

ADVENT

reflections



Introduction

This year, 12 members of Unity Presbyterian Church and I wrote reflections to create an Advent Devotional for 2020!

This year, Advent begins Sunday, November 29 and goes through Christmas Eve. The four Sundays of Advent have a Psalm to read, followed by an Advent Hymn. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day have two passages of Scripture for you to read, followed by an Advent Hymn / Christmas Carol for you to sing. The remaining 21 days have one passage of Scripture from the daily lectionary and a reflection for you to read written by someone from Unity!

If you are reading this on your computer, you may click on the Scriptures at the beginning of each day to be directed to BibleGateway.com to read the passage of Scripture. If you are using a printed version, please have a Bible on hand to read the daily passages of Scripture. After reading the passage of scripture for the day, then read the reflection. Some of the reflections include a prayer at the end for you to pray. Whether or not a prayer is included, please take a moment to pray about what you've read, reflected upon, and/or sung.

My prayer for us, this Advent, is that we would be drawn deeper into the life of Jesus, as we remember his first coming and prepare for his second coming. And I pray that, through this Devotional, we would experience the Scriptures in a new and deeper way, allowing the Lord to speak to us, through the scriptures, the songs, and the reflections of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Advent Blessings
in Christ,

Jeff

Prepare
the way
of the
LORD.
ISAIAH 40:3

Sunday, Nov. 29, 2020

Read [Psalm 25](#)

Sing

O Come O Come Emmanuel

Translated by
John Mason Neale

Words and Music
Veni Emmanuel
Arranged by
Thomas Helmore

$\text{♩} = 76$ VERSE

Em Bm/D G/B C G/B D G D Bm C



1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
2. O come, Thou Day-spring, come _____ and cheer our spir - its by Thine
3. O come, Thou Wis - dom from _____ on high, and or - der all things,
4. O come, De - sire of na - tions, bind all peo - ples in one

5 Am Em/B Bm Em Am Em/G D/F# Em Bm C D Em



Is - ra - el; That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here, un -
ad - vent here; Dis - perse the gloom - y clouds _____ of night, and
far _____ and nigh; To us the path of knowl - edge show, and
heart _____ and mind; Bid en - vy, strife, and quar - rels cease; Fill

10 CHORUS

D G C G/B D G D Em Bm G



-til the Son of God _____ ap - pear. Re - jice! Re - jice! Em -
death's dark shad - ows put _____ to flight.
cause us in her ways _____ to go.
the whole world with heav - en's peace.

15 C G/B D Em D/F# G C Am Em/B Bm Em



-man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el!

Monday, Nov. 30 by Judy Ellwood
Read [Isaiah 1:10-20](#)

Do you ever feel like you're not doing enough to please God? Not enough Bible reading, not enough quiet time, not helping others enough? I sure have. If you really concentrate on these verses, you'll see that all God wants from us is love. Our love for others, showing forgiveness, caring for each other, just as he has done for us.

God sends us Jesus as a perfect example of how to do this. Yet, we still fail. I am thankful for His grace and mercy. As we await the coming of our LORD, may we all be better examples of Christ to the people around us. Then, reach out to those not so close to us and show them the love of Christ.

Pray: Lord Jesus, help us all to remember how you served others in your short time on earth. Help us to be more like you.



Tuesday, Dec. 1 by Steve Schick
Read [Isaiah 1:21-31](#)

Remembering that the prophets in the Bible spoke messages from God to the chosen people of God. Here God is telling His chosen people what they have done wrong in His eyes and what the consequences are going to be.

Jerusalem had turned to themselves and away from God. They refused to heed God and instead they were playing God. The temptations of money, power and pleasure had consumed them and their faith had been watered down and they had become worthless. They had disgraced God's creation by making idols of wood and metal and performing immoral acts among the trees and gardens. Their sinful acts were a barrier between God and themselves.

God tells them in no uncertain terms that He is going to destroy His enemies and the faithless and start over.

So what is the message here for us today, after all this is the Old Testament, what does that have to do with us? We have been given the greatest gift of all, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. Our job is clear. Read, contemplate, understand and obey. The promises that we hold through Christ include a better life now and then eternal life with the Father.

The question that we must ask ourselves as we prepare for the celebration of our Savior's birth is; "What are we letting come between ourselves and God?"

Jesus tells us how to live. Know Jesus.

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Even though our sins have been forgiven, there is a “response issue” here. True faith on our part will result in a Godly mindset and a Godly heart set as well, which will culminate in obedience.

A final question to consider; “What am I going to do today to become a better follower of Christ?”



Wednesday, Dec. 2 by Sheila Ellenberger
Read [Isaiah 2:1-5](#)

What is your hope?

No matter how good your life is right now, you are living off the hope that things will get better. We all are. Nobody wants just more of today. We cannot survive without hope. We cannot live without hope.

Nobody wants to suffer, but you can suffer if you have hope. Nobody wants to be poor, but you can survive being poor if you have hope. The most dangerous factor in a person’s life is a sense of hopelessness.

What is your hope?

Is it a certain level of income? The perfect romantic partner? A certain level of career success? Children? We are all hoping for something. To be human is to hope.

Life is hard, and our hopes do not deliver as much as we desired. Usually the thing that we hoped for does not turn out to be as good as we had hoped. But even if it does, it does not last that long. Or even if it does, it still does not satisfy us as we had hoped.

Historian Daniel Boorstin suggests that we suffer from all-too-extravagant expectations. We expect anything and everything. We expect the contradictory and the impossible. We expect compact cars which are spacious; luxurious cars which are economical. We expect to be rich and charitable, powerful and merciful, active and reflective, kind and competitive. We expect to eat and stay thin, to be constantly on the move and ever more neighborly, to go to a “church of our choice” and yet feel its guiding power over us, to revere God and to be God. Never have people been more the masters of their environment. Yet never have people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never have people expected so much more than the world could offer

What exactly are the things we are hoping for?

Like the prophet, we can strive to live in the hope of a future illuminated by faith. He said, “In the days to come, God will do something new. God’s temple will be on the highest mountain, and people will stream to it.”

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The prophet told them to expect a time of restoration! We need that too. We can open our hearts to God's continued work even if we still see trash along the streets and unkempt properties in our neighborhoods.

We can live in the hope of a restored tomorrow.
We can also live in the hope of peace.



Thursday, Dec. 3 by Margaret Hirschfeld
Read [1 Thessalonians 3:1-13](#)

The scripture for today's reading is part of a letter written by Paul to the new Christians in Thessalonica. Paul had spent a short time with them, possibly as little as three weeks. He had preached to them in the synagogue perhaps only three times, but in that short time a very close bond had developed, rather like a family.

Paul, Silas and Timothy were forced to leave due to the persecution they were suffering and their lives being threatened. At the first opportunity, Paul sent Timothy back to check on the new church with a letter of encouragement. He thanked God for them. He remembered their work of Faith, their labor of Love, and their endurance by Hope. He reminded them that they had received the gospel not only by the Word, but also in the Holy Spirit. In spite of severe suffering and persecution they were an example to others as they served a living and true God while they waited for his Son to return.

As I read this, the word "persecution" made me pause. Had I ever felt persecution? Had I ever experienced hostility and ill-treatment because of my race, political or religious beliefs? The next part of the definition continues... "persistent annoyances or harassment." I thought about all that we have gone through in this year of 2020. Aha! Yes, we have all experienced persecution. What are we to do? In spite of the persistent annoyances we are to continue to be an example to others as we serve a living and true God and we await the coming of our Lord.

Pray: Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of your precious Son, Jesus. Help us, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, to be an example, as we go about our daily lives, to demonstrate Faith, Hope, and Love to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Friday, Dec. 4 by Beth Nelson
Read [1 Thessalonians 4:1-12](#)

There are a few reasons that taking advantage of people can lead to our own downfall.
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I had a co-worker that at the time had this habit of always asking people for rides, and it was always the last minute. Because of this and some of the other things that she tended to do, a lot of my other co-workers would have a hard time dealing with her at times. I would, unfortunately, have to include myself in the bunch.

What we all came to realize is that the only person in her life that could pick her up was not very reliable. So even though getting taken advantage of can lead to irritation and annoyance, sometimes people do not realize that their actions could be seen as taking advantage of other people.

Pray: *Dear God, You are wonderful and wise. Please grant us the wisdom to see past other people's actions if the other person means no harm. Amen.*



Saturday, Dec. 5 by Amber Gump
Read [Luke 21:5-19](#)

False prophets, nations rising against nations, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famine, pestilences, and fearful events. Sound familiar? This past year has certainly been filled with social and political unrest. There have been hurricanes and severe wildfires. I would certainly consider the pandemic a fearful event. Are we living in the end times? We could cause ourselves a great deal of worry trying to read the signs to figure out when and where the end times are coming. However, I do not think that is the message we are to take from this reading.

A closer reading of this passage reveals hope offered by Jesus. In verse 9 he tells us “when you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened.” He also tells us that we will be persecuted. Although we will be persecuted, in verses 14-15 he tells us to make up our minds not to worry about how we will defend ourselves because he will give us the words and wisdom we need. He doesn't tell us that our time on this Earth will be without difficulty. What he offers is freedom from the worry.

How do we gain that freedom? Verse 19 has the key – stand firm and you will win life. Stand firm in your faith. Trust in Jesus Christ. Pray and spend time in the word. It is there that you will find freedom from fear and worry.

Pray: *Dear Lord, help us to not allow the difficulties of this life to consume us with fear and worry. Instead, encourage us to spend time with you in prayer and studying your word. Draw us near to you so that we can learn to stand firm in our faith and gain the freedom from fear and worry that only you can offer. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Sunday, Dec. 6, 2020

Read [Psalm 24](#)

Sing

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

1. Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates;
2. Fling wide the portals of your heart;
3. Re-dee-mer, come, with us a-bide;
4. Thy Ho-ly Spi-rit lead us on

be-hold, the King of glo-ry waits;
make it a tem-ple, set a-part
our hearts to thee, we o-pen wide;
un-til our glo-rious goal is won;

the King of kings is draw-ing near;
from earth-ly use in for-heaven's em-ploy,
let us thy in-ner pre-sence feel;
e-ter-nal praise, e-ter-nal fame

the Sa-vior of the world is here!
a-domed with prayer and love and joy,
thy grace and love in us re-veal.
be of-fered, Sa-vior, to thy name!

Text: Georg Weissel, 1642;
trans Catherine Winkworth, 1855
Tune: *Psalmodia Evangelica*, 1789



LM
TRURO
www.hymnary.org/text/lift_up_your_heads_ye_mighty_gates_bcho

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Monday, Dec. 7 by Jill Cherry
Read [1 Thessalonians 5:1-11](#)

“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:1

Probably the most disciplined part of my life is the use of my planner. It’s with me every day and updated every day. It helps me stay focused on the priorities. All day long calls come in, emails are opened and text messages alarm, pulling me off course. My planner helps to re-focus and keep me moving forward.

Paul is telling the Thessalonians, they will not be able to note in the planners when the Master comes again. However, he does tell them and us what we are to do in the meantime:

Get dressed every day with the breastplate of faith and love and on the helmet of hope and salvation.

“For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him.” 1 Thessalonians 5: 9-10

Paul then gives us a list of things we can add to our “to do” list in our daily planners:

- Speak encouraging words to one another
- Build up hope to be together, no one left out, or left behind

And for the church:

- To those leaders who work hard for you, who have been given responsibility of urging and guiding us in obedience – overwhelm them with appreciation and love – In Thessalonian times they had “sponsored home churches,” but certainly could be relative to our church today.
- Take care of each other, encourage, pull the exhausted to their feet, gently encourage the stragglers, be patient and attentive to their needs, look for the best in each other
- Be cheerful and thank God no matter what happens
- Carry the attitude of prayer all day, every day

The Master will return, we cannot plan or know when, but we do know what to do while we wait.

Pray: Father, help me to follow your list of what I am to do each day. Help me to move your priorities ahead of mine so I might be prepared for your return.



Tuesday, Dec. 8 by Kelly Bergeson
Read [1 Thessalonians 5:12-28](#)

What are your hopes for this Christmas? Do you hope to get a specific item as a gift? Do you hope to get an awesome reaction to a gift you give? Do you hope to get along with family or friends? Do you hope for world peace? Do you hope to just make it through the holidays?

These verses in Thessalonians have a lot to say to us. I think they mostly address the question: what does it mean to live together? How should we treat our leaders, those who are struggling, and those who are apathetic. We are to strive or works towards the good of the other person, to have patience with them, to encourage them, and to help. This Advent and Christmas we do this maybe a little better than other times of the year. This scripture passage also tells us to always be joyful and give thanks in every circumstance. I don't know about you, but none of that comes naturally to me: patience, joyful always, etc. I love that Paul doesn't just say good luck and leave us to try. He reminds us in (vs. 23-24) that God does this work in and through us. We are not alone to do this in our own strength. When we are sad He is there to help us have gratitude and joy. When we are frazzled by business He give us patience with those around us and ourselves. He fills us with His peace that it might overflow to those around us. All we need is connection to Him and He can be our lifeline. As vs. 24 says [God] is faithful and He WILL do it. May the Grace, Peace, and Joy of our Lord be with you this Advent/Christmas season.

Pray: Lord, you know our weaknesses. On our own we make a mess of things. We come to you asking You to fill us with your love, joy, peace, patience, and self control. You are faithful. Lord, this Advent season help us to have eyes to see those around us. Help us to see who needs to be encouraged, who needs basic food/shelter/clothing, who needs the truth spoken to them in love. Thank you that You don't let us down. Amen.



Wednesday, Dec. 9 by Judy Ellwood
Read [John 7:53-8:11](#)

Forgiveness. Do you ever really think about what that means? Have you ever been forgiven by a person for doing something or saying something you shouldn't have? Depending on that scenario, you may have felt great relief that you were forgiven. You may have been a bit shocked that the person could or would forgive you. I imagine that is likely what the women in this scripture felt. At first, the people around her were ready to stone her to death for allegedly committing adultery. When the people asked Jesus what he thinks of this situation, they're ready for him to really dig into her and give her a lecture about how awful of a person she is. Instead, he shocks them all by saying "let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her". The people all, one by one, start dropping their stones to the ground and walk away. Soon there is just the woman and Jesus. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you", Jesus asks. She responds "No one sir". "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin".

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Did you notice, Jesus didn't lecture her. He didn't punish her in any way. He didn't belittle her. He just said go, don't do it again. Instead, he made all the others aware that they too have sinned. He said "let any of you who is without sin be the first.....". He did not say "let any of you who have not committed this sin" See the difference? We are all sinful because we are human. Jesus came in to this world as part of God's plan to free us from sin if we believe in him.

During this advent season, I encourage you to think about asking Jesus to help you next time you need to forgive someone.

Pray: Lord, we know we are sinful in nature. All but you Lord. You show mercy to us when we often don't deserve it. You forgive us many times over. Help us to always remember those gifts from you so that when we need to forgive someone we can do that with the same kind and loving heart as you. Amen.



Thursday, Dec. 10 by Sheila Ellenberger
Read [Isaiah 7:1-9](#)

As I read the Isaiah scripture for today, December 10th, verse 9b intrigued me. I turned to BibleGateway.com to read various translations of verse 9. Three translations resonated with me.

“If your faith is not strong, then you will not have strength to last” (ICB).

“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all” (CSB).

“If you don't take your stand in faith, you won't have a leg to stand on” (MSG).

God tells us in Isaiah 7:9 to stand firm in our faith. How do we know if our faith is strong enough? Are there ways we can strengthen our faith? Could it mean trusting God to take the lead and to truly lead us in life? But what if God does not show me the way when I am ready to act?

I do not know about you, but I struggle with waiting let alone 'waiting patiently'. But I know that is what I need to do if I am to be obedient to God. So, what am I supposed to do while standing still and waiting patiently for God to lead me? I am going to strengthen my faith! I am going to strengthen my relationship with God!

As ambitious and challenging as that may sound, maybe it is not so difficult if I break it down into several steps. I challenge you to walk these steps with me. Will you join me?

1. TRUST

We must trust God in all things. We must intentionally focus on God's plans for us and not our own. Sometimes that means setting aside our own plans and expectations. If we have faith in God, our feelings of worry, stress, anxiety, fear, and doubt should never surface. If we have faith in God, then we completely trust that God will provide all we need and in great abundance, no less! God's plans for us are greater than anything we can imagine for ourselves. Doubt in our hearts is replaced with belief and trust in God. As our faith grows stronger when we let God lead us, we begin to move in the direction we are truly meant to go. *(continued on next page)*

2. PRAY

Start every day with prayer! Sitting in the presence of God is important. Set aside time every day to give God your undivided attention. A special prayer closet or a prayer room is not required. A quiet kitchen while the coffee brews works just great to reach out to God. Begin by thanking God for the blessings poured on you. Ask God to lead and guide you through the day. God already knows all our needs even better than we do. Sending quick prayers throughout the day helps keep us in touch with God. They may be prayers of thanks, for people in your life, for guidance or wisdom, etc. We are better able to stay focused on God's will through prayer.

There is no right or wrong way to pray, God simply wants to hear from us. Talk to God, no pressure, just talk. Like you mean it! Pray like God is in the room sitting right beside you. It's okay to lift up our every need to God. It's okay to give God every single burden, worry, fear. It's okay to ask God to intervene in our lives and ask for the provisions we need. God wants to hear our voices, and God wants a personal relationship with each one of us. Daily prayer will invite God into our lives and help us establish a deeper trust and help to strengthen our faith.

3. READ SCRIPTURES

Knowing God's Word goes hand in hand with trusting God and praying. Take time every day to sit and read the Bible. Read God's promises and have faith that the promises will come to you. In God's Word, we will find strength, hope, love, peace, and joy. Reading God's instructions helps us gain wisdom, knowledge, and understanding of how to live our lives. When something I read 'speaks' to me or 'tugs' on my heart, I write it in my journal. When a verse becomes a focus, it takes time to understand it so that I can start applying it to my life. We must know the Word of God to exercise faith in our lives. May God's instructions and commands be our guide. Let our faith be strengthened. Lean into the Word of God and apply it to your life. If you are not exercising your faith daily in scripture reading, start small and let God lead you from there.

4. LIVE OUT HIS WORD

Applying the Word of God to our lives will deepen our walk with God and strengthen our faith. How do we apply God's Word? We make a commitment to grow in our faith and commit to living God-first lives. Begin by getting to know Jesus and listen for the life we are called to live. I write verses I personally need to work on. Then, I start to apply them to my life. Take one day at a time. The goal is always to be better than we were yesterday.

5. BE THE LIGHT

You are the light of the world, so shine bright my friends! Practice being loving and caring towards each other. Encourage and build one another up. Strive to be joyful and do not spend precious time complaining. Practice thankfulness. Be forgiving. May we give our time, our talents, and our treasures. When people see us, may they see believers in God, people who exercise great faith, as role models for a God-first life. May our actions draw people closer to God.

May you stand firm in your faith in God.



Friday, Dec. 11 by Jill Cherry
Read [2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5](#)

“So then, brothers and sisters stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word or mouth or by our letter.” 2 Thessalonians 2:15

When we were young parents my brother and I had a discussion about establishing traditions. He had read that establishing family traditions was a strong way of instilling values in children for the rest of their lives. That practiced traditions would stay with them.

But establishing traditions can be tricky. If they are based on a person, say, we always gather at Grandma’s for Christmas and then she passes does the gathering together end, sometimes. We use to pass around a large wedding gift bow, but the two who had wedded, divorced, and the bow after many years much like the marriage fell apart!

So over the years, we’ve started and stopped traditions. Some have gone well and held the test of time, others have not. However, the one that fills my heart most is our tradition of gathering for the candlelight Christmas Eve service. Filling the pew to celebrate the birth of our Savior shared with loved ones – how powerful is that!

Paul demonstrated and taught traditions and asked that the Thessalonians remember and practice them, so they could hold fast to them when life became difficult and to celebrate when times were good.

Gathering together on Sunday mornings, a tradition that for some started back generations ago, has certainly been challenged this year. But determining the purpose of the tradition, or the value of the tradition is what we have to do in these times. It’s not about the place, but about taking that time to worship. It will be easy to let this tradition fade away unless we see it for the purpose and value it holds in our lives. How are you holding onto those traditions during these difficult times?

Pray: *“Now may our Lord, Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word” (2 Thessalonians 2: 16-17). “May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ” (2 Thessalonians 3:5).*



Saturday, Dec. 12 by Jeff Bergeson
Read [Isaiah 8:1-15](#)

I’m not a betting man, but we all make “wagers” sometimes, don’t we? We put all our “eggs in one basket,” from time to time. Sometimes, that really pays off, but often it doesn’t.

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In this passage, the leaders of the people of God had ceased to rely on the LORD and started “betting” on political alliances for their security. Rezin was the King of Syria in Damascus, and Pekah (the son of Remaliah) was the King of Israel (the northern kingdom which broke off after King Solomon’s death). Ahaz was the King of Judah (the southern kingdom), and was afraid of Rezin and Pekah (those two northern kings) working together to attack Jerusalem. So King Ahaz asked the political “Super Power” of the day for help; Ahaz called on Assyria. Where and on what do we look for “security” and help? Whom are we tempted to call upon instead of the LORD? It doesn’t always work out well, does it?

Isaiah warns Ahaz that calling on Assyria is like calling on a flood to help you. “Yes, it will wash away your enemies, but the flood waters will reach further than you’d like, Ahaz.” Assyria will come knocking on Jerusalem’s door after overtaking Rezin and Pekah.

When the floodwaters rise or when things don’t go the way we’d hoped, sometimes we’re tempted to think that “the deck is stacked,” or “the dice are rigged.” The odds were in our favor, but it somehow didn’t work out. Why?! “Conspiracy!” we cry. But Isaiah says, “Do not call conspiracy everything these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear and do not dread it” (8:12, NIV). Instead, Isaiah tells us that the only “sure bet” is the LORD. Focus on the LORD. Look to the LORD as the most powerful help upon whom you can call. Trust the LORD as your security and safety, because despite the lost bets, and the rising floods, the LORD is Immanuel, “God with us” (8:8, 10), through it all. If this was true before the birth of Jesus, how much more so now?

Pray: *Immanuel, forgive us for not trusting you to be “God with us” in the flood. Forgive us for “betting” on other systems, structures, and strategies for our security, rather than seeking sanctuary in you alone, the Living Rock and the Head of the Church. This Advent, Lord Jesus, give us eyes to see how you are with us, guiding and guarding us, each day. Amen.*



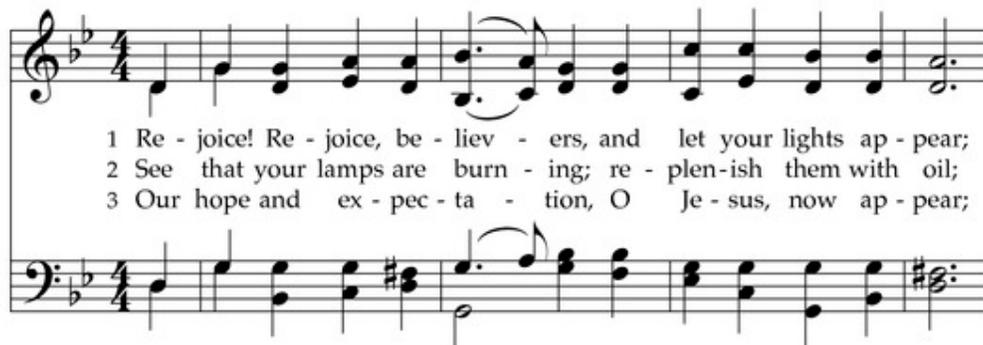
HOPE
HOPE
HOPE

OF PARDON

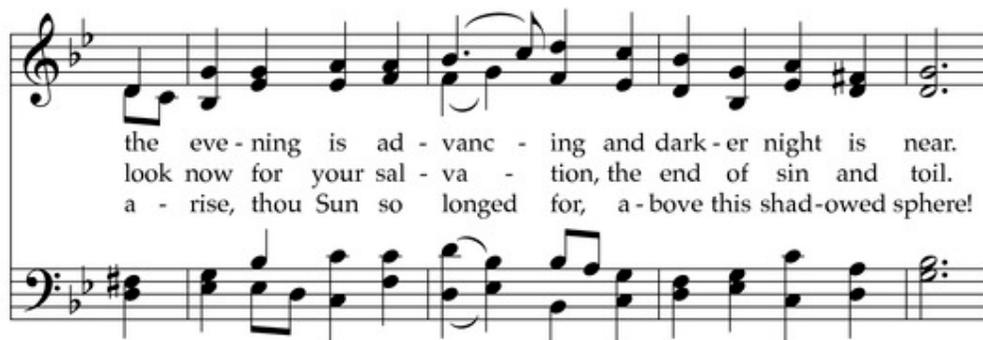
OF PEACE WITH GOD

OF GLORY

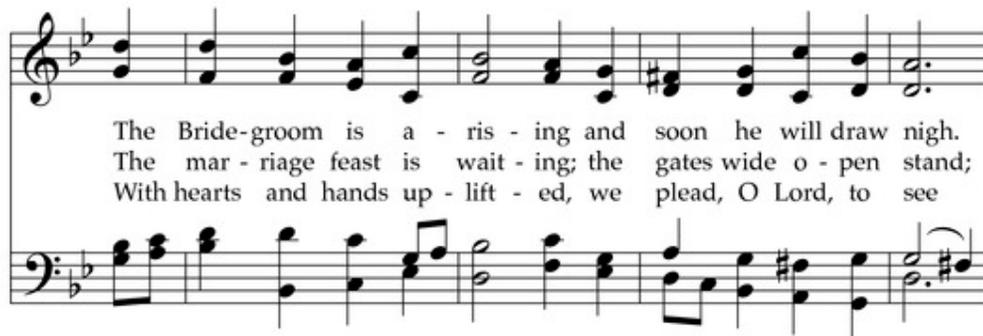
Sunday, Dec. 13, 2020
Read [Psalm 110](#)
Sing “Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers!”



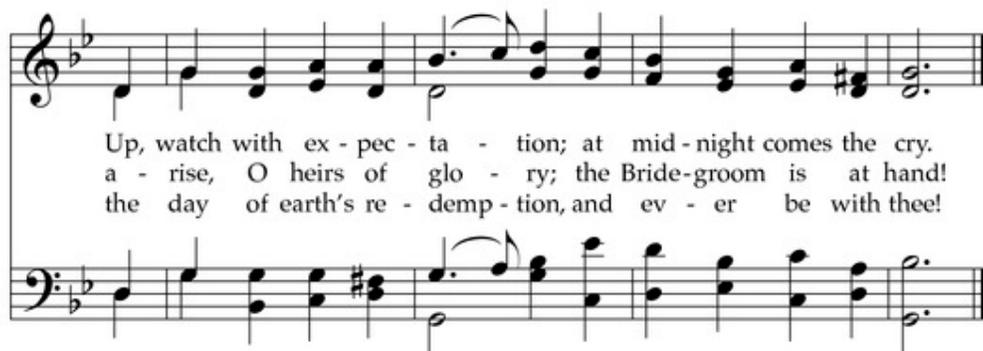
1 Re - joice! Re - joice, be - liev - ers, and let your lights ap - pear;
2 See that your lamps are burn - ing; re - plen-ish them with oil;
3 Our hope and ex - pec - ta - tion, O Je - sus, now ap - pear;



the eve - ning is ad - vanc - ing and dark - er night is near.
look now for your sal - va - tion, the end of sin and toil.
a - rise, thou Sun so longed for, a - bove this shad - owed sphere!



The Bride-groom is a - ris - ing and soon he will draw nigh.
The mar - riage feast is wait - ing; the gates wide o - pen stand;
With hearts and hands up - lift - ed, we plead, O Lord, to see



Up, watch with ex - pec - ta - tion; at mid - night comes the cry.
a - rise, O heirs of glo - ry; the Bride-groom is at hand!
the day of earth's re - demp - tion, and ev - er be with thee!

The Latin original of this text based on the parable of the wise and foolish maidens (Matthew 25:1-13) consisted of ten stanzas, but this briefer version is more appropriate for its message of urgency. It is set to a spirited minor Welsh tune named for a Pembrokeshire village.

Monday, Dec. 14 by Veronica Amos
Read [2 Peter 1:1-11](#)

The first few verses of this chapter remind us of everything we have been given through our faith in Jesus. Verse 3 in the King James Version says that they are all things that pertain to life and godliness. I think it can take a lifetime to realize that. We may accept it, but do we always remember it, or put it in to practice?

We are human, we sin, we are busy, we forget.

Peter says the gifts we have been given are so we may escape the sin in the world. Even to share the divine nature!

We are reminded to do our best, to add goodness to our faith, add knowledge, self control, endurance, godliness, brotherly affection and love. We need these in all things at all times, and that we will be given the full right to enter the kingdom.

Whatever the time of year, and perhaps especially at Christmas, we may think more about these things. They seem to fit.

I think we can accept that we need to grow as Christians. That never stops. We can pray, try to be humble and open to the Holy Spirit. Every day.

Pray: *Father, thank you for the gifts your love has given us. Help us to remember always that you gave your son for our sins. What more could we need? In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Tuesday, Dec. 15 by Lucas & Katie Weber
Read [Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

The beginning of this passage, talks about how people who are walking in “darkness” or living in the “land of deep darkness” have seen a light that has dawned upon them. Jesus will light the path out of darkness for them. It goes on to talk about how the nation will be humbled and prosperous, as the good news has “increased their joy.” People are rejoicing just like one would during harvest or after a battle. The surplus that has been obtained is plentiful and they want to share it. The good news has been given to them and they want to share it! They are no longer slaves to fear, as the song says. The tools of oppression have been cast away! The passage states that “a child is born,” it also states that the “government will be on His shoulders,” demonstrating that God is the final judge and His “greatness” lasts forever. His will, will be done!

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This passage can be applied to our lives as we think about the direction God guides us into. We should follow the “light” and be humbled by it. God doesn’t just provide for us, he provides more than what we need. Jesus was born to guide us and be all of those names from the passage: “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” No matter what is going on in the world, we can trust in Jesus and see that His peace will have no end, it is plentiful and humbling to us.

Pray: Lord, please watch over us as we can see all that is happening in the world. Please remind us about the humbling joy you gave us with the good news through Jesus. You are our light and joy, thank you for guiding us. Amen.



Wednesday, Dec. 16 by Beth Nelson
Read [2 Peter 2:1-10a](#)

When talking about prophets, the first story that comes to my mind is about a church that my grandma attended when she was younger. The pastor at this church said some very false statements from his pulpit. One of the main ones was talking about how the only people that are going to make it into heaven were the ones that were members of his church and listened to his sermons. You may think that no one believed him, but from what I got told, there were a few families that moved around the country to listen to his sermons.

There are some false prophets that are plain to see. There are others that are not as plain and that you have to pray about, study about, and be aware of.

Pray: Dear God, You are great and wise. Please grant us the wisdom to know when people are giving false testimony in your name. Please let us hear the words of truth that we need to hear from you. Amen.



Thursday, Dec. 17 by Amber Gump
Read [Matthew 3:1-12](#)

This passage is the story of John the Baptist. John is the cousin of Jesus. He spends his time in the desert, calling people to repent, baptizes them in the River Jordan, and pointing them toward Jesus. He wears unusual clothing, eats strange food, and yet people flock to him to be baptized. In verses 7-10, he speaks to the Pharisees (the teachers of the law) and the Sadducees (the priests and aristocracy), warning them that their claim to a heritage of believers is not enough. John tells them that they must also produce good fruit.

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What does this mean for us? We can't rest on being baptized and then continue to live a life of sin. We can't point to the faith of our ancestors and expect that to be enough. We need to "produce good fruit." We need to show that we have repented in the way we go about our daily life. The things that we say and do should show others that in our heart and mind that we are followers of Jesus. Our words and actions need to show others what it means and what it looks like to walk with Jesus. What can you do today to show others that you are a faithful follower? How can you "produce good fruit?"

Pray: Heavenly Father, help us to daily return to you. Remind us of our baptism and the faith of our fathers. Guide our words and actions to help us live a life that matches who we claim to be. Let our lives be a reflection of your love, pointing others to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Friday, Dec. 18 by Bob Baird
Read [Isaiah 11:1-9](#)

When I was in college in the late 1960's, my church choir performed Randall Thompson's "The Peaceable Kingdom" that uses texts from Isaiah. When reading this passage (and others) in Isaiah now, I am reminded of this musical work. On the cover of the sheet music was an image of a painting by Edward Hicks called "The Peaceable Kingdom" which represents verses 6-11 of Isaiah 11. According to "Barnes's Notes," the general design of the prophecy in chapter 11 was "to console the people with assurance of their deliverance from impending calamity." The 60's were certainly full of "impending calamity" from the Cuban Missile Crisis and assassination of a U.S. president to the assassination of an important civil rights leader (and associated race riots) and continuing unrest about the war in Viet Nam. Fast forward to 2020, 60 years later and there is no shortage of calamitous things to worry about from a pandemic with health and financial implications, racial unrest and riots, gathering threats in North Korea and the Middle East, and concern about the Federal Government's ability to effectively manage all of these issues at once. The people in Isaiah's time only had the prophecy that things would be better in the future. However, now we know in hindsight that the shoot from the stump of Jesse really did sprout and bear fruit and that fruit was Jesus Christ whose birth we anticipate celebrating in just a few short days. While that birth did not necessarily deliver us from calamities on earth and the wolf and lamb are not yet at peace with each other, we can have confidence and comfort that with the love and presence of God in our lives and the example of Jesus by which to live, we can bear anything that happens in this life.



Saturday, Dec. 19 by Jeff Bergeson
Read [Isaiah 11:10-16](#)

“I’ll be home for Christmas. You can count on me. Please have snow, and mistletoe, and presents on the tree!” What is it about home that creates such longing within us? Yes, I know that sometimes our places of residence are not always safe, warm, and welcoming. Sometimes families are abusive. And even without abuse, family gatherings can sometimes be stressful, bringing up old wounds, or bad habits. But “home” is not necessarily “where we grew up.” Home is where we “feel at home!” It’s a place and people where we *belong*, where we can let down our guard, where we can truly rest. This is why we all long for *home*.

In this passage from Isaiah, the people of Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom) have been scattered among the nations; they’re in exile and bondage far from home. And before they were scattered, they had been at odds with each other. There was some family rivalry going on between the kingdoms. But, in this passage, the prophet sees that, from their places of exile, they will be set free and assembled together (v. 12)! A “highway” (v. 16) will be given to them on which to return home! And, their “family rivalry” will be put to rest (v. 13). They’re going home!

All of this is brought about by the “Root of Jesse” (that is, Jesus). He not only restores the relationship between Israel and Judah, but he is “a banner for the peoples,” rallying all the different ethnicities of the world (i.e. “the nations”) to himself! And “his resting place will be glorious” (v. 10).

Jesus Christ is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life, not just for Israel, but for all peoples. In him, we find freedom from bondage. In him, we find reconciliation and peace. In him, we “find our way home” to God. The love of the Father is the gleaming light of home. Jesus is the Way home, and the Holy Spirit is our guide, bringing us all home, to sit at table together with Christ.

In what ways do we still need Jesus—the “Root of Jesse”—to set us free from bondage to lead us home? In our lives, are their rivalries that need to be put to rest? How is the Father calling us deeper into the gleaming light of his love for us this year?

This Advent, may we long for Christ, and get ourselves ready to travel “the highway” home, realizing that home is “where the love light gleams,” as reconciled family in Christ.

Pray: *“O come, Desire of nations, bind | All peoples in one heart and mind; Bid envy, strife, and discord cease; Fill the whole world with heaven’s peace.” Lead us all home to find our peace and rest. In you, dear Lord, in you, we all are blest. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*



Sunday, Dec. 20, 2020
 Read [Psalm 150](#)
 Sing

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Words by
 Charles Wesley

Music by
 Rowland Hugh Prichard

♩=90 VERSE

F C F B♭/F F C Dm C F/A C⁷/G F F/A



1. Come, Thou long - ex - pect - ed Je - sus, born to set Thy
 2. Born Thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, born a child and

7 B♭ C F F C F B♭/F F C Dm C



peo - ple free; From our fears ___ and sins re - lease ___ us,
 yet ___ a King; Born to reign ___ in us for - ev - er,

13 F/A C⁷/G F F/A B♭ C F Am Dm



let us find our rest ___ in Thee. Is - rael's strength ___ and
 now Thy gra - cious king - dom bring. By Thine own ___ e -

19 Gm C F Dm Gm C^{sus} C



con - so - la - tion, hope of all ___ the earth ___ Thou art;
 - ter - nal Spir - it rule in all ___ our hearts ___ a - lone;

25 F/A F B♭/F C/E F G⁷/D C/E



Dear ___ de - sire ___ of ev' - ry na - tion,
 By ___ Thine all - suf - fi - cient mer - it,

29 F F/A B♭ F/C C⁷ F



joy of ev' - ry long - ing heart.
 raise us to ___ Thy glo - rious throne.

Monday, Dec. 21 by Bob Baird

Read [Luke 1:26-38](#)

What's the big deal about Mary? When I was younger, I used to puzzle over the fact that my Catholic friends would pray to Mary and not directly to God, or Jesus his son. As I grew older, I discovered through Sunday school lessons and bible study that there is a bit more to Mary than first meets the eye. In this passage, the angel indicates to Mary that she is "highly favored" and has "found favor with God". Why should Mary find special favor with God out of all the other young ladies in the area at that time? Certainly God could see that Mary had been (past tense) a good and faithful servant. But God being God would also know that Mary would continue to be a good and faithful servant under very difficult circumstances. He knew that she would, in humility, accept his incredible request to give birth to his son. He knew that she would be a devoted mother raising a very special child. He knew she would follow Jesus and support him during his earthly ministry. He knew that she would stand by Jesus at the foot of the cross as he was put to death by the Romans. He knew that she would have the courage to be one of the first to visit Jesus' tomb on the morning of his resurrection and then spread the good news to his disciples. So the answer is yes, Mary is a very big deal. Upon reading this passage, the question for us here and now is: How can we find such favor with God? Have we been good and faithful servants up until now? Perhaps more importantly, when God asks something difficult of us, will we be willing to say "I am the Lord's servant -- May your word to me be fulfilled"?



Tuesday, Dec. 22 by Jeff Bergeson

Read [Luke 1:39-56](#)

"I can hardly wait!" Do you ever get excited for what's about to happen? We're just two days away from singing "Silent Night." Three days away from Christmas Morning. I can hardly wait! But as special as those celebrations will be, something even greater is coming.

The Song of Mary (*The Magnificat*) in Luke 1:46-55, begins "My soul magnifies the Lord." In it, Mary highlights the great things the Lord has done for her, thereby "magnifying" the Lord, but she doesn't only focus on what God has done for her. No! The Lord is far more magnificent!

Throughout history, there have been powerful and proud people oppressing and belittling others. Throughout history, there have been rich people gorging themselves and acquiring wealth at the cost of the hungry poor. But throughout history, there have been people who "fear the Lord," ascribing ultimate power and authority to God, revering the Lord above all others. So the Lord will right the wrongs and overturn the tables by bringing down the mighty, scattering the proud, and exalting the humble (vv. 51-52), filling the hungry with good things while sending the rich away empty (v. 53). Or, as Jesus says, "all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 14:11, NIV).

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And Mary indicates that what the Lord is doing within her, his humble servant—giving life to the Lord, the Son of the Most High, who will receive the throne of King David, whose kingdom shall have no end—is how God will right these wrongs and fulfill the covenant promise of mercy to Abraham (vv. 54-55) to bless all families of earth through him (see Genesis 12:1-3). Jesus shows the true exercise of power through his humility. As we prepare to celebrate the Incarnate birth of the Son of God, we acknowledge that this good work is well underway. But as we look forward to Jesus' return, we know he will come to finish the job of making all things right in the world. I can hardly wait!

“Truly He taught us to love one another
His law is love and His gospel is peace
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother
And in his name all oppression shall cease.”

Pray: Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly! Come to right all the wrongs in the world, and let it begin with me. Please reveal in my heart any ways that I might be perpetuating the wrongs of the world by magnifying myself instead of magnifying you, or by oppressing the poor instead of empowering them. Come, Lord Jesus, and have your way in my life and in the world. Amen.



Wednesday, Dec. 23 by Shane Cunningham
Read [Luke 1:57-66](#)

Have you ever heard the expression, “I’ll believe it when I see it”? Let me introduce you to Zechariah. Zechariah didn’t believe God when they were told that Elizabeth would not only give birth, but that she would bear him a son. Zechariah had doubts. He was old, Elizabeth was old, and he just didn’t quite believe it, and because he doubted God, Gabriel told him he was going to be silent until his son was born, and not only born, but given the name that the Lord has chosen. Fast forward 8 or 9 months, Elizabeth gives birth to a son. After he was circumcised, it came time to name the child. The locals wanted to name him after his father, but Elizabeth said no, he is to be named John. They couldn’t believe it, so they turned to Zechariah, and he confirmed that his name was to be John. All of a sudden, Zechariah could speak!!

There are a lot of times in our daily lives, that even though we say we have faith in the Lord, we just can’t believe what is happening, or what might happen, or that no matter what happens (and there has been A LOT in 2020), God is in control. Let me say that again...GOD IS IN CONTROL!! We are just mere humans, we have doubts, disbelief, and all too often, an “I’ll believe it when I see it” approach or mentality. If you remember one thing this Advent season remember this, there is nothing too great, nothing too out of the ordinary, for our great and mighty God. Peace be with you all not only this Advent season, but through all the days ahead.



Thursday, Dec. 24, 2020 Christmas Eve
 Read [Psalm 132 and Philippians 2:5-11](#)
 Sing

Silent Night

Words by
 Joseph Mohr
 Translation by
 John Freeman Young

Music by
 Franz Xaver Gruber

VERSE

B♭ E♭/B♭ B♭ E♭/B♭ B♭ F⁷ B♭

1. Si - lent night, ho - ly night; All is calm, all is bright.
 2. Si - lent night, ho - ly night; Shep - herds quake at the sight.
 3. Si - lent night, ho - ly night; Son of God, love's pure light.
 4. Si - lent night, ho - ly night; Won - drous star, lend thy light.

5 E♭ B♭ E♭/B♭ B♭ E♭ B♭ E♭/B♭ B♭

Round yon vir - gin moth - er and Child. Ho - ly In - fant so ten - der and mild;
 Glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far, heav'n - ly hosts sing al - le - lu - ia;
 Ra - dant beams from Thy ho - ly face, with the dawn of re - deem - ing grace;
 With the an - gels let us sing, al - le - lu - ia to our King;

9 F⁷ B♭ B♭/F F F⁷ B♭

Sleep in heav - en - ly peace, sleep in heav - en - ly peace.
 Christ, the Sav - ior, is born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!
 Je - sus, Lord, at Thy birth, Je - sus, Lord, at Thy birth.
 Christ, the Sav - ior, is born! Christ, the Sav - ior, is born!

Friday, Dec. 25, 2020 Christmas Day!
 Read [Zechariah 2:10-13](#) and [Luke 2:1-20](#)
 Sing

Joy To The World

Words by
 Isaac Watts

Music by
 George Frederic Handel

VERSE

D G D/A A⁷ D G A D



1. Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth re - ceive her King; Let
 2. Joy to the earth! The Sav - ior reigns; Let men their songs em - ploy; While
 3. No more let sins and sor - rows grow, nor thorns in - fest the ground; He
 4. He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the na - tions prove the

8



ev - 'ry heart pre - pare Him room. And heav'n and na - ture
 fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains, re - peat the sound - ing
 comes to make His bless - ings flow far as the curse is
 glo - ries of His right - eous - ness. And won - ders of His

13

A A⁷



sing, and heav'n and na - ture sing. And
 joy, re - peat the sound - ing joy. Re -
 found, far as the curse is found. Far
 love, and won - ders of His love. And

16

D G D/A A⁷ D



heav'n and heav'n and na - ture sing.
 -peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.
 as, far as, the curse is found.
 won - ders, won - ders of His love.

