

ADVENT

*Let Every Heart
Prepare Him Room*

WILSON 2025 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

EVENT

Dear Reader,

Advent is the Church's four-week season of waiting, wonder, and holy longing. Each year we look back to Christ's first coming in Bethlehem and we look ahead to His promised return, holding both hope and ache together. This story, however, did not begin in a manger. It began in Eden, echoed in God's covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David, and rang through the prophets who promised light for people walking in darkness. Advent trains our hearts to remember that God keeps His word and that every promise finds its "Yes" in Jesus.

The guide you hold, *Let Every Heart Prepare Him Room: 2025 Advent Scripture Guide*, has been prayerfully and thoughtfully prepared by members of Wilson Community Church, who desire to walk through this season with you. May these daily readings make space for Christ to enter, dwell, and renew your heart. We pray it draws you to Emmanuel, God with us. And, we pray that it will encourage you to take steps everyday to always "Prepare Him Room."

May these bless and encourage you,

Pastor Dave

(and the people of Wilson Community Church)

PREPARE WITH HOPE



PREPARE WITH HOPE

November 30th

*¹³ May the God of hope fill you with
all joy and peace as you trust in
him, so that you may overflow with
hope by the power of the Holy
Spirit.*

Romans 15:13

PREPARE WITH HOPE

Hope as "Knowing"

By Ron Clarkson

The season of Advent is a time of intentional waiting and preparation for the arrival (adventus) of Jesus Christ. It is the season where we light the first candle of hope, a reminder that our hope is not a mere wish, but a sure "knowing" rooted in God's promises. We prepare our hearts not just to remember Christ's first coming in Bethlehem, but also to anticipate His second coming in glory.

In a world often filled with darkness and hardship, hope can seem like a distant light. The ancient prophets, like Isaiah, spoke of a people walking in darkness who would see a great light (Isaiah 9:2-7). That light is Jesus, the "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace".

Preparing for this hope means actively turning our gaze from the temporary troubles of this world to the eternal promise of God's presence. It means cultivating a spirit of vigilance and openness to the needs of others, just as we prepare for the most anticipated guest. It involves introspection and asking ourselves: Where do I need hope in my life right now?

We can prepare our hearts by remembering God's faithfulness in the past. The fulfillment of every Old Testament prophecy in Jesus' birth assures us that He is faithful and will fulfill His promise to return. As we navigate the busyness of the season, let us find stillness, quiet, and rest in this assurance. Our hope is not in our own strength or efforts, but in the power of the Holy Spirit to fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in Him.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we begin this Advent journey, we open our hearts to the true meaning of hope. Help us to fix our gaze on Jesus, the source of our eternal hope. In the midst of our waiting and the challenges we face, remind us of Your promises and Your unfailing love. Fill us with joy and peace through the power of Your Holy Spirit, that we may overflow with hope to those around us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Question to Consider

What is one practical step you can take this week to intentionally "prepare room" in your heart for Christ's hope, rather than getting caught up in the busyness of the season?

For further reflection: Psalm 130:5-6; 1 Peter 1:3-9; Psalm 25:4-5

PREPARE WITH HOPE

Dec 1st

¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Genesis 1:1-5

PREPARE WITH HOPE

Let There Be Light

By David McAdam

Have you ever missed seeing the forest because of all the trees in the way? I have, and it led me to disbelieve the entire Bible for years. So many painful years...

I didn't become a believer in any God or a follower of Christ until I was in college and realized I was viewing both the world and Bible through a tiny, broken lens, and that in a dark room. I learned later that ONLY the Holy Spirit can fix that lens and provide light to see. (1 COR 2:7-16) When I finally made room in my heart and asked God to reveal Himself to me, of course He agreed. He shined His light on my flawed thinking, enabled me to confess my limitations, and then showed me what I was missing in His word. (1 JN 5:14-15)

Genesis 1 was a major problem for my faith. I was a skeptic. I could only "see" the trees with my broken magnifying glass. I thought I "saw" major flaws in Genesis and dismissed the whole Bible as unreliable, poetic philosophy. "What primitive thinking," I thought. Both day and night were created on the 1st day and the sun was not created until the 4th day...what non-sense! I thought if the Bible was really God's word, it could correctly describe what a day was and give a logical order of creation. How could a God-inspired book start with such errors? Obviously, the sun causes light and the earth's rotation causes night and day, so how could the sun have been made 3 days later?

In college, I discovered Genesis 1:1-5 had to be a literal event. It describes God's ability to make something from nothing, something ONLY a being existing before creation can do. God explained what the Big Bang theory cannot. I saw the natural world God made can transform energy into matter and matter into energy (i.e. $E=mc^2$), but it can't create either from nothing. The creation of matter or energy depends on a starting point which includes neither matter or energy. Genesis 1 says it was God's voice alone.

I would also learn that the first three days in Genesis 1 were just like the last "days" in Revelation 22:1-5. God promises that there will be more supernatural "days" when we have light without a sun. When this created world ends and God's eternal kingdom begins, God's light will be the only light we need. Then, we'll see Him clearly, face to face.



I would also learn that the first three days in Genesis 1 were just like the last “days” in Revelation 22:1-5. God promises that there will be more supernatural “days” when we have light without a sun. When this created world ends and God’s eternal kingdom begins, God’s light will be the only light we need. Then, we’ll see Him clearly, face to face.

The Bible is not a collection of chaotic thoughts that can be understood independently, like pine trees; it's more like an aspen grove, a single living organism connected by an underground root network. We should not reject God’s word simply because we don't currently understand it. Our understanding can be flawed, but flawed thinking doesn’t change reality. If we truly want God’s light in our life, we must look in our Bibles in the morning for a risen Son, not for a rising sun. Come Lord Jesus!!!

As you reflect on creation this Advent, ask God to illuminate the areas of your life where disbelief or distraction still clouds your vision. Pray for His light to pierce your understanding and renew your trust in His Word. Then, open your Bible and invite the Spirit to show you something new about who He is—because His truth is never hidden from those who seek Him.



For further reflection: 1 Corinthians 2:7-16; 1 John 5:14-15;
Revelation 22:1-5

“The Creation of the Sun,
Moon, and Plants” (1511)
— Michelangelo, Sistine
Chapel



PREPARE WITH HOPE

December 2nd

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock

and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring^[a] and hers;

he will crush^[b] your head,

and you will strike his heel.”

PREPARE WITH HOPE

Grace in Separation

By Scott & Sharon Sigler

In Genesis 3, we see the first and deepest separation in all creation—the moment when sin entered the world and humanity hid from the presence of God. Yet even in that moment of loss, God's grace spoke a promise: one day, the serpent would be crushed, and communion would be restored. Advent reminds us that this promise was fulfilled in Christ, whose coming began the great reunion between God and His people. As you read the Sigler's reflection, reflect on the ache of separation in your own life—how every longing for reunion, every grief of distance, echoes humanity's longing for God's presence.

Separation is hard but thanks to the grace of God it is only temporary.

Many families in our community have experienced the separation of a service member—usually the husband—being deployed for months at a time. Living in a military town such as Colorado Springs, we often see news coverage of the preparation and ceremony surrounding military units readying for and returning from deployment. For those who have experienced this disruption to family life firsthand, a multitude of emotions arise.

During the times of separation, an emptiness settles within the family structure. An increased burden falls on the remaining spouse: sprinklers need to be blown out, children must be taken to school, dropped off at practice, shuttled to appointments, and cracked toilets need to be replaced. Meanwhile, the deployed spouse carries guilt and sadness over missed birthdays, festivals, pageants, and holiday celebrations.

These feelings of emptiness, frustration, and guilt are not exclusive to military families. Many households endure prolonged absences due to medical hospitalizations, career relocations, or even the separation caused by death.

For both the military husband and wife, however, we know that separation is not meant to be forever. A time of homecoming celebration will come, when the family is made whole again. Revelation 19:7 reminds us, “Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.”

As we remember the nativity and “...prepare Him room,” let us reflect on the words of Matthew 1:23: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).” Just as the bride and husband long to be reunited in homecoming, let us hold fast to the belief that Christ will come for His Church—and God will be with us.



For further reflection: Revelation 19, Matthew 1

PREPARE WITH HOPE

December 3rd

¹² The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

*² “I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

*³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”*

Genesis 12:1-3

PREPARE WITH HOPE

Gift of a Savior

By Cynthia Hagen

Gifts – most of us as children focused on what we would find under the Christmas tree. We spent hours circling items in the Sears Christmas catalog, Toys R Us booklet, or creating Amazon wish lists. Gift giving may emulate the three magi who brought Jesus expensive gold and spices. It could be following the Fathers giving of his son Jesus. But perhaps Christmas gift giving goes back to the Old Testament and the first book of the bible.

God gave Adam and Eve a perfect garden, life and relationship with Himself. We all know how that ended. But God was not okay with the end to relationship with those He created in His image.

A few chapters into the bible, God's story, God unveils His plan to restore relationship.

Genesis 12:1-3 God initiates His redemption plan through Abraham. He makes a covenant with Abraham. God promises several "gifts" to the Abraham. He promises that Abraham's future descendants would become a great nation who would bless all nations. Eighty-year-old Abraham and his seventy-year-old wife Sarai found this shocking and a bit absurd. This gift of offspring didn't come with one day shipping; it took 25 years for the gift of Isaac to be born.

Thousands of years before the birth of Jesus God promised a gift. Through Abraham's line a Savior would be born. God made a covenant that only He could keep. From the beginning of time God's good and kind intention has been to gift each one of us and every nation of the world with relationship through faith in Abraham's descendant and God's own son. Jesus, fully human and fully God is the perfect gift.

God told Abraham that he would be blessed to be a blessing to every nation. We are recipients of that blessing. We are blessed. God created the first "pay it forward" plan and He made the payment through Jesus' death and resurrection. A gift we can never repay but can joyously give to others.

If you have a relationship with God through Jesus, who will you bless by sharing the gift of the gospel? A friend, a co-worker or a person from another nation? Jesus is too good of a gift to keep to yourself. If you have not received the Son, ask Him into your heart and accept the gift of abundant and eternal life.



For further reflection: Genesis 22:15–18; Isaiah 9:6–7; John 3:16;
Romans 4:16–25; Galatians 3:6–9; Ephesians 2:8–9

PREPARE WITH HOPE

December 4th

⁸ “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ⁹ Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

Exodus 25:8-9

PREPARE WITH HOPE

The Heart's Sanctuary

By Phil Ballard

Phil Ballard reflects on the beauty and childlike wonder that fill our hearts during the Christmas season. His reflection reminds us that preparation for Christ's coming is not only about outward activity, but about creating space, within our hearts, for God to dwell, just as He instructed His people to build a sanctuary in the wilderness.

To begin your devotional time today, consider revisiting Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, either by reading the story or watching a favorite adaptation. Like Phil's words, Dickens' tale captures both the longing and renewal that come when a heart is prepared for love's arrival.

As you read, take a moment to reflect:

- In what ways do you usher in the Christmas season with beauty and wonder?*
- Are there habits or distractions that crowd out the meaning of Christmas?*
- What practices help you make room for Christ to dwell within you?*

May this passage and Phil's reflection inspire you to prepare your heart with hope, allowing God's presence to fill every corner of your life.

As we open our hearts for this advent season let us recall the message of our Lord Jesus when he said "If you believe in me you may be called a child of God." As I recall Christmases of my past life I am blessed by recalling the preparation, the anticipation, and the work that comes with Christmas. Most of the work fortunately was done by my parents, church, and extended family. Only as I have entered a more mature season of my life can I appreciate the life long joy and happiness that these events have given me. Yet again I experience with Wilson and the church family that we have here: in our bible studies, life groups, and our worship services can I really relive the presence of God in my life as I experienced it as a child. The warmth, insight, and blessings of fellowship has allowed me to fill my heart with Gods message. God desires to dwell among his people and who knew that the birth of our Savior Jesus the Christ would give us hands on lessons of Gods love for us as we recognize the joy of being a child in his Kingdom. As Jesus reminds us of our Fathers love he also reminds us that "He is with us always until the end of the age." As tiny Tim hopes for us that God blesses us one and all; as Christ reminds us we are his for all time. His house has many rooms and he has prepared one for each of us in his Salvation. May our hearts be full of past and present joy in his presence. Merry Christmas.

For further reflection:

Exodus 40:34–38; Psalm 132:13–16; John 1:14; Matthew 1:23; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Revelation 21:3

PREPARE WITH HOPE

December 5th

¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. ¹⁵ But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

2 Samuel 7:12-16

PREPARE WITH HOPE

The True King

By Shelley McAdam

How much of our lives are spent preparing for the future? Children are asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Then it’s, what college to attend? Where to interview? Where to live? Who to marry? How many children? And, before you know it, you’re planning for retirement and, might I add, even your own funeral, yikes! We spend much time on this all-consuming building project known as our kingdom. But isn’t there more to life than this? This is an age old question, to be sure.

In 2 Samuel 7:12-16 Nathan, the prophet, speaks simultaneously of two kingdoms, King David’s earthly kingdom and his future son (Matthew 21:9), the Messiah, Jesus Christ’s forever kingdom. Known as the Davidic Covenant, God promises that the Messiah will come from David’s line and His kingdom will last forever.

Let’s consider your “kingdom” verses Jesus’ kingdom, where He is the King of kings (Revelation 17:14). Jesus is without sin 1 Peter 2:22, “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” But us? “We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”, Romans 3:23. And we cannot even tame our tongues, James 3:8, “but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” Hmmm, who do I want to be king over my life, someone without sin and deceit or someone sinful and full of deadly poison? It’s a no-brainer for me.

Let’s surrender ourselves completely to Jesus and His kingdom, while pursuing the things that please Him and bring Him joy. We will continue in our worldly responsibilities that clamor for our attention, but we will do it under Christ’s authority, his Lordship, not ours.

How does this happen? First, surrender self-idolatry. We put ourselves on the throne of our hearts, often without realizing it. Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” With sorrow, repent and turn from the sin of self-idolatry, like King David in Psalm 51:17, “My sacrifice, Oh God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”

Second, allow Jesus, the King of kings, to take up kingship of your heart and reign. Allow Him to influence your mind through His word. Paul tells us in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” As our hearts and minds align with His, we will behave in the way He designed us to bring Him great joy as we build His kingdom.



For further reflection: Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 9:6–7; Jeremiah 17:9–10;
Luke 1:31–33; Romans 12:2; Revelation 17:14

PREPARE WITH HOPE

December 6th

*⁷ Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*

⁸ Who is this King of glory?

*The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.*

*⁹ Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*

¹⁰ Who is he, this King of glory?

*The Lord Almighty—
he is the King of glory.*

Psalm 26:7-10

PREPARE WITH HOPE

His Bride

By Mike Somerville

50 years ago today two young Asbury college students made a covenant to one another—yes Linda and I are celebrating our golden anniversary. We were young and naive but we held on to each other and to our faithful God. Has it always been easy? No! But God's faithfulness has been our hope.

Today's passage reminds us of that same hope. David is writing about the Ark of the Covenant being brought back into Jerusalem. The King of Glory. Lift them up that the King of Glory might come in. King of glory" as God, who is powerful and victorious in battle, and commands the armies of heaven.

As we celebrate this Advent we are reminded that Jesus returned to the Father and he is coming back for his bride. Is your heart saying "Come in Lord and make yourself at home!" Today throw open the gates of your heart to Jesus.

50 years ago I remember my amazing bride coming down the isle in all her beauty. Today, I am awaiting with hope, the coming of the King of Glory in all his splendor.

As you reflect on God's faithfulness through the years, take a moment to consider your own covenant with Him. What would it look like this Advent to "lift up the gates" of your heart in a fresh way—to welcome the King of Glory not just as a guest, but as the Lord who reigns? His faithfulness through every season is your greatest hope and joy.



**For further reflection: Isaiah 9:6–7, Revelation 19:11–16,
Philippians 2:9–11**

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE



PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

December 7th

¹⁰ Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:10-14

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

"With"

By Lea Ann Brookens

It was a year ago that my husband of 33 years went from life to death and immediately to eternal life **with** Christ. That very morning I had moved from my office to the living room for my time **with** Jesus. I lit candles in the darkness, turned on the Christmas tree lights and began my yearly Advent reading, "The Wonder of it All", on December 1. As I was getting ready for church, I got the call from the care facility that Eric was on his way in an ambulance to the ER and met them there. Susie, the ER nurse that cared for us all that day, was a Christ-follower and we shared and talked about our Advent readings. She laid hands on Eric and I, and prayed for us. I experienced God being **with** us in powerful ways, even a vision of those waiting for his arrival in heaven (and this girl is not one for visions). I'd written in my journal "it was an excruciating day" but Jesus was **with** us.

That name Immanuel in the Isaiah 7 verse for today literally means "God is **with** us". Around 700 years before Jesus was born, He was given a name! And oh what a beautiful name! As I reflect on this new Advent season and His name, Immanuel, I go back to my journal last year and that new Advent devotion I'd begun the day my husband died. I had experienced such comfort and God's presence even that day – Dave, Tracy, and Indy had come to be **with** us (my friend Robin noticed I wasn't at church and texted me, so shared **with** them) and another dear friend came to the ER to be **with** us that evening. That following Sunday I experienced such joy in the midst of the sorrow just by being **with** friends and loved ones at Wilson. I felt loved. No, that wasn't the right word, it was more than that. I went home that Sunday pondering and was given the answer on day 10 of my Advent reading. This is what I wrote in my journal last year:

Overshadowed by your presence.**** THAT is what I've not been able to articulate these past days as I've felt so loved. But its deeper, it's Your presence manifest through your people. Like Mary in my Wonder Advent devotion today, I have been *overshadowed*. Hugs, words of affirmation for both Eric and I, calls, texts, emails, gifts, services w/needs like moving toilet out of my car, decorating my tree, gifts and cards. A friend coming to help me make my annual peanut butter cups tonight.....



And so.....I have learned that Immanuel truly is **with** me so powerfully through His people. His “manifest presence” through His people. And I’m forever grateful during this Advent season and “get” more and more the Bible’s promise of being “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10). He is Immanuel, God **with** me, even in and especially through the “hard” and sorrows of life. And so I sing....

Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel....
O come, O come, Immanuel

As you finish reading, take a moment to reflect on where you’ve experienced God’s presence in both joy and sorrow. How has He shown Himself as Immanuel—God with you through the people around you? This Advent, let every act of love and comfort you give or receive remind you that His presence is nearer than you think.



For further reflection: Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22–
23; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4



“Sermon on the Mount” (c.1877) — Carl Heinrich Bloch

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

December 8th

*2 The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.*

*3 You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.*

*4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.*

*5 Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.*

*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, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*7 Of the greatness of his government and
peace
there will be no end.*

*He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.*

Isaiah 7:10-14

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

Our Wonderful Counselor

By Gina Scheper

This passage was estimated to be written some 700+ years before the birth of Jesus Christ. The people of Israel at that time were living in extreme hardship, with various tribes of Assyria invading and ruling over them leading to dark times and oppression for God's people. Yet, a prophecy was given, a foretelling of God sending a light and hope to His people that would cut through these dark times. Here we are some 2000+ years later, and we can still find comfort in that same promise God made for sending a light and hope to us all. Our dark times may not look exactly like the times of the people of Israel in 700BC, and more often than not don't even look the same from person to person in our present-day times, but we all go through dark times. Thankfully God has given the answer TO EVERYTHING and FOR EVERYONE! Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! The prophet Isaiah describes this child that will be born as a Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Wonderful Counselor. A counselor is a person trained to give guidance on personal, social or psychological problems. He/she may provide advice, support, and tools to improve one's mental, emotional and personal well-being. When seeking counseling advice, what does one look for in a counselor? Someone who knows all the info about you and your situation to help you make the best decision (Psalms 139)? Perhaps one with strong beliefs, morals, values (Proverbs 27:17)? How about one who can see the outcomes before you can (Jeremiah 1:5)? Or one who has your best interests at heart and wants to see you succeed (Romans 8:28)? There is no better counselor than our Wonderful Counselor. Who better to go first with anything, everything, going on in our lives, then to Jesus? If we need advice on life decisions, big or small? Ask Jesus. If we're struggling? Take it to Jesus. If we're searching for mental clarity or coping strategies? Consult Jesus. There is nothing He can't handle or hasn't seen before, and there is no situation where He is not the solution.

Mighty God. Our God is all powerful, capable of creating the heavens and the earth, and His power surpasses all others. God has the ability to deliver, protect and provide for us amidst our own struggles and battles, just as He did for the people of Israel during Isaiah's time. And we know that He is victorious over all (1 Cor 15:57, 1 John 5:4-5)! Who do you want to have on your side, protecting and defending you? The Mighty God who created the heavens and earth? We have the ultimate victory...and if our God is for us, who can stand against us (Romans 8:31)?



Everlasting Father. We need love. We were made to love and to be loved. And we love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). We can't even imagine loving someone else as much as our Father loves us...to send His only Son to die for our sins (Romans 5:8) and make us whole and right with God again. He is always so tender, faithful, and wise, a profoundly caring provider and ruler. Even when we may not feel love from those around us, we can always depend on the love of our Everlasting Father.

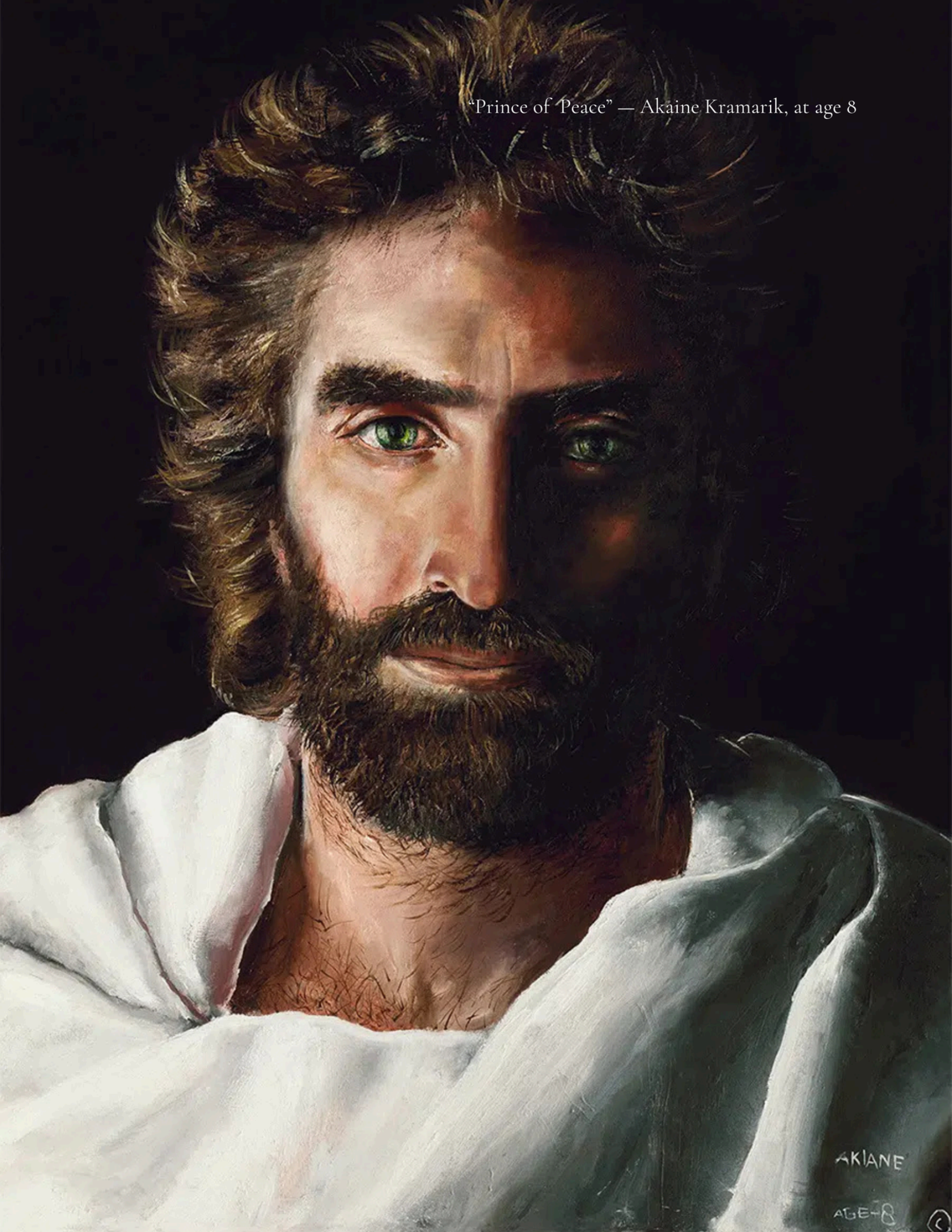
Prince of Peace. Through Jesus, we are given eternal peace, a wholeness, and unity with God that can no longer be separated by our sins. God provides us with a deep spiritual peace knowing that we cannot be separated from Him, even during the most difficult times (John 14:27, Philippians 4:6-7). While we may not always feel His presence during our struggles, He is there and waiting for us to seek Him and to give us peace as He is our rock eternal (Isaiah 26:3-4).

During this holiday season, I pray that this passage finds you surrounded by the love and light of Jesus Christ. And that even if you may find yourself amidst some dark times, struggles, or perhaps feelings of loneliness/despair (as did the Israelites back in 700BC), that you will remember our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace who was sent to this world to save us from all darkness. We can go to Him with everything at any time for counseling, strength, love, and peace. There is no better gift this holiday season than that! Merry Christmas, Wilson Church



For further reflection: Psalm 139, Proverbs 27:17, Jeremiah 1:5,
Romans 8:28, 1 Cor 15:57, 1 John 5:4-5, Romans 8:31, 1 John 4:19,
Romans 5:8, John 14:27, Philippians 4:6-7, Isaiah 26:3-4

"Prince of Peace" — Akaine Kramarik, at age 8



AKIANE

AGE-8



PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

December 9th

The Branch From Jesse

11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;

from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

*2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—*

*3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,*

or decide by what he hears with his ears;

4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy,

with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;

with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

*5 Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*

*6 The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling^a
together;*

and a little child will lead them.

*7 The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*

*8 The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into
the viper's nest.*

*9 They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge
of the Lord*

as the waters cover the sea.

*10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a
banner for the peoples; the nations will rally
to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*

Isaiah 11:1-10

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

When Hope Springs Forth

By Janice Browdues

One of my favorite Christmas gifts is the amaryllis bulb. Have you seen one? They don't look like much - as big as your fist and covered in an onion-like brown paper skin. But oh, what's inside! First come green shoots and soon, huge trumpet-shaped flowers. Life springs forth from these dull, dirty bulbs! One day, you notice a tiny sprig of green on the dead-ish-looking bulb. What is happening? It grows like crazy! The amaryllis is a beautiful picture of this promise from Isaiah! Just like God brings Messiah Jesus at the perfect moment in time - sprouting a sprig from the seemingly dead stump of Jesse - He can breathe new hope into your life. What you thought was a bucket full of dead bulbs is going to yield the most beautiful blooms you can imagine.

Many seasons of my life, in the midst of failure on so many levels, things have seemed hopeless. I've been covered in so much sin and shame that you could peel off layer after layer and never find anything good. Just more dirt and muck. But with God, hope springs forth where life seems cut off.

The day after Lehman Brothers failed in 2008, I lost my job along with 261 others. I'd been there 20 years. I was 55 years old. I thought, "I'll just get another job and life will go on, it might even be better!" (ever the optimist)! Fast forward to one year later, and I'm still job searching. It's not fun anymore. I applied for hundreds of jobs and was rejected every time. But God! That moment in 2008 led to me relocating to Colorado, where God gave me the desires of my heart! A second career at The Navigators, and living life in one of the best places you can be; Colorado Springs. But for that "terrible day", I might have woken up in Indiana this morning!

Ever had that season? Life feels hopeless, the stump is dry, days are long and hope is hard to come by. You put one foot in front of the other, not sure where it will lead. Afraid to hope because you can't take one more disappointment. Hang on, because that's when the sprig shall spring from the stump. It's how God works. Never early, but never late. He's just "gooder" that way!

God never fails. Just as Jesus, his Righteous Branch sprung forth from the stump of Jesse, God can send forth green shoots from the dead stumps in your life. If you're in God's waiting room, please KNOW a shoot will sprout and the sprig will spring forth. God sees you. He has promised and He is faithful.

Let every heart prepare Him room! Make space on your windowsill for an amaryllis! Hold on to hope. As the green shoot sprouts taller and taller and taller and bursts into glorious bloom, praise God for His promises and His mercies.



For further reflection: Isaiah 43:19; Romans 15:12-13; John 15:5

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

December 10th

Comfort for God's People

*40 Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.*

*2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.*

*3 A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord[a];
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.[b]*

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

*5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

*6 A voice says, "Cry out."
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
"All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of
the field.*

*7 The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the Lord blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.*

*8 The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever."*

*9 You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,[c]
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"*

*10 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.*

*11 He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.*

Isaiah 40:I-II

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

Our Comforter

By Dave Carducci

“Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed. That our sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hands double for all her sins.”

Isaiah brings us wonderful news! Our comforter is coming - Our iniquities will be covered and we have the ability to be forgiven and to be blessed by our lord.

After centuries of judgement we hear a tone of coming hope from our Lord through Isaiah - Our savior is coming.

We are as fragile as grasses blown this way and that and weakened by the days of the seasons – We truly can rejoice that our Messiah was near in Isaiah's days and has in fact arrived.

The coming of the Messiah brings us new life. We can now be as it says in John chapter 3 be “Born from above”.

We have all sinned, but the coming of Jesus as foretold by Isaiah tells us that our iniquity can be pardoned. We just need to repent and put our faith in Jesus and the work he did for us on the cross.

Isaiah tells us of a voice crying in the wilderness that proclaims the coming of our Lord Jesus. It took me a long time to hear that voice. I didn't want to really listen to the news. I had entrenched myself in my own version of faith - a ritual, not a relationship. I was truly lukewarm until I was awakened from my hibernation.

I know that I was self righteous and that I never really knew God. I also carried guilt from all my wrongs. I thought that they would never be forgiven. I didn't really understand that true faith signals the understanding that Jesus died for my sins. No amount of good works could make up for my actions. I only needed Jesus!

Once I realized that God loved me as my Father and that he wanted more than anything to have me home with him - I finally saw the truth and truly believed in the Word of God. It wasn't easy but God was patient and led me to faith in his Word.



All this motivated me to dig in and learn more and to understand the evidence so I could strengthen my faith and maybe help others.

I have found in my studies that the word stayed true over the Millennia no matter how heresies tried to change it or men tried to destroy the scriptures and snuff out Christianity. Present day China is a great example. Even though regimes banned it, Christians continue forward. Today the estimated number of Christians in China is over 100 Million.

God always prevails and Isaiah's announcement is so very monumental.

The Messiah is here! The word of God will stand forever. - Behold our God will feed his flock like a shepherd. Do not fear, He is with us. Just open the door and he will come in and walk with you. Thank You Jesus!



For further reflection: Malachi 3:1-4; Mark 1:1-8; Titus 3:4-7

The Return of the Prodigal Son (c.1669) — Rembrandt van Rijn



PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

December 11th

*²“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans^[a] of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”*

*³Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.*

*⁴He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.*

*⁵And he will be our peace
when the Assyrians invade our land
and march through our fortresses.
We will raise against them seven shepherds,
even eight commanders,*

Micah 5:2-5a

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

A Promise Fulfilled

By Alicia Jarvis

I particularly do not like promises. I have had many broken promises in my life. How about you? In today's devotion, God promises that a ruler will come from Bethlehem. Even though Bethlehem was a small town there were some influential characters associated with Bethlehem. In Genesis 35:16-20 we learn that Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, died near Bethlehem when she gave birth to Benjamin. She was buried near Bethlehem. In the book of Ruth, we learn that Ruth came to Bethlehem with Naomi and married Boaz. The prophet Samuel traveled to Bethlehem to anoint a new King from the family of Jesse. That new King, who was David, was going to be the family that God's promise of a new ruler, who would bring peace and shepherd his flock, would be fulfilled. This promise fulfilled is found in Jesus Christ who is the ultimate ruler and shepherd who is peace.

I googled the meaning of a Biblical promise and this is what I found; "In the Bible a promise is a divine guarantee rooted in God's character, rather than a mere hopeful wish. These promises are seen as certain, unchanging, and dependable, covering every area of life." I find encouragement in the words of 'divine guarantee rooted in God's character' because I can lean on those promises and not the broken promises in my life. I can live in security knowing that Jesus' greatness not only reaches to the ends of the earth but reaches into every aspect of my life. If you are struggling with anything, I encourage you to discover, claim, and hold onto God's unchanging and dependable promises. I pray that you can find security, strength, peace, and comfort in the promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Reflection:

- *When have you struggled to trust a promise because of past disappointment?*
- *How does knowing that God's promises are "a divine guarantee rooted in His character" reshape your understanding of trust?*
- *What promise of God do you need to cling to most closely this Advent season?*

For further reading: Matthew 2:1-6, John 10:11-16, Luke 1:68-75

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

December 12th

³ “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty.

² But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Malachi 3:1-4

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

Refined by His Promise

By Richard Beckham

The prophet Malachi foretold a time when God would return to his temple to dwell again with his people. He would first send a messenger to prepare the way. Then the Lord would arrive, purifying the hearts of those who serve in his presence. This prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist, the preparer, and Jesus, the Lord who purifies hearts. Not long after I became a Christ-follower in college, I sensed that something was off. God felt distant, and with that distance came a loss of peace and joy. I couldn't understand why.

At the time, I had a roommate whom I deeply resented. He was self-absorbed, treated me as if I had no worth, and continued to do things that irritated me. My anger and resentment grew until I refused to even speak to him. I truly despised him.

During that season, I began reading the Bible for the first time. Gradually, I became aware that God wanted me to forgive this man—not only forgive him, but love him. I couldn't bring myself to do it. I resisted, insisting that he deserved my contempt. But as I wrestled with it, I realized my feelings went deeper. This man reminded me of my sister, whom I also deeply hated. The things I saw in him mirrored what I saw in her—and how she had wounded me. I magnified their faults, seeing only what was wrong. I couldn't let go of my bitterness.

Like the Israelites whom Malachi addressed, my problem was a hardened heart. God desires to draw close to us, but a hardened heart stands in the way. Neither we nor the Israelites have the ability to change our hearts on our own. Our only hope is in the God who promises to step in—to refine and purify us from within.

For the first time, I stopped making excuses and admitted my need to God. Whenever anger or resentment surfaced, I asked Him to forgive me and help me love. It took time, but I kept asking. Then, after several weeks, a miracle happened. One day, as I felt anger rising toward my roommate, I silently cried out to God for help. Instead of my anger intensifying as it usually did, it was suddenly replaced with peace and compassion. God was keeping His promise. He was renewing my heart.

As a result, my relationship with God was revived—and, astonishingly, I was even able to reconcile with my sister. Since then, I've had to turn to God many times to confront the lingering hardness in my heart. It's often a struggle, but God continues to change me, just as He promised.

This Advent, may we remember God's promises fulfilled in Jesus. Trust Him to forgive you and to make the necessary changes in your heart. Don't give up. He loves you—and longs to draw near.



**For further reflection: Matthew 10:7-10, Matthew 3:1-12,
Revelation 3:19-20**

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

December 13th

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹ The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵ "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

PREPARE WITH REPENTANCE

We Can Always Trust God & His Timing

By Lynette Smith

The Bible passage tells of a priest, Zechariah, who was visited by the Angel Gabriel who announced Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth would soon conceive and bear a son to be named John. Now Zechariah and Elizabeth were both well on in years and Elizabeth had never been able to get pregnant so Zechariah voiced his disbelief that this could possibly happen. The Angel Gabriel replied that he had stood in the very presence of God to receive the message that he was to deliver to Zechariah. And, because of Zechariah's disbelief, the Angel Gabriel declared him mute until the actual birth occurred.

How often do we do just the same thing as Zechariah? We pray for something we know the Lord would want for us but do not receive it. Then weeks or months later something much grander and better than what we originally prayed for lands in our lap. Our Heavenly Father has already planned the best path for us and if we are prepared to listen and wait will bring greater blessings than we can imagine.

Scripture continues telling us Zechariah's wife Elizabeth received the news with joy and faith and soon conceived. She was delighted that the Lord would bless her and Zechariah with a son and that she would no longer be the woman in their village who could not produce a child. She had waited so long for this wonderful thing to happen to them. Zechariah and Elizabeth became parents of John the Baptist at exactly the right time (God's time) in their lives.

As we prepare for the coming of Christ, help us to wait faithfully and trust in God's perfect timing.

Reflection:

- *Where have you grown weary in waiting for God to act?*
- *What might He be shaping in your heart during that waiting?*
- *How can you trust that His silence is not absence but preparation?*



For further reflection: Habakkuk 2:3, Isaiah 40:31, Galatians 4:4-5

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP



PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

December 14th

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

³⁴ "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[a] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."

³⁸ "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

True Worship Flows from Surrender

By Indiana & Cassie Martin

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, his message was astonishing. She would bear the Son of God — though she was young, unmarried, and from an ordinary town. This moment could have filled her with fear, doubt, or resistance. Yet, her response is one of pure worship: “I am the Lord’s servant.” (vs. 38)

Worship isn’t only a song or a Sunday moment; it’s a life posture. We see worship happen in all kinds of ways and in all kinds of places - we see it in sporting arenas, in concert venues, in Amazon shopping carts, and on the pages of our calendars, but here is the deal; **true worship flows from surrender** — a “yes” to God even when His plans are beyond our understanding and comfort.

True worship can be seen whenever an individual’s posture is that of “I love you God, and because of that I surrender myself to You, I surrender my desires to You, I surrender my perspectives and opinions to You, I surrender my plans to You...do whatever You want to!”

Where is God asking you to trust Him beyond your comfort or understanding?

Mary’s worship wasn’t in a temple or with music playing. It was in her humble obedience, her willingness to trust God’s word over her circumstances.

When Mary said yes, she entered into the greatest story ever told. Her surrender became a sacred act of worship that changed the world. **Are you willing to believe the same can be true with you and your yes?**

With every act of obedience, and in every moment we trust God’s promises, becomes worship. When we say, “Lord, have your way in me,” we echo Mary’s heart of faith.

How might saying “yes” to God today become an act of worship in your life?

As we step into this third week of Advent, and as we prepare Him room, would you be brave enough to pray this prayer?

Lord, like Mary, I want to respond to Your call with faith and surrender.

Help me to worship You not only with my words but with my obedience.

Let my “yes” become a song that honors You. Amen.



If you feel a tug on your heart to further explore “surrender as worship”, please also look at: **Proverbs 3:5-6, Psalm 37:5, Luke 9:23, Romans 12:1, and Galatians 2:20**
After spending time in this devotional, would you also take exactly 5 minutes and 51 seconds to worship God as you take a step towards surrender? Scan here:



PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

December 15th

Mary Visits Elizabeth

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Mary's Song

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors."

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

Have Joy: God Cares

By Ann Koeningsman

These beautiful verses tell us about a visit between Mary and her relative Elizabeth. Both of these women had received joyful news from God. Mary was pregnant with a baby named Jesus, and Elizabeth, who was advanced in age, was pregnant with a baby named John. When Mary greeted Elizabeth, the baby inside Elizabeth “jumped” with joy. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and told Mary that she and her baby were blessed by God.

Imagine receiving this message from your cousin! Mary showed compassion to her relative by coming to visit and then staying to help her older cousin with her pregnancy and likely the birth of her child. This must have been a very sweet time for both women. Mary’s visit lasted for about three months.

From Elizabeth’s greeting, Mary sang a beautiful song of praise where she thanked God for choosing her for this blessed mission, lowly and humble that she was. She acknowledged that God is mighty and holy, that He helps those who are lowly and hungry and that He cares for His people.

This passage tells us that God keeps His promises and blesses people who trust Him, even when we are lowly or afraid. Like Mary and Elizabeth, we can praise God and be thankful to Him for the good things He does in our lives and for His kindness.

Most of us have not experienced anything close to the miracles evident in this passage, but we have experienced God working in our lives. When a chapter of our life suddenly closes, it can feel bewildering and lonely. Our faith in Jesus helps us know that we will experience joy again and that God cares about our grief and loneliness. We can cling to our faith and move forward. What a miracle that can be!

For even more context, especially on the message that Elizabeth and her husband received from the angel Gabriel, read Luke 1:1-38 as well. What an amazing conversation Zechariah had with the angel Gabriel in the temple!

Reflection:

- *When have you experienced God’s presence through the encouragement of another believer, like Mary and Elizabeth?*
- *How might you express praise to God this week, even in uncertain circumstances?*
- *What “small miracles” in your life might be reasons to magnify the Lord today?*



**For further reflection: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Psalm 34:1-10;
Romans 12:9-16**

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

December 16th

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^[a]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^[b] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[c] because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”^[d] (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

The Carpenter's Yes

By Chris Jennings

Scripture Focus: Matthew 1:18–25

I absolutely love the Gospel of Matthew! Think about it: a tax collector, someone who once squeezed money out of his own people, is now a disciple pouring his heart out to show them how Jesus fulfills every single Old Testament promise. It's a historical goldmine into the Jewish world of Jesus's time.

And unlike Luke, who gives us that tender, beautiful cradle scene, Matthew just slams us right into a crisis! He starts with a royal ledger: sixteen verses of names marching from Abraham to David to Joseph... and then verse 18 hits us with a scandal. Forget the inn, the wise men, or the shepherds for a minute. We're thrust into Joseph's gut-wrenching crisis of conscience and a glorious, dramatic example of holiness through obedience.

Read the text:

Here's the core message: True righteousness isn't about rigid rule-keeping to save your reputation; it's about reputation-losing obedience that actually makes room for Christ.

Let's look at Joseph. He was a solid carpenter, known around Nazareth as *dikaioi* in the Scripture (meaning upright, Torah-observant, and faithful to his covenant with God). That same word is used for Noah, Job, David, and even Jesus Himself in the NT! Joseph had a quiet, respectable life all planned out: betrothal to Mary, a wedding, a future. Life was good... until the bomb dropped in verse 18.

The Greek is brutally direct: "She was found with child of the Holy Spirit" (v. 18). Imagine Matthew's original Jewish readers gasping! This was CRAZY... betrothal was legally binding, and a breach meant adultery, which could be punishable by death (Deuteronomy 22:23–24).

Joseph faces a truly impossible choice (v. 19):

- A public divorce upholds the Law but could brand Mary for disgrace and possible stoning.
- A quiet divorce spares her life but leaves Joseph absorbing the shame. He becomes the guy who "couldn't keep his wife pure."

His first plan of a quiet divorce was logical, legally righteous, and self-protective. It followed the letter of the Law with compassion. Then, an angel of the Lord breaks into his sleep with a message from God: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife..." (v. 20).

And then we see Joseph's incredible response: he's quick, obedient, and decisive. "When Joseph woke from sleep, he did (*poieō*) as the angel commanded." There's no back-and-forth dialogue or deliberation. He rose, took Mary home, got married, took care of her and named the child Jesus as he was told once He was born.

This incredibly tough act of obedience was HUGE. It was a reputation-shredding "yes." By taking Mary as his wife, Joseph legally adopted the Son of God into King David's royal line. He didn't protect his good name; he risked it completely to keep God's promise. His silent, supporting role became the absolutely essential earthly doorway through which Christ entered the world, exactly as the Old Testament foretold.



John Wesley consistently taught that genuine saving faith is always evidenced by holiness of heart and life, which means full, practical obedience to God's commands. For Wesley, this wasn't mere outward conformity or "rule-keeping" for reputation's sake (which he'd call "filthy rags"), but a sincere, loving surrender that flows from a heart transformed by grace—what he termed "social holiness."

Joseph's decision perfectly embodies this:

- Saving Mary's life showed love and compassion over strict, cold legalism.
- Obeying the angel regardless of the societal cost demonstrated a courageous, sanctified will.
- Risking his reputation was the outward, practical fruit of his inner faith.

Making Him Room in Our Lives

Joseph's story is the very pattern for both the new birth and sanctification in our lives. It's not enough to be outwardly "righteous" by convenient rule-keeping. We are called to sacrifice comfort, pride, and our reputation to obey God's disruptive Word.

As 1 Samuel 15:22 says, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice..."

Today, take a honest look at your heart. Where is God calling you to trust His Word over a comfortable reputation? The courage to obey, even when it costs your earthly standing, is the very act that makes room for Christ to be born in us and through us. Let's rise from the sleep of self-protection. Your quiet, surrendered "yes," even when it feels messy or illogical, is the greatest preparation you can make for Emmanuel's presence—God with us.

Prayer for today:

Heavenly Father, grant us the courageous faith of Joseph. When fear, self-interest, or the easier way tempts us, wake us from the sleep of self-protection. Redefine our righteousness as risk-taking obedience to Your Word. Give us the strength to set aside our pride and reputation, so our surrendered "yes" becomes the pivotal, earthly doorway for Christ to be born anew in our hearts, through our actions, and in the world around us. Make us faithful in the supporting roles You assign, preparing room for Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.



**For further reflection: 1 Samuel 15:22, Proverbs 29:25,
and Hebrews 11:8.**



“Joseph the Carpenter” (c.1642) — Georges de la Tour

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

December 17th

The Birth of John the Baptist

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, ⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.”

⁶¹ They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”

⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

Luke 1:57-66

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

Enduring Sadness

By Mary Frances McCullum

After months of silence, Zechariah's first words were an act of obedience—and an act of worship.

When he confirmed his son's name as "John," the promise of God came full circle. His tongue was loosed, his heart overflowed with praise, and those around him were filled with awe. As you read, reflect on how obedience—especially in seasons of waiting or pain—can open the door to renewed joy and restored faith.

Zechariah obeyed God. He named his son John. John was a prophet sent by God to preach to the people—who were waiting for the Messiah—to repent and be baptized. He dressed in sackcloth and ate honey and locusts. He was not a proud man but a lover of God. Jesus Christ the Messiah came, and we celebrate this at Christmas. As we wait to again celebrate the coming of Christ into our world, let us show to all we encounter, whether friend or foe, that we have received Christ as Lord and Savior by our love and care for them.

John faithfully followed God's direction to tell of the Messiah's coming. He cared for the people he ministered to and for those he encountered. May we do the same in our time. It is not always easy, but the Holy Spirit living within us will give us the power and strength if we call upon Him. I know this to be true.

As to the worldly celebration of Christmas with family, due to long-standing estrangement issues, my Christmases have been difficult. In the midst of going through the motions of the season, God's grace—and my willingness to endure the sadness—always seemed to bring me to a moment where joy and peace arrived. This reminded me again that Christ is where the joy is.

When have you felt silenced by sorrow or disappointment, unsure if joy would ever return? Like Zechariah, sometimes the breakthrough comes not through understanding, but through simple obedience. This Advent, invite God to meet you in the quiet places of your heart. Ask Him to turn waiting into worship and to remind you—again and again—that Christ Himself is where joy begins and where it is made complete.



For further reflection: Psalm 30:5, James 1:2–4, John 16:22

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

December 18th

Zechariah's Song

⁶⁷ His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸ “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,

because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn^[a] of salvation for us

in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

⁷¹ salvation from our enemies

and from the hand of all who hate us—

⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors

and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,

and to enable us to serve him without fear

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;

for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation

through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness

and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit^[b]; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Luke 1:67-80

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

Break from Silence

By Abby Jennings

Luke 1:67–80 (The Benedictus)

Luke, that doctor turned historian, captures a powerful moment of transition here: an old priest named Zechariah goes from doubtful silence to a booming prophetic declaration. He'd become forcibly mute for nine months—a consequence of doubting the angel's promise. But when his voice finally returns, it bursts out in an "explosive song" known as the Benedictus.

Read the text: From Doubtful Silence to Complete Obedience

Remember Zechariah? He was an elderly priest who questioned the angel Gabriel's announcement that his barren wife, Elizabeth, would have a son (John the Baptist). His doubt literally shut his mouth. That nine-month period of quiet wasn't just punishment; it was a lesson. Doubt had closed his mouth, and the Lord used that silence to reshape his heart and fill it with faith.

When his miracle baby is born and his name is confirmed as John, Zechariah's tongue is instantly freed. What floods out isn't a complaint or a cautious whisper, but a deep, profound song of prophecy and praise.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zechariah declares the victory is already won: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people..." (v. 68). Think about that! The King is still months away from birth, yet the redemption is declared accomplished.

He then turns to his infant son, proclaiming his calling: to be a prophet who will "go before the Lord to prepare his ways... to give light to those who sit in darkness" (v. 76, 79).

The message is clear for us: Salvation breaks like a sunrise into our darkness, and preparing Him room means using our voices to declare it with praise!

We all know the experience of silence: the anxiety we tuck away, the unanswered prayer that hushes our voice, the shame that mutes our witness. Yet, Advent calls us to break free from this. The Dawn from on high is coming "because of the tender mercy of our God" (v. 78).

God doesn't want our polite, worried whispers; He wants the kind of prophetic shout that proclaims redemption has arrived. The same Spirit who loosed Zechariah's tongue is ready to fill ours with praise. Your voice.. whether cracked, tear-soaked, or trembling is the exact instrument God wants to announce the Light.

Your voice is essential. This Advent, let's stop clinging to the silence of fear, failure, or small faith. Let every testimony, every song, and every whispered "Thank You" become a beam of light piercing someone's darkness, clearing the path for the Rising Sun.

Today's Prayer:

Father, you took a priest full of doubt and transformed him into a loud, joyful announcer of your glorious plan. Please do that in us, too! Break the silence that comes from our fear, our shame, and our weak faith. Fill our mouths with prophetic praise—the kind of shout that truly clears the way for Jesus, the Rising Sun. Let your gentle mercy, the same mercy that inspired Zechariah, pour into our lives. Let every story we tell, every song we sing, and every honest "Thank You" we whisper become a ray of light for someone who's in a dark place. We declare it now: The Light has come, and He is still coming! Amen.



For further reflection: Psalm 126:5–6, Romans 15:13



"The Visitation" (c. 1491) — Domenico Ghirlandaio

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

December 19th

The Birth of Jesus

² In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while^[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Luke 2:1-7

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

Slowing Down

By Krista Morgan

I've always loved Christmas — the lights, the carols, the beauty of Advent, and the quiet moments that draw us back to the true reason we celebrate. But Christmas took on a whole new meaning the year I became a mother.

Our son Alden was just five months old for his first Christmas. During that season, I often found myself looking at him and thinking about Jesus — how the Savior of the world came as a tiny, fragile baby, fully human and completely dependent. I'd rock Alden to sleep and wonder: Did Mary ever feel overstimulated or exhausted? Did she have moments of insecurity as her body changed? Did Joseph ever feel uncertain or afraid? Those questions made the nativity story feel alive and deeply personal in a new way.

That year, I slowed down. Having a baby has a way of forcing you to pause — the rhythm of feedings, contact naps, bedtime routines. In that slowness, I found space for wonder again — space to treasure what God was doing right in front of me.

But I'll be honest — even now, as our family grows and we've welcomed our newest little one, Caleb, I still wrestle with busyness. Even in the quiet of the newborn stage, it's easy for my mind to race ahead to all that needs doing. Between caring for three boys, managing the home, running a business, and the endless lists that come with this season, I find my heart at times filling up with everything but the One we're meant to celebrate.

And yet, that's exactly what Luke 2 shows us. Bethlehem was bustling. Every room was full. The world carried on with its business, unaware that the greatest miracle in history was happening quietly in a stable. There was no room in the inn — not out of hostility, but distraction.

How often do we do the same? Not deliberately pushing Jesus aside, but simply crowding Him out with the weight of our schedules, responsibilities, and noise.



Preparing Him room isn't about clearing our calendar; it's about realigning our hearts. It's choosing to worship — not just with songs on Sunday, but in the stillness of everyday moments. Worship in the middle of the mess. Worship when the baby and toddler finally fall asleep. Worship when the kitchen is quiet and the soft glow of the tree reminds us that His light still shines in the darkness.

When we prepare Him room through worship, we make space for His presence in the midst of our ordinary. The stable may have been humble and imperfect, but it became holy because He was there. The same can be true of our homes, our hearts, and our lives.

This Advent, may we not just admire the story of His birth — may we live it. May we welcome Him, not as an afterthought squeezed into the margins, but as the center of it all.

Let's slow down enough to notice Him — to worship in the wonder, to rest in His presence, and to prepare Him room in every corner of our lives.

Reflection:

Where have I filled my life so full that there's little room left for Jesus?

How can I prepare Him room this season — not through doing more, but by worshiping more deeply?



For further reflection: Psalm 46:10; Matthew 11:28–30;
Revelation 3:20



The Angelus (c.1857–59) — Jean-François Millet

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

December 20th

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke 2:8-20

PREPARE WITH WORSHIP

Worship Through Availability

By Charles & Cimberly White

It was just another night for the shepherds: cold, dark, and quiet. They were out in the fields doing what they always did: watching over their sheep, keeping predators away, and staying awake until dawn.

In first-century Israel, shepherds weren't known for status or education. They lived on the edges of society, often viewed as too dirty or untrustworthy to worship in the Temple. No one expected God to choose them for anything special.

But God did.

“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.” (Luke 2:9)

The first announcement of Christ's birth didn't go to kings or priests, it went to night-shift workers. God revealed His glory not to the powerful, but to those who were simply present and available.

The shepherds' story reminds us that God's presence isn't confined to sacred spaces. He meets people in the middle of ordinary tasks, when they are faithful with what's in front of them.

Martin Luther expressed this truth beautifully in “The Estate of Marriage”. Reflecting on the holiness of everyday life, he wrote that when a parent rocks a baby, washes diapers, and cares for their child, “God, with all His angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.”

Luther's point was radical for his time: the woman changing a diaper and the priest preaching a sermon stand equal before God when both act for His glory. God delights not just in what we do, but why we do it, when our ordinary work becomes an act of love offered to Him.

In many ways, the shepherds embodied that same truth. Their response to God was simple and sincere. When the angels left, they didn't debate or delay. They turned their faith into action, letting their ordinary obedience become worship.



“Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.” (Luke 2:15)

Their worship began not with singing, but with movement. They said yes to God’s invitation, and that yes led them straight to Jesus. Availability is the beginning of all worship, the willingness to let God interrupt us, surprise us, and send us.

When the shepherds returned to their fields, the world around them hadn’t changed, but they had.

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God.” (Luke 2:20)

The same fields, the same sheep, the same work, now filled with joy. Their work became worship because their hearts had encountered Christ. The same can be true for us. Our homes, workplaces, and daily routines can become altars of praise when we approach them with open hands and hearts, ready to see God in the simple and to serve Him with joy.

Reflection

- *Where might God be inviting you to notice His presence in the ordinary, unnoticed parts of your life?*
- *How can you practice availability this week—allowing God to interrupt your routines with His purposes?*
- *What everyday task could become an act of worship if done for God’s glory rather than merely out of obligation?*



For further reflection: 1 Samuel 16:7; Colossians 3:23–24; James 4:8



"The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds" (1634) — Rembrandt van Rijn

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE



PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

December 21st

The Magi Visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi^{1a} from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

*6 “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’^{1b}”*

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

Even the Devil Believes in God

By Logan & Anna Mays

“PUT THAT DOWN!”

We’ve all heard it—and most of us have said it. Maybe to a toddler holding something breakable, or maybe you remember hearing it yourself as a child, reaching for your mother’s fine china or your father’s tools—things you didn’t yet understand the value of. The phrase is familiar, but it raises a question: Is that all obedience is? Is it just listening because we have no choice?

If we’re honest, obedience often feels that way. It’s easy when we understand the reason, but much harder when we don’t. Yet God calls us to something infinitely deeper than reluctant compliance—He calls us to communion. But here’s the danger: we often confuse distraction for peace and comfort for closeness. The slow drift from obedience rarely feels like rebellion—it feels ordinary. C. S. Lewis captures this perfectly in *The Screwtape Letters*, where a demon warns that the surest path away from God is not rebellion, but distraction: *"It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing...the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones..."*

In other words, the Enemy doesn’t need to turn us against God outright. He just needs to convince us that there’s something better to do than to walk with Him. But obedience isn’t a dull rule to keep; it’s a relationship to pursue. Even the devil believes in God—he knows who God is. What he does not have is union with God. Obedience is what opens that door. To obey is to step into the very life for which we were created.

Aristotle and many of the ancient Greeks viewed the world through a different lens than we do today. They believed that everything in creation had a purpose or end for which it was made. And what made a thing good? Fulfilling that purpose. Take a simple example: a knife. What makes a knife “good” or “bad”? It’s not about morality; it’s about function. A good knife is one that cuts well, because it fulfills the purpose for which it was created. In the same way, goodness in human life isn’t defined by comfort or success but by whether we live according to the purpose for which we were created.

So what makes a good human? What does it mean to fulfill our divine design? A good human is one who lives according to the purpose for which they were made. We were created to know, love, and obey God. Sin dulls us—it makes us less capable of doing what we were designed for. But obedience sharpens us again. When we walk in step with God, we are most alive, most human, most good.



The most virtuous knife is one that cuts cleanly; the most virtuous human is one who lives in harmony with the will of God. To obey Him is not to lose freedom—it's to live in it. It's to become who we were always meant to be. And what could be better than that? Obedience is the best thing in the world. It is joy itself—the joy of harmony between creature and Creator. It is what every restless heart is really searching for.

That's why the wise men's journey in Matthew 2 matters so much. They weren't just following a star; they were chasing communion. They traveled far, suffered discomfort, and risked their safety—all for the chance to worship God face to face. That's what obedience looks like when it's alive. It's not about fear, guilt, or self-protection. It's about love burning with purpose.

So chase Him. Seek Him with an undying fury. Obey because it is the joy of your design, the fulfillment of your creation. And when you fail, remember—you are already loved, already saved, already His. Your obedience will not earn His favor; it will simply let you live inside it.

Reflection:

- Where have you settled for believing in God instead of walking with Him? What would it look like this week to treat obedience not as duty, but as delight—the very thing you were made for?
- Today, think of three ways your family sometimes prioritizes other things above God. (Hint: They might be good things—just not the best thing.) Talk about how you could reorder your hearts and time to honor Him first.



For Further reflection: John 14:23, 1 Samuel 15:22, Matthew 7:13–14, Matthew 5–7, Revelation 21



"Adoration of the Magi" (c.1481) — Leonardo da Vinci (unfinished)

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

December 22nd

²¹ On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

Jesus Presented in the Temple

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”^[a]), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”^[b]

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss^[c] your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,
³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

³³ The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

The Promise That Sustains

By Sam & Baylor Tshappler

In Luke Chapter 2, we briefly meet a man named Simeon. Simeon does not appear again in Scripture; there are other individuals named Simeon in various places throughout the Gospels, but we hear nothing more of this particular Simeon.

He seems to appear from nowhere, spot the baby Jesus, praise God for letting him live to see this day, deliver a rather cryptic prophecy, and vanish. And yet, this brief passage teaches as much through the things it does not say, as it does through the things it does say. We do not know how long Simeon waited between receiving this promise and seeing its fulfillment. We do not know whether he struggled with doubt and uncertainty. We do not know how long after this event he lived.

But we know that he held on to the promise he was given, until he saw it fulfilled.

Waiting on the promises of God is one of the greatest tests of faith we endure. Even in the midst of other desperate times full of pain, suffering, fear or regret, it is often the waiting, the uncertainty about a future we have no power to affect, that we find the most difficult. And this waiting becomes exponentially more difficult as we become more uncertain how long we will have to wait.

David spent much of his life waiting. Throughout the Psalms we see a man desperate for God to act, crying out day and night for God to act, to punish the wicked and to uphold the righteous. And David knew, much like we must know, that God could have acted at any time. Why do you wait? Why have you not yet made this right? Time and time again David's cry goes up, desperate and longing for these trials to be over, for the promise to be fulfilled.



And yet David held on to the promise he was given, until he saw it fulfilled.

This is why the absences in Simeon's story matter to us. We are not told whether or not he struggled. Maybe he was steadfast and faithful, like David and Job, who suffered but never once doubted or turned their back on God. Maybe he doubted and sinned in his doubt, like Abraham who fathered Ishmael because he thought there might be a technicality to God's promise, or Zechariah who had his mouth sealed until his new son was born because of his doubt.

These things did not matter to Simeon's story, and they do not matter to us.

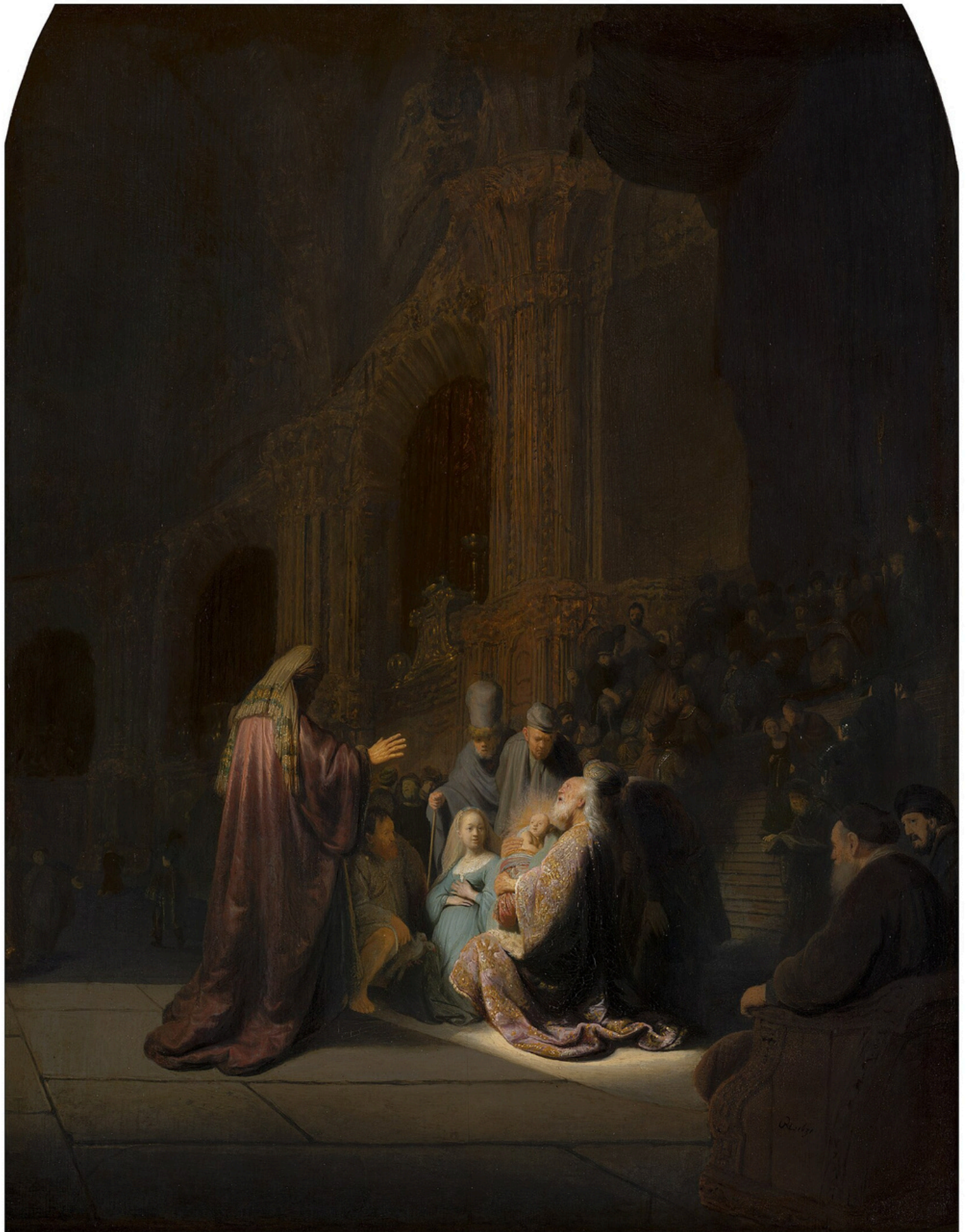
At the end of the day, it does not matter how many times we trip and fall. It does not matter whether our race is graceful, whether we have the respect and admiration of other Christians for the strength of our faith or the peaceful obedience of our lives. Nor does it matter if our race is swift, as if somehow "progressing" in our faith faster or slower than someone else truly makes a difference to who we are in God's eyes.

It does not matter how many times we cry out to God in pain and fear and despair, begging Him to let this end. It does not matter how many times our own sinful natures overwhelm us, and the guilt and shame makes us feel unworthy and undeserving, as if we could ever be deserving in our own power anyway.

What matters is that we hold on to the promises we are given, until we see them fulfilled.



For further reflection: Ephesians 6:13; Psalms 27:13; Hebrews 10:23;
Deuteronomy 31:6; Isaiah 40:31



"Simeon's Song of Praise" (c.1631) — Rembrandt van Rijn

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

December 23rd

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.[a] She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Luke 2:36-38

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

Anticipation

By Glen & Michele Wood

The Christmas season is a time of anticipation. Children can't sleep waiting for school vacation, presents, and gingerbread houses. In Luke 2 we see an elderly prophet named Anna faithfully waiting as well. She spent all of her time worshipping and fasting at the temple in Jerusalem. And finally, she saw in person what we celebrate every year. She saw baby Jesus, our Messiah. She confirmed who Jesus was along with Simeon. Our excitement at Christmas mirrors what Anna experienced. And over 2000 years later we also celebrate and confirm that Jesus is in fact our Messiah. We remind our church family to anticipate and expect Jesus to show up in our lives just as Anna did.

Questions for further reflection:

- *Where in your life are you waiting for God to move—and how can Anna's faithfulness encourage you in that season?*
- *How might you make space, like Anna did, for worship, prayer, or quiet expectation during this busy time of year?*
- *What does it look like for you to “look forward to the redemption” Jesus brings in your own daily life?*



For further reflection: Luke 2:25–35; Isaiah 40:28–31; Psalm 27:13–14;
Psalm 130:5–6; Titus 2:11–14

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

December 24th

The Incarnation of the Word of Life

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

Light and Darkness, Sin and Forgiveness

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

² My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Love and Hatred for Fellow Believers

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹ But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

Reasons for Writing

¹² I am writing to you, dear children,
because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

¹³ I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

¹⁴ I write to you, dear children,
because you know the Father.
I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God lives in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

Love Initiates

By Bob Meredith

Love initiates. Godly love initiates unconditionally.

Jesus (God the Son) took a huge risk in initiating and moving toward us.

Uninvited. Semi-expected, but NOT in the form He would choose to come in. Still, He came. He **CHOSE** to leave Heaven, move toward us and live among us.

He came unconditionally. He did not do a survey trip. He did not require a minimum number of humans agree to believe in Him **BEFORE** He left heaven. He just came in accordance with God the Father's perfect plan.

He took a risk because His love for us compelled Him to obey and come.

Recently I spent a week changing a lot of diapers for our daughter's new twin sons. I noticed how helpless they are, how vulnerable they were to their big brother's attempts to play with them. How dependent they are on a human to feed and change them. And...Jesus **CHOSE** to start like **THAT**?

Imagine a conversation between the Son and His Father before He (Jesus) left on this "trip":

God the Son: "So, yeah, I'll just go down there and start like **THAT**, an infant!"

God the Father: "Are they expecting you?"

God the Son: "A few are. Mom definitely. My earthly Dad just looks compliant. He thinks a lot. One cousin got rather excited when he heard I was coming. He flipped out."

God the Father: "You have a backup plan?"

God the Son: "No, not really. I mean, **DO** we??"

God the Father: "...and...say... in 30 years, if they **DON'T** receive you?"

God the Son: "I'm going anyway. Love initiates."

God the Father: "OK, lemme hold that for ya, you won't be gone long eternally speaking."

And so...the Word became flesh and lived among us. For a while. Some received Him, some have not. He **CHOOSE** to come anyway. **Who will I initiate moving toward in love** – without first asking, "But, what if...?" and without requiring a response? Godly love initiates. Unconditionally.



For further reflection: 1 John 4:9–10; Philippians 2:5–11;
Romans 5:6–8

LET US REJOICE
FOR OUR SAVIOR IS
BORN



PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

December 25th

⁴ But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.^[a] ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba,^[b] Father.” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 4:4-7

PREPARE WITH OBEDIENCE

"Abba"

**By Pastor Dave, Your brother and fellow housemate
(and fisher of men...and fish)**

At Christmas, God didn't just solve a problem; He welcomed us into His family. "In the fullness of time... God sent His Son" so that you and I would no longer live like slaves—afraid, earning, proving—but like beloved sons and daughters who cry, "Abba, Father." Preparing Him room means learning to live from that beloved identity, not striving for it.

I recently heard about a Christmas tradition that my friend's father had started with his children. It was simple: when they turned twelve, he would quietly hand each grandchild a house key on Christmas morning. Little was said apart from, "You no longer have to knock. My house is your house so just come on in."

Every time this was said there was an immediate change in their demeanor. Before the key, they'd ring the bell and wait on the porch. But after they had their key, they would walk straight in, bellowing something like, "I'm home!" It was the same house with the same people—but that little piece of metal changed how they approached the door.

Galatians 4 says that at just the right moment, God sent Jesus to redeem us and to adopt us. He didn't just cancel our debt, He changed our status. And with this, He has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts so we would know—deep down—that we can call God "Abba." Another way of saying this is that Christmas is God saying to us, "You don't have to stand on the porch waiting for permission to come in. You belong here. You are my beloved. Just come on in!"

So, "preparing Him room" isn't about squeezing one more activity into December; it's about making inner space to live as heirs rather than hirelings—as children who come boldly into the Father's presence.

When the carols fade and the wrapping paper is gone, this remains: In Jesus, the Father has placed the key of sonship in your hand. Walk through the door. Speak to Him as "Abba." Receive His delight. And let that secure love shape your home with less hurry, more presence; less proving, more praising; less fear, more welcome—because you are no longer slaves, but children... and if children, then heirs. Merry Christmas.



**For further reflection: Romans 8:15–17; John 1:12;
Ephesians 1:5; 1 John 3:1**

Merry Christmas

*"Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King; let
every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,"*

— Joy to the World, Isaac Watts (1719)

With Joy,
WCC

