

# Advent Devotions

by staff, elders and church family members

## December 1

Isaiah 9:2-7

How do you feel and respond when you receive a valuable and unexpected gift? We sometimes overlook the amazing gift of freedom given to us in Jesus. Today's passage describes what this freedom is like (v. 2-5) before it describes the One who brings it to us (v. 6-7).

*How do you feel and act when you are trying to walk through a very dark room? What changes when the light goes on? How does this relate to the feeling a person might have when his or her nation is finally freed from an oppressive, foreign force?*

*Using v. 6-7, list the words used to describe the Son.*

*V. 6 tells us this child is born to us, this Son is given to us. Take a moment to thank the Father for His gift and ask the Son to bring His light and freedom to the place(s) where the darkness or oppressor's rod can be found in your life or this world.*

## December 3

Isaiah 7:10-14

Even when nations are at war and the world feels chaotic, God is at work. Centuries ago He sent His prophet Isaiah to challenge the evil king Ahaz: "Ask God for a sign that will confirm the truth of His word and strengthen your faith!" Although Ahaz' refusal to ask for a sign sounded pious, it indicated his unbelief. God wanted the king, and every generation of people afterwards, to know that despite our unbelief, He has a plan. Immanuel, the God-with-us Son, arrives on the scene centuries later and is with us still - in the chaos of our own inner life and of the world near and far.

*How might I respond when God asks me, "What do you want me to do for you?" (as Jesus did in His conversation with Bartimaeus—Mark 10:51).*

*What images of God might shape how I respond when He invites me to ask? What heart posture do I imagine He has toward me?*

*Where in my life today do I need assurance of Immanuel's presence?*

## December 5

2 Samuel 7:12-16

When my friend Rob Campbell built his home, he wrote meaningful Bible verses on doorways and the frame of the house. I always thought that was a great example of putting Christ first and reminding ourselves of God's promises. This passage is one of those 'already but not yet' passages about God's promise of building His kingdom and the promise of security and peace.

In the New Testament we are reminded that we are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:20), meaning God's Holy Spirit resides inside us. In addition, we are told we are part of the Kingdom of Heaven now (Matthew 5:3).

*What are some of the promises we see in this passage? How is God represented in this passage and what is our relationship to Him?*

*These verses point to the big picture that extends from creation to long after we are gone. Where do you see yourself fitting into the story?*

*Since we are God's temple, what are you writing on the inner walls and doorways of your home? What does it look like for you to know you are part of God's kingdom now?*

## December 2

Isaiah 11:1-5

What makes someone a king? On May 6, 2023, King Charles III was crowned king in a coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey in London. He was called king on September 10, 2022, after his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, died. Since he was her eldest son, he became king.

What makes Jesus a King? The prophet Isaiah foretold a king whom God would raise up, and upon whom His Spirit would rest. What makes Him a king is His character, not simply His lineage. This is who Jesus was, who He is, and who He will be shown to be.

*When we celebrate Christmas, we acknowledge the coming of a King who is unlike any other, declaring our allegiance to Him and anticipating His total reign to come.*

*In these verses from Isaiah, what 12 descriptions are given about the King's character?*

*What do you think people can expect from a King like this?*

*How is your life shaped by your King?*

## December 4

Micah 5:1-5

So much of the Christmas season is spent getting ready: for a visit, a trip, a party, or Christmas morning. What's one way you've been getting ready? For hundreds of years, God got things ready for Jesus' visit. One way He did that was by sending messengers ahead of Him to let us know what to expect.

*What does God tell us through Micah about who the Messiah will be and what He will do? What on that list comforts you? What on that list surprises you?*

*Look at verse 5. What do you think Micah means when he says not "He will give us peace" but "He will be our peace."? Where in your life would you like to experience His peace?*

*Ask Him to give you the gift of Himself this Christmas season.*

## December 6

Luke 1:26-33

When the angel brought Mary unexpected and life-changing news, he didn't get right to the point. Instead, he started by stating truth about Mary's identity (highly favored) and truth about God (He is with you). Then the angel told Mary how she was going to be involved in God's plan of keeping His promises. Mary would give birth to Jesus, the promised Messiah and King, whose kingdom would never end. When we face uncertain or troubling circumstances, let's ask God to remind us King Jesus is with us, calls us His dearly loved children, and is reigning forever!

*What truth about God or about yourself would be a comforting reminder the next time something unexpected happens?*

*Has there been a time when God comforted you with truth about Himself? If so, share that story with someone.*

*How does the angel describe this son whom Mary would give birth to? Which name, title, or description feels like especially good news to you?*

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### December 7

Luke 1:34-38

Mary has heard what the angel said to her – now she asks an important question. How? How will this happen? It seemed impossible that she could have a baby. The angel says, “God will make it happen. He has given a baby to your cousin, who couldn’t have a baby for years. Nothing is impossible with God.”

*How does the angel answer Mary’s question? What does the angel call the baby Mary is going to have?*

*Do you think Mary understood what the angel was saying? How does Mary respond to his answer?*

*What have you been asked to do recently – by your parents, a boss, a teacher, or even Jesus – that you didn’t understand? What was your response? How do you wish you had responded? Ask Jesus to help you be willing to obey.*

### December 9

Matthew 1:18-25 NIV

This familiar passage about Joseph accepting Jesus as his son is one of the more understated parts of the birth of Jesus. Joseph’s faithfulness to the LAW GIVER as opposed to just the law, gave him the ability to listen. The angel of the Lord directed him to take Mary as his wife and name her son Immanuel - God with us - whom we know as Jesus. His obedience to what the Lord commanded him to do was second to his own consideration of being faithful to the law and how it would impact him personally.

*What does God tell us in these verses about who the Messiah will be and what He will do?*

*Think about what Joseph was risking to obey the angel of the Lord. What were some of the things that Joseph might have been considering? What could some of the consequences have been for not obeying?*

*Consider how we are much like Joseph, having to accept Jesus as THE Son.*

### December 11

Luke 2:13-30

Good news is hard to contain. It is spread and shared, even among those who had not expected it. While Jesus was born in the humblest of places and circumstances, this good news was not bound by those. This passage shares the beginnings of where we get the term ‘gospel’, or good news.

*Think about the reactions of the shepherds, Mary, and Simeon. What was your first reaction when you heard the good news about Jesus? What about now? How has it changed over time?*

*Read Luke 2:30 where Simeon says my eyes have seen your salvation. Where does your ultimate hope come from? Where do your eyes turn to for help?*

*Pray for a renewed hope and trust in Jesus this Christmas season.*

### December 8

Luke 1:45–55

Mary received the news that she was chosen to bear the Messiah with great joy and understandable fear. She went to visit the one person who might understand, her cousin Elizabeth, who greeted her with gladness and encouraged her. Mary responded with an ageless song of praise and trust. The truth of the incarnation should stagger us and move us to join Mary in exalting, rejoicing and reflecting back to God any glory which He has shed upon us. His love and mercy are beyond our comprehension.

*As you meditate on the incarnation, how does your soul and spirit respond?*

*God’s glory is like a weight which displaces what is untrue and impure. Think about the areas in your life which need to be displaced by God’s glory. How does His glory and mercy carry you through difficult circumstances?*

*Like Elizabeth, to whom can you give a timely word of love, acceptance and encouragement?*

### December 10

Luke 2:1-7

“While they were there, the time came....” How do you hear these familiar words that bring us to the climax of all of history?

Are you watching, eagerly waiting with open eyes, open ears, and an open heart, for the Son to come? For Him to be conceived in you, to change you and to live through you?

Or perhaps all this waiting and watching has worn you down, leaving you without the strength to carry on, with hope far behind, something you remember, but cannot access anymore.

Maybe you are so distracted with the busyness and small circumstantial hopes life brings, that you have forgotten what you were supposed to be waiting for.

Don’t despair, and don’t lose heart. Whether you are holding on to this hope with strength you don’t even have, or you are trying to force your eyes back open because you have been asleep at the wheel, your God is safe to trust. Simply look again. Draw near. Rejoice. For the time *has* come, the time *is* come, and the time *will* come.

### December 12

Luke 2:12-21 (NIV)

Have you ever experienced something that took your breath away? The expanse of the Grand Canyon? Fall leaf colors that line a street? Even on an ordinary day, we can walk into something unexpected. That’s what happened to these shepherds. An ordinary day turned extraordinary. They encountered angels, heard their message, and suddenly, these shepherds headed to Bethlehem!

They became the first to spread the word about Jesus’ arrival. While angels returned to heaven and shepherds trekked to Bethlehem, Mary treasured and pondered the events. A sense of wonder and awe permeates these people.

*How would you respond to an angelic conversation? What did the angels see that we may be blinded to in our ordinary days?*

*Mary considers the meaning of these extraordinary events. In a season of increased activity, how can you pull away to ponder the true meaning of Christmas? Are you more prone to be on the move, or consider things in your heart?*

*Imagine yourself in the midst of these events, what would take your breath away?*

## December 13

Matthew 1:1-17

Some of the easiest scripture passages to skip over are the ones with a long list of “begats” - the genealogies, such as this one. And yet, we need to look closely at the way this one begins! The English translation says, “A record of the *genealogy* of Jesus Christ.” But in the Greek text, that word is “*genéseos*”, or GENESIS. The prophets had foretold of a coming renewal of all creation – the Kingdom of God. The Old Testament book of Genesis records the creation of the earth.

*Do you think the use of the word “genesis” rather than “genealogy” was intentional? If so, what was the author hoping to convey?*

*Genealogies of the Old Testament were exclusively through the fathers – yet in this relatively short genealogy, four women are mentioned. Can you find them?*

*These women had some things in common – what were they, and why do you think Matthew included them?*

## December 15

Galatians 4:1-7

If you were to write a letter to God, how would you address it? Does it start, “Dear Sir,” or “To whom it may concern,” or maybe “Hey God!”? Today’s passage unfolds a beautiful truth to ponder this advent season: We are invited to relate to God on the most intimate of family terms.

*In your culture, what do small children call their dad? (Example: USA: “dada”, Spanish: “papa”, Chinese: “baba”)*

*What does it mean to you that you’re invited to relate to God as intimately as a small child would to his/her father?*

*In what ways do you slip back into relating to God as if you were His servant (“slave” in our text) and not His cherished child?*

*Try praying the answers to those questions back to God, your Abba, as a group or individually.*

## December 17

Titus 3:3-7

The very best stories begin with a problem that seemingly can’t be solved. What a joy it is to reach the part of the story when you find out the amazing way all will be made right. And the conclusion of the story is all the better because of the gratitude for deliverance and help.

*When you read v. 3, how do you feel the weight of our sin problem?*

*Look at v. 4-5. How are these deepest problems solved?*

*We already know how this story will end! What is our hope?*

## December 19

John 14:1-6

If you asked me for directions, I would probably say, “take this road” or “go that way.” If instead I said to you, “I am the road,” you’d be baffled and probably say, “So you want me to drive over you?”

Jesus’ response here sounds crazy; how can a person be “the way, the truth, and the life”? Those are *things*.

Maybe the problem is we make God a thing by forgetting He is a person. When we see God as a map, we use Him to find the treasure.

When we see God as the living and active person He is, we realize He is the treasure. This is why Jesus does not answer Thomas’ question by giving him directions, but by offering him a personal relationship.

*Jesus begins by saying, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” How does knowing that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life put your heart at ease?*

*Have you ever been tempted to think of God as a thing rather than a person? How does that difference affect your relationship with Him?*

## December 14

Romans 6:20-23

According to our verse today, we have a simple but profound choice: we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. We have either given our allegiance to sin or we have offered ourselves to a life of following Jesus. I often think in terms of living my own way, for my own desires versus living God’s way. However, this passage uses the stronger word - “slaves” - and lets us know that either way we have a master - sin or God.

*What differences do you see in the two types of slavery listed in this passage? If you are a slave to God, what does it mean when it says you are set free?*

*How does your outward life reflect to whom you have given your life?*

*In this Christmas season, how can you reflect your master to others?*

*Praise God for His gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## December 16

I Timothy 1:15-17

We are pulled in a lot of directions in December getting ready for the big day! Just think of all the plans you have this month. The list is long. Do you have a moment to consider the meaning of Christmas?

In this passage, Paul takes a moment to voice what he knows is true. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” (v. 15 - Truth)

He recognizes Christ has shown him great mercy and immense patience. (v. 16 - Thankfulness)

He is excited to shout who God is - “all honor and glory to God forever and ever.” - and what He has done for him. (v. 17 - Praise)

Paul describes himself as the “worse of all sinners.” What can we learn from Paul’s description?

*Christ Jesus displayed immense patience with Paul. How has God displayed patience with you? How does that make you feel?*

*How can you follow Paul’s example and speak truth, share thanks and praise God?*

## December 18

Philippians 2:6-8

During Advent, some think about what they will give. Some think about what they will get. Many are occupied with the battle between the two: “I should be focused on giving, but truthfully, I’m more excited about getting.” This passage takes the focus off of what you might give or get and puts the focus on what *He* gave.

*According to v. 6-7 what did Jesus have? What did He give up?*

*What caused Jesus to place His trust in the Father? How would you describe your level of trust in the Father?*

*Notice that what He gave up set Him on a course to experience years of inconvenience, pain, and suffering. To what extent do you expect your own life of following Jesus to be free of inconvenience, pain, and suffering?*

*How did this all turn out for Jesus (see v. 9)? How does a life following Jesus turn out for those who choose it?*

## December 20

Daniel 7:13-14

What a vision! Jesus Christ, the Son of Man being led into the presence of God the Father, the Ancient of Days. In this vision, Daniel sees the coronation of the Son of Man, the Messiah King, who has been given all authority, glory, power and an eternal universal kingdom. At the time of Jesus' birth, the angels prophesied, "He shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give him the throne of David" (Luke 1:32). During his earthly ministry, Jesus refers to himself as the "Son of Man" (Luke 21:27). Daniel's vision also includes the spectacular response to the coronation of the Son of Man – all peoples bowing down, worshipping Him, submitting to Him, and giving Him their allegiance.

*Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matt 16:13). How would you answer that question?*

*What is your response to the coronation of the Son of Man, the Messiah King?*

*How do you picture the eternal universal kingdom of the Messiah King?*

## December 22

Revelation 3:20-22

How many people will you welcome into your home this Christmas season? Family, friends, and neighbors will knock and enter your home, ready to experience the joy of connecting around a table or tree.

As you look and listen this Advent, remember one guest stands out more than all the others - the One through whom the entire universe was created. The One who saw you and loved you, even before the world was created. The One who laid down His life, so you could experience real life. He stands at your door and knocks. He wants to sit with you, not as a guest, but as a friend, sharing a feast with you. And this One who invites us to rule victoriously with Him in the new heaven and earth! May you welcome Him with an open heart this Christmas season, and linger with Him for eternity!

*Who do you most look forward to seeing at your front door?*

*What would you do if you saw Jesus at your front door?*

*How do you respond to Jesus' invitation to come, and share a meal with Him as friends?*

## December 24

Revelation 22:16-17

I hope today's passage is a delightful shock! The risen Jesus identifies himself as the Root and Offspring of David. He is the rightful King of His forever kingdom and one day the peoples of the earth will see Him as a banner and all the people groups will seek Him. Another title He claims is the bright Morning Star, revealing a new day is coming! Then comes the wonderful invitation: "Come!"

This invitation is backed by the entire written Word but it is simple. Let those who hear say, "Come!"

*How might this be like the wedding banquet invitation in Matt. 22:1-14?*

*How does John 7:37-39 inform your understanding of today's passage?*

*How does this wonderful invitation give you hope?*

## December 21

Revelation 1:4-7

Have you ever stepped outside on a snowy winter evening, stood quietly and let the stillness envelope you as the flakes brush your cheeks? Let's imagine that's how it was when Jesus was born. Savor that sense of stillness and silence. Lift your face to Him and know you are loved.

That night, the quiet was quickly broken. Suddenly an angel appeared to terrified shepherds and a host of angels filled the sky. What a celebration for a tiny infant!

Verses 5-6 in today's passage point us, with hope and anticipation, far beyond that helpless infant to Jesus our Savior and King who will come again.

*Have you ever wondered what was going on in heaven before Jesus was born? Perhaps it was silent with anticipation, or the angel choir was practicing.*

*Where can you find silence and stillness as you busily prepare to celebrate the miracle of Jesus' birth?*

*How does John's greeting in Revelation 1:4 lift your eyes beyond Christmas to eternity?*

## December 23

Revelation 22:12-13

Jesus' claim about Himself is stunning here. In three ways He claims His eternal and central role. He is the Alpha and Omega, encompassing all faith, philosophy and mindsets. He is the First and the Last, encompassing all science and creation. He is the Beginning and the End, encompassing the start and the completion of time.

The vastness, the clarity and the simplicity of Jesus' claims are astounding, comforting and humbling. And this God of all we can imagine came as a humble baby. No other god came to us like Jesus. No other god claims centrality like Jesus. No other god came once and will come again. No other god walked this earth. There is no other god. He, alone, deserves our allegiance. Come to the manger. Come and bow to Jesus.

*What comforts and encourages you most about Jesus' claims?*

*What other claims pull you from resting in Jesus' centrality alone?*

*Who can help you wrestle through this?*

## December 25

Revelation 22:20

Recently I visited Israel. In the 'little town of Bethlehem,' a shepherd boy gently placed a week-old lamb in my arms. How pure white it was, how defenseless. How like the Lamb of God.

As I wove through the narrow streets of Jerusalem, for centuries a battleground, the presence of Christ startled me. His peace arose from an Ethiopian lady in a church-owned café. His joy radiated from a juice seller who shouted 'Hallelujah!' as he chopped his oranges in half.

From this polarizing region, "Christmas reminds us that God takes sides," declares Pastor Isaac of Bethlehem. "God chose to suffer with us. God became part of our messy and ugly world."

Born in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ arrived helpless.

Alive today, He grants peace and joy.

Coming again, He promises hope.

"To be a Christian," declares Pastor Isaac, "is to hope." Hallelujah!

*In today's divided world, how will you determine whose side you are on?*