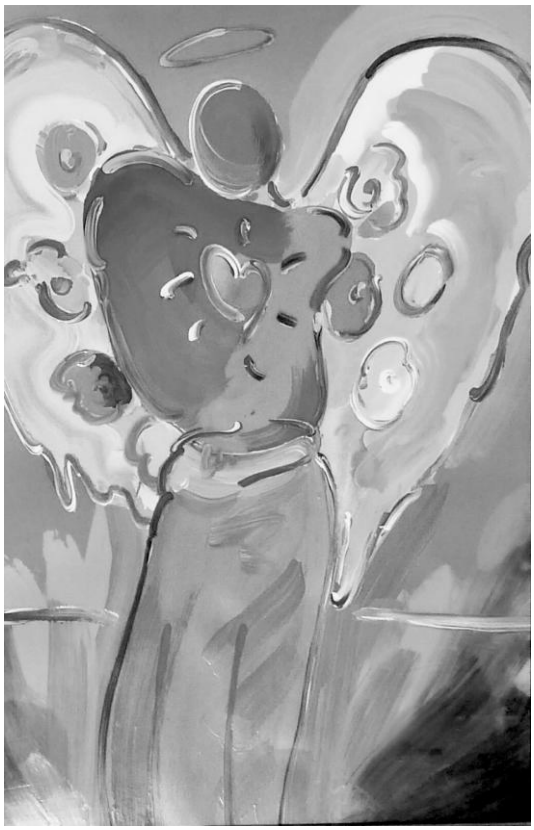
God Will Fulfill God's Promise
by Robin Hodgson

Jeremiah talks about how God will fulfill the promise He made to the lands of Judah and Israel to "bring forth" a leader from the house of David who will bring righteousness and justice to the land, and Judah and Jerusalem will be saved.

As it says in Luke 2:14 (our theme for this year), God will bring peace to the earth and to all people. Whether that peace is meant for Israel and Judah, or for our world today, God's peace is for us all, if only we would live in that peace. Peace in the world must start with peace in our own hearts and minds -- as it says in the song, "Let it begin with me."

To me, peace goes hand-in-hand with kindness, and kindness is an outward expression of "agape love". Kindness toward other people, kindness politically or socially in what we say, think or do. (See Luke 6: 45). Kindness toward the Earth and all of God's creatures. We all share this space together.

Jesus is God's gift to us. Let kindness, peacefulness and love be your gifts to others, not only at Christmas, but all the time.



December 5, 2026
1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13

Leaning Into Worthiness
by Charles Keefer

We often talk of the value or worthiness of something or someone. Yet as stewards and singers of life, *we* are called to exemplify worthiness to *each other*.

In this letter to Thessalonians, joy is expressed as a lasting effect of an effort made and subsequently is evident in the group at large. In God's ways, we are worth every effort - living lives worthy of God: that our labors may not have been in vain.

God is pleased when we care for each other the same way he cares for us.

ADVENT: WEEK TWO



Peace (Purple), the Bethlehem Candle
represents peace in Christ and peacemaking,
as well as Mary and Joseph's inner stillness, trust and peace on their journey to Bethlehem.

Second Sunday of Advent
December 6, 2026
Isaiah 40: 1-11

Promise of Salvation
by Vickie Hugger

Today's lesson speaks to the hope and comfort of salvation.

"Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain." Isaiah 40:4

How many times have we prayed that obstacles would be removed and rugged paths would be made straight and smooth? Because God can make a way through the rough and thorny paths we must travel, we have hope.

For example, my husband has developed a severe form of Spinal Stenosis. His deteriorating spine compresses nerves that cause weakness and pain in his back and legs, especially when he walks. He says that he never realized how many hills there are that now feel like mountains. He looks forward to those mountains and hills becoming level again. Thank God there is hope.

In Isaiah's message of hope, we learn that while this world will fade away, it is not the end! Because God conquered death and can make a way for all eternity, we can live with hope.

God "…tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart…." Isaiah 40:11 In short, God's got this…**God's got you!** Our journey, even the mountains and rough ground, is in God just as our eternity is in God.

Stop and thank God for the crooked paths and mountains you have safely navigated and for the hope you carry to complete your appointed journey. God's got this…God's got you!

Monday December 7th
Romans 15:4-13 Vs.13

A Spirit of Unity
by Mary Louise Forsythe

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in the Lord, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"What a powerful message. Powerful words: Hope, Joy, Peace! The passage begins this message with the idea that "Through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

And that it is with a "spirit of unity" as we follow Christ Jesus that "with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" (cue the Hallelujah Chorus here!).

I cannot imagine I have words that could give more meaning to this message. These are the deep needs of each of us, and the power of the Holy Spirit has been given to us as we open our lives to Christ's calling.

So, my prayer for you, for all of us is: *May the God of HOPE fill YOU with ALL JOY AND PEACE as you trust in the Lord! Amen.*

Tuesday, December 8, 2006
Mark 1-8

The Bridge
by Tom Karvonen

Isaiah was one of several Old Testament prophets who foresaw the coming of God's Son. God told him to call Him Immanuel, meaning "with us, God." One can imagine the prophets as revered elders who spoke with wisdom to the Jews from their prophetic offices.

Fast forward hundreds of years and we have John the Baptist, prophesizing in a much different way, both in appearance and speech. He must have had a magnetic personality to draw people from the countryside and Jerusalem, all seeking to be baptized by him. Later verses include visits by the Pharisees and Sadducees, but John immediately dismissed them.

We see that John was another important trailblazer in helping to lay the foundation of our faith. He served as a bridge from the Old Testament prophets to our Lord and Savior.

Biblical scholars emphasize that John's first baptisms were for the forgiveness of sins, not in the name of the Holy Spirit. Although John said he was unworthy to baptize Jesus, He told John to Baptize him. Immediately God's Spirit descended on Jesus thus fulfilling past prophecies (verses 14-16).

Gracious God, we are eternally grateful for the Holy Spirit inhabiting our very beings. We pray that it continues to guide us in our faith journeys during the coming years.

Wednesday, December 9, 2026
Isaiah 11:1-10

Paving Godly Paths
by Molly Garnett

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse…." (v. 1)

Who's in your family tree? Mine includes many farmers, a constitution framer, authors, teachers, religious leaders, and (I've struggled with this one) slave-owners.

Jesse is part of Jesus' family tree. A whole-bunch-of-great grandfathers away, he is named as the "root" from which a new

branch springs. This family tree sprout is the very Messiah! Jesus brings the hope of a new world in which unlikely beasts lie peacefully together and justice reigns.

Jesus was fully God, of course, but he was also fully human. As such, he came from a whole line of sinners and saints, just like us. He stood on the shoulders of those who came before, whose lives and faith shaped the family into which he was born – and thus shaped him.

We, too, stand on the shoulders of ancestors who paved paths for us, some clear and some rocky. Politicians stand on the shoulders of those who opened doors and set standards.

We honor the family tree branches that opened possibilities. We struggle with those who blocked or limited progress. And then, we become the new shoots, ourselves, hopefully clearing new paths for kindness, mercy, inclusion, and, on Earth, peace.

Thank you, God, for those on whose shoulders we stand. Grant us courage and strength to pave godly paths for future generations to follow. In our lives, may we consider this: What new shoots could come forth from the stumps of us?



Thursday, December 10, 2026
Philippians 1: 3-11

Paul's Thanksgiving for Christian Friends
by Paul Hugger

During his missionary journeys in Philippi, the Apostle Paul experienced both warm hospitality—such as from a wealthy merchant named Lydia—and severe persecution. After Paul cast a disturbing spirit out of a troubled slave girl, her angry owners had Paul and his companion Silas beaten and thrown into prison.

Yet even in the darkness of their cell, they sang hymns, ultimately leading their jailer to Christ and sparing his life, after an earthquake opened the prison doors and the other prisoners escaped.

Years later, while imprisoned in Rome, (Acts 16), Paul reflected with deep gratitude on the many believers who had supported him along the way, in the Philippian church in particular, writing, "I thank God every time I remember you." (See also, Phil. 4)

Today, many people find themselves trapped in figurative "prisons"—whether through failing health, memory loss, or the isolating darkness of depression. In these difficult seasons, the author connects Paul's gratitude to the meaning of Advent, which signifies "coming" or "arrival."

While Advent primarily celebrates the arrival of Jesus to conquer hopelessness, we also experience a personal Advent whenever we encounter or remember the Christian friends, pastors, and even strangers through whom Christ's love flows. We experience the Advent of Christ over and over again.

Just as Paul found comfort in his faithful companions, remembering the love of fellow believers brings the Advent of Christ into our own lives once again. I'm Thanking God for YOU.

Friday, December 11, 2026
Malachi 3:1-4

The Challenge
by Jan Prichard

"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?"

This version from the New Living Translation Bible is a little easier to understand. Malachi, I've learned, actually means "my messenger" or "my angel," and I choose to believe that this prophet truly was a messenger and perhaps an angel sent by God to prepare the people for Christ's coming. He assures the people that Christ is coming, because the Lord of Hosts has told him so.

Then Malachi's language becomes a little ominous as he also speaks to the coming Day of Judgement when the Lord identifies those who have been purified and made worthy to stand before God on that day. He challenges the people to return to their earlier faithfulness and act in ways that are acceptable to the Lord.

How often have we grown weary of waiting for God's answer to our prayers only to fall away from our faith? Surely Malachi's admonishments are valid as he seeks to prepare us for Christ's coming. Are we up to this challenge?

Saturday, December 12, 2026
Luke 1: 68-79

Serving God in Holiness
by Barb T.

Luke tells the story of the priest Zechariah whose elderly and barren wife Elizabeth had a young kinswoman known as Mary. While worshiping in the Temple, Zechariah was visited by the Angel Gabriel who promised a baby son who would grow up to do great things. Zechariah became speechless until the baby was born. That baby would become John the Baptist who heralded the coming of Jesus.

Upon the birth of the baby John, Zechariah's speech was restored. Then Zechariah told the important things about Jesus which I have paraphrased as follows:

"He (Jesus) is the coming of the Lord. He has raised up the horn of salvation. As prophesied long ago, Jesus will bring us salvation from our enemies. Jesus will show mercy to our fathers and remember God's covenant with Abraham about blessing all of Abraham's many descendants. Jesus will enable us to serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness for all of our days."

So, having been blessed by God, how are you now and can you in the future serve God in holiness and righteousness?



ADVENT: WEEK THREE



Joy (Pink) the Shepherd's Candle
Lit on *Gaudete* ("Rejoice") Sunday, the Joy candle marks the midpoint of Advent, the elation of the shepherds, and the joy that the approach of Christmas brings.

Third Sunday of Advent
December 13, 2026
Isaiah 61, 1-4 & 8-11

What God Asks of Us
by Betty Lockwood

In these verses from the Prophet Isaiah, it was a time when the people of Israel were returning from years of exile, and their land had been left in ruins. God commissions his followers to “bring good news to the poor, heal the broken hearted, and set captives and prisoners free.” In the later verses they are asked to rebuild ancient ruins, and repair broken cities.

These words come back to us in the Gospel of Luke (Chapter 4 – verses 16-21). In this passage, Jesus enters the synagogue in Nazareth, on the Sabbath, and is given the scroll with this passage from Isaiah to read.

Following this reading he proclaims that the scriptures have come true that day.

Our world today still needs healing, and we will do well to remember that God does not ask us to do the easy things, even though they may be good things, then take credit for them. God asks us to do the difficult things, those that we need His help to accomplish.



Monday, December 14, 2026
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Foretelling the Miracle
by Norie Sanchez

21And they asked him, "What then? Are you the prophet?" He said, "I am not," 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you". Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"
23He said: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'"
25They asked him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" 26John answered them, "I baptize with water. But among you stands one whom you do not know. 27The one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie his sandal."

John the Baptist is truly an oracle person in the story of Jesus. It is said that he leapt in the womb of Elizabeth when Mary went to visit. We next meet him as a wilderness wanderer, dressed in animal hides and dining on locusts and honey. When we meet him again, he is a preacher and baptizer, using the Jordan river as his baptismal font.

When the young Jesus, beginning his ministry, comes to him, it is to be baptized - as if the Son of God would need to be born again. John foretells Jesus to a world that is really not comprehending yet the miracles that are occurring.

Let us give thanks this day for those wise and unrecognized people in our midst who sometimes see more than we see, tell us more than we can understand, and stand behind the miracles on the way.

Tuesday, December 15, 2026
Isaiah 12:2-6

Thoughts
by Marcy Bone

"Yes, indeed—God is my salvation. . . Sing praise-songs to God. He's done it all" (The Message translation, Isaiah 12:2a,5a)

These words from Isaiah are truly powerful. Not only does he tell us that God is our salvation, but he goes on to say that God is our strength and that our complete trust is rightfully placed in our God!

Verses 5b-6 emphasize the importance of telling others this good news moving from personal trust to a public, global call to praise God, reminding us that He dwells among us.

As we get ready for Advent, we're encouraged to get our hearts and minds fully focused and receiving the amazing gifts God has given us. Prayerful contemplation is a great way to get ready, but I also love listening to or singing traditional carols and modern Christian worship songs, especially "Mary, Did you know?", "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel", and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing".

Through song, we join the angels in praising God and praying for peace on Earth. This Advent season (and always), let's "sing to the Lord, for He has done glorious things;" and "let this be known to all the world." (Isaiah 12:5 NIV)



Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2026
Zephaniah 3:14–20

"Lift up your heart, lift up your voice…"
by Leslie Nissen

I wish an instrumental version of the hymn "Rejoice, the Lord is King!" could be playing as you read this passage. And now that I brought it up, if Darwall's melody gets stuck in your head because you already know the tune by heart, or you Googled it, or you looked on *page 363* of our hymnal, then… YAY! No one claims that Charles Wesley wrote the lyrics in direct response to today's passage; it's just that, to me, it's bit uncanny.

Verse 14 of Zephaniah, Chapter 3 is where a major about-face occurs, from a focus on Jerusalem at the edge of collapse to a message of profound hope, restoration, and joy. All is <u>not remotely</u> lost. God's chosen people are called to sing, shout, and rejoice with all their heart. Our creator has taken away past judgments, sent enemies packing, and replaced fear with steadfast <u>presence.</u>

God not only rescues God's people but also rejoices over them with happiness and [*loud]* singing!! God promises to rescue the lame, gather the outcasts and the exiled, contend with oppressors, and transform past shame into universal praise and prominence. "And on earth, peace"… **indeed!** Our joy in the Lord offsets misery and strife, hopefully. But God's joy in <u>us</u> is flat-out everlasting.

After you read Zephaniah 3:14–20, you might find it delightful to listen to /read the lyrics of that familiar hymn. I'm betting that you can't help but feel the deep joy emanating from BOTH.
"Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!"

Thursday, December 17, 2026
Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord
by Jeff Morris

Today's scripture encourages us to rejoice constantly in God's love, and to let our gentleness be known to everyone. We are also urged to not worry about anything, and to let our requests be known to God through prayer and supplication. We are told that doing so will yield a peace in Christ Jesus "which surpasses all understanding."

It was the part about not worrying that caught my attention first. Easier said than done, I thought! We live in a worrisome time, and the bustling holiday season can certainly increase our anxiety.

Even so, the scripture's exhortation to "rejoice in the Lord" recalled for me the refrain of a popular hymn, which goes "Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice give thanks and sing" (from *Rejoice Ye Pure in Heart*).

I sing poorly, but I do enjoy our popular Christmas hymns. For me, they can instill a sense of well-being that comes about as close to serenity as is possible these days. Indeed, the Healthline.com website lists "stress relief" as the very first psychological benefit of singing.

So, as we experience the Advent season, my prayer is that joining in song to rejoice in the birth of our savior will help bring us peace – the incomprehensible peace promised in today's scripture. May it be so! Amen.

[1] "And they asked him, "What say you about the ancient proverb, "Great minds think alike?"

[2]He answered, "Verily, I say unto you, do not overlook the God-Wink." - Concurrences 1: 1-2.

Friday, December 18, 2026
Micah 5: 2-5a

The Peace We Seek
by Steve Culp

Micah, a minor prophet, wrote at the time (about 750 BC) when the region was threatened and later overrun by Assyria. Besides wars, it is a period when many in Israel had abandoned religious and political beliefs – so things sound kind of familiar.

This passage is a call for a ruler (who will be born in Bethlehem!) who "will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord". Israelites will join together, live securely and be at peace.

Security and peace, under the strength and protection of the Lord as our shepherd, has a resonant appeal in our troubled current times as well. Peace often seems beyond our capability, and factors arise to disrupt our lives as we long for ways to achieve peace.

Our Lord, our shepherd, guards us and provides us strength as we renew our efforts for peace, on earth, for all people. The peace we seek is among countries, among citizens in our country, among our neighbors, and among those closest to us.

Prayer: Lord, we seek to follow your path as you lead us toward security and peace. Help us to do our part for peace. Amen

Saturday, December 19, 2026
Isaiah 7:10-16

Love
by Paul Soltesz

Give me an *L*, give me an *O*, give me a V, give me an *E*. What does that spell? *LOVE*!

A Sunday School teacher was teaching her kids about Christmas. She posed a question: "Describe Christmas in one word, but it has to be four letters." Bill raised his hand and said "Cookies!" Sindey raised her hand and said "Presents!" Johny raised his hand and said "Love!"

Going into another Christmas season, we face a year that has been chaotic. It has been full of uncertainty, and we have all had to deal with more sinners than saints in the political arena. All of us are tired in one way or another, and it seems like everyone, including myself, does not want to love—we want to be as hateful to others as we sometimes feel they are towards us.

Believe me, I am talking from experience! What I've learned, though, and what this passage says, is that love is the answer. God gave us the gift of love as a sign. Love is divine, and it is a command and a gift that we have received. We must share this gift with the world. It's not an issue of what we feel like doing—it's an issue of what we must do.

Lord, this Christmas shows us how to love. You sent love as a sign to us and a sign to the world to show the world that we are your children and that we are one with you. Make us all a beacon of your love. Amen.

ADVENT: WEEK FOUR



Week 4 – Love (Purple) the Angel's candle

The fourth Advent candle represents God's love shown in sending Jesus to us, and celebrates the angels' announcement of the birth of the Christ Child.

Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 20, 2026
Luke 1:26-38

What Sort of Greeting?
by Ellen Creed Branham

We were mending tunics and telling tales when the air quivered and stilled. Our chatter hushed, fingers lay quiet. A surprise courier, bearing God's calling-card, addressed Mariam: "favored one." Mariam tilted her head, tucked her lip. I could see wheels turning. We wondered too– *what sort of greeting was this*? Exchanging glances, we leaned toward her conversation with the *Aggelos,* Gabriel. His calming tone belied extraordinary words: Perceive this! Mariam to be, now, in the family way. And the coming baby boy was not of her betrothed, but *of God*?

At that moment everything learned in Sabbath school (anticipated king from David's royal line, a "Prince of Peace" who would shake things up, etc…) evaporated. My thoughts raced to plan how to shield my friend from *this* scandal; my second cousin in Yavne might take her in, or --- when Mariam's clear voice interrupted. Wait. She's actually going along with this scheme?

That's when things changed for me.

It's as if Mariam had been waiting for *this* sort of greeting. As if she already knew her life to be held in God's hands, okay with whatever came next. She was just one of us, yet God had chosen her. The greatest taking shape within the least. That got me thinking: what kind of peace starts with the inbreaking of the holy into a most ordinary life —and, since God called Mariam, why not *me* too?

God of surprises, prepare our hearts for your inbreaking and help us to be ready for the greeting you bring. Amen.

Monday December 21, 2026
Luke 1:39-55

The Messiah Brings Socio-Economic Reversals
by David Garnett

Mary, the future mother of Jesus of Nazareth, according to the gospel writer Luke, had two significant encounters before giving birth to the Messiah. The first was with the angel Gabriel and the second was with her cousin Elizabeth.

Gabriel told Mary that she was the favored one who would give birth to a son that she would name Jesus, who would also be called "Son of the Most High" and the "Son of God" who would sit on David's throne, which were other ways of saying Messiah. Cousin Elizabeth would later address Mary as "the mother of my Lord", confirming the word of the angel.

The two encounters together make Mary speak in response in what has been called "The Magnificat" because the opening line is "My soul magnifies the Lord." Her prophetic message is that the Messiah brings socio-economic reversal both to her and to the larger society.

She first recognizes the personal effect that the Messiah has had on her, noting that God her Savior has looked with favor upon her lowliness and blessed her. From the little we know about her, Mary was a low status, poor Jewish peasant woman from a backwater town, and yet God incredibly chose to make her (of all people) the mother of the Messiah.

Then she notes more broadly that this is so typical of God, who "scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, brings down the powerful from their thrones, and lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things, and sending the rich empty away." Later, Jesus will say as confirmation that, "The last are made first, and the first last."

For the proud, powerful and rich, this is a hard message to hear, but, at the same time, it is such overdue good news for the lowly and the hungry.

Tuesday, December 22, 2026
Matthew 1: 18-25

Emmanuel
by Jim Kisner

"But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the holy Spirit.'" All of this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they will name him Emmanuel" which means, "God is with us."

Advent is the Season for us to know "God is with us"; just as the Lord's angel helped Joseph; He can be with us during this Holiday Season

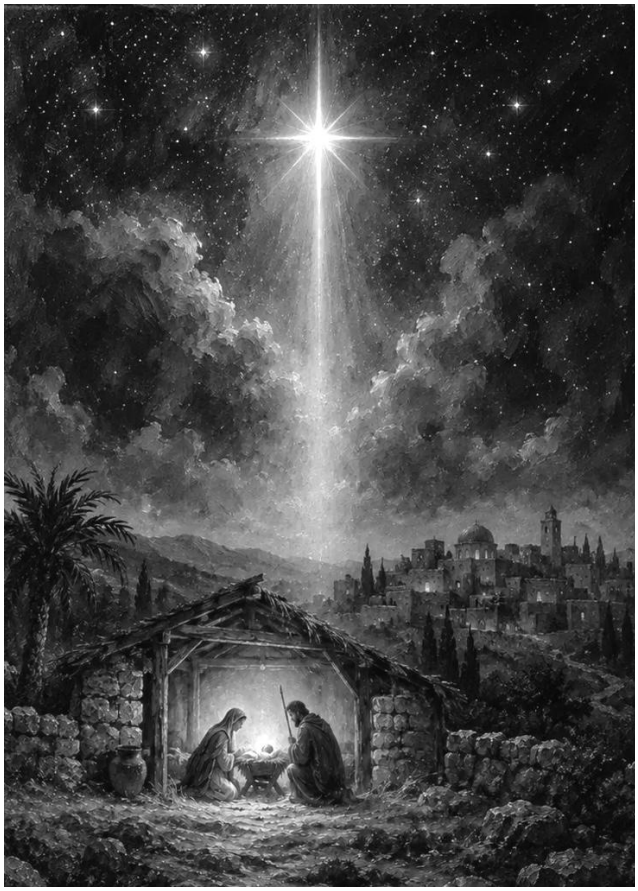
It is the central idea of what the season is all about. We step back and think about how much the Advent season means to each of us. It's more than the Holiday, it's a time to really feel God's Love and Hope for us and our families.

Let us all walk in Christ's Love during this Christmas Season.
Love and Peace,
Jim



Wednesday, December 23, 2026
Isaiah 9:2-7

Our Guiding Light
by Angela Kuykendoll



6 For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The foretelling of the coming of the Christ child in Isaiah 9:6 is to me one of the most beautiful passages we read at Christmas. Singing these words always fills me with awe at the blessing God sent to Earth on Christmas.

Our spiritual guide and teacher is Jesus, the one whose actions and teachings we look to guide our life steps. This will never be lost on me. And I am not lost because God blessed me with the gift of Jesus Christ, Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. And I would add Guiding Light. Amen.

Please read the entire passage for further inspiration.



Thursday, December 24, 2026
Luke 2:1-20

How Odd!
by Dwight Christenbury

How odd that God should arrange for the birth of the Savior of the world in such a place as Bethlehem. Truth be told, seems He made no arrangements at all—"No room in the inn," or so the story goes.

And how odd that God should choose shepherds, of all people, to tell the good news of this baby Savior born in a barn. Now, I suppose you could argue that we ought not lay this particular odd choice at the feet of God: there seems to have been some holy subcontracting at work. It was the angels, after all, who disturbed the sleep of those poor slobs out there in the pastures with their blinding angelic light and their sweet angelic choruses of *Gloria in excelsis deo*—What, they thought some smelly old disgusting shepherds would be better at proclaiming the birth of the Savior of the world than they themselves?

How odd, when you stop to think about it, that God should entrust the success of this whole operation to two clueless teenagers. That Joseph: Seems like a nice enough kid. Seems like a good fit with Mary. But—how should I put it—the mechanics of this whole thing . . . well, speaking of odd!

I suppose you can't blame God for choosing to explain it in a dream: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

And Mary. What can you even say about poor Mary? One minute she's playing with dolls on the floor of her nursery; the next minute she's pregnant with the Son of God! They grow up so fast.

And how odd, last of all, that God should choose to come to earth as one of us. To be born like all of us; to know hardship and cold like too many of us; to suffer and die in pain in a way that few of us can comprehend; and yet to be God—like none of us.

I suppose it's not at all odd that we should want it all explained.

Is it enough of an explanation that God is always confounding the wisdom of the world?

Is it enough of an explanation to see ourselves in the shepherds, unkempt and unshaven, at the bottom of the totem pole, thoroughly unworthy, and yet worthy enough to rate a visit from the angels, to be entrusted with telling this good news of a great joy to all the people of the earth?

Is it enough of an explanation to see ourselves in Mary and Joseph, children of God—and children indeed—never quite ready to answer God's call to do the impossible, and yet answering anyway, doing the impossible anyway, because, as the angel himself said, "Nothing will be impossible with God"?

And because, well, if we don't answer God's call, who will?





Christmas Day: Nativity of the Lord

Nativity of the Lord
December 25, 2026
John 1: 1-4

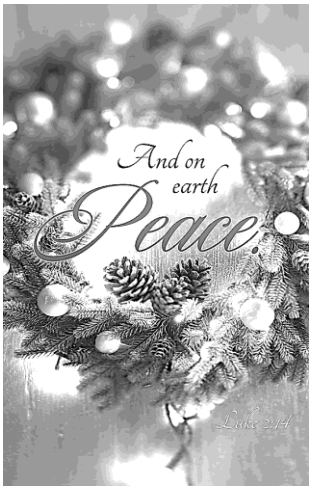
The Message
by Duane Johnson

Christmas Day is finally here. We have been waiting the entire Advent Season for it to arrive. One might think that the scripture passage chosen for today would be about the baby Jesus all wrapped up in swaddling clothes, along with Mary, Joseph and a bunch of sleepy shepherds. But the book of John goes right to the heart of the gospel message.

John 1:1 "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*."

John is telling us that Jesus was the personification of God's Word. God is communicating with us through Jesus. Jesus's life and words tell us what God wants us to know about what God expects of us. It is a message of love, peace and forgiveness.

In verse 4, John goes on to say, "*In him was life, and that life was the light of men*." The light shines in the darkness in order to reveal the truth of what is there. Jesus came to shine the light of God's truth, that is, the message of God's love for us to which we are called to respond with our love of God and our love of neighbor, no matter who that neighbor might be.



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