



Daily Advent Devotional  
Knox Presbyterian Church  
2011

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Advent is a season in which we journey with the people of God, who waited for the Lord's birth. During this time of year, we travel alongside those who experienced Christ's birth firsthand and those who prophetically spoke of our need for a savior.

This year our Advent devotional focuses on the Psalms, the Prophets and the Christmas narrative. And each Sunday we include prayers and Scripture readings for you or your family to use while lighting the candles of an Advent wreath.

May God speak to us through these devotions written by those with whom we worship. And may God move in us to more joyfully and more boldly proclaim the Lord's coming.

~

Brian Lee & Lauren Obregon

O that you would tear open the heavens  
and come down,  
so that the mountains would quake  
at your presence –  
as when fire kindles brushwood  
and the fire causes water to boil –  
to make your name known  
to your adversaries,  
so that the nations might tremble  
at your presence!  
From ages past no one has heard,  
no ear has perceived,  
no eye has seen any God besides you,  
who works for those  
who wait for him.

Isaiah 64:1-2, 4

Cover art: Stefan Robinson

All Scripture quotations taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

*Opening Prayer:*

We give thanks for the light of Christ,  
shining in the lives of all God's people.

*Scripture Readings & Candle Lighting:*

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger  
who announces peace; who brings good news, who announces  
salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" **Isaiah 52:7**

"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the  
promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah."  
**Jeremiah 33:14**

With the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, we watch and wait for the  
coming of Christ who will bring light and peace to all the world.

*Light the first candle (purple).*

*Closing Prayer:*

Light of Jesus (*echo: light of Jesus*), show the way (show the way).  
Shine in us forever (shine in us forever); this we pray (this we  
pray).

Mary

We all have a hard time believing in God's supernatural  
power, don't we? We often talk about God's power and we dream  
of what it may look like for our lives. But when we face those  
times of impending danger or loss, it's hard for us to really believe  
that God will intervene on our behalf. There's just something  
about being human that makes it difficult to trust in divine  
miracles. Perhaps this is because we have a hard time giving up  
our sense of control to God. Or maybe it's because there have been  
times where we have anticipated God's divine provision and  
haven't seen it materialize. Whatever the reason, the last thing we  
often do when disaster hits is expect God to come in and save the  
day. Yet this is exactly what God does in the Christmas narrative.

Faced with a sin-induced separation between Himself and  
humanity, God supernaturally takes on flesh to solve the sin  
problem once and for all. The story of Christ's birth, life, death,  
and resurrection reminds us that God does not fit in the boxes we  
create for Him. God is not tied to the laws of physics or the laws of  
man. Rather, as Gabriel reminds Mary, nothing is impossible with  
God. God's love for humanity and desire to be in relationship with  
us means that God is willing to do anything to provide for His  
people. All that God requires of us is a willingness to participate  
in his impossible plans, to say "Here am I" when He tells us the  
unbelievable story of what is to come. And so, as we spend time in  
Advent meditating on the birth of Christ, let us be open to the  
supernatural ways that God works among us. Inspired by Gabriel's  
exhortation to Mary, let us embrace the mystery of God so that we  
can dream the dreams of those who trust in His miraculous power.

Isaiah 9:2-7

November 29, 2011

Eileen, Juan Carlos & Angelina Gathman



**Eileen:** How do you think it felt for the people to be in darkness?

**Juan Carlos:** I think they were scared and lost and tired of feeling around in the dark, thinking someone would come help them. But no one was coming.

**Angelina:** Maybe they didn't like being in the dark.

**Eileen:** Yeah, I think the people were really scared and didn't like the darkness. Dark can feel scary and maybe even lonely, huh? God called Isaiah to be a prophet to his people. Who knows what a prophet is?

**Juan Carlos:** Me! It's someone who tells everyone about God.

**Eileen:** Yes! So, Isaiah had been telling the people about God but no one was listening. They kept doing their own things and turning away from God. They were very lost and in need of help. God asked Isaiah to tell the people about the help he would send. But it wasn't help like they thought, was it? Isaiah told the people that the help God was sending would be a baby. Crazy, right?

**Juan Carlos:** Yeah, they probably thought, "What? A baby? How can a baby help us?" But it was just that they didn't know that the baby was going to grow up to be Jesus.

**Angelina:** Jesus was going to help them and make them so happy, right, mom?

**Eileen:** Yes, they couldn't even imagine how their helper would be a baby! They probably thought, maybe a king or a really strong person would come. But Isaiah told the people about this baby who would come and sit strong on the throne, ruling with justice.

**Angelina:** King Jesus, King baby Jesus!

**Juan Carlos:** God never ends. And Jesus saved us by dying on the cross, Mom. But that came much later, when he was older...

Luke 1:46-55

November 30, 2011

Liberty Crisp

In the first verse of this passage we read, "*My soul magnifies the Lord.*" In other words, Mary is saying that she wants more of God and her soul wants to be closer to Him. In the second verse, Mary says, "*My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon the humble estate of his servant.*" What does this mean? It means that God has regarded the state of Mary's soul to see what she was worthy of. He looks deep into our souls just like He looked into Mary's.

He chose Mary to carry Jesus because she was worthy of His anointing. He placed His hand on her and gave her a gift of new life through the Holy Spirit. "*For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed, for he who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is his name.*" It is true. Mary has been called the blessed virgin for thousands of years because God did great things for her. "*His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*"

Jesus says that if you and your family believe in Him, you will have His mercy for generations. "*He has shown strength with his right arm, He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.*" In other words, God makes the proud lowly but lifts up the humble. "*He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he sends away empty.*"

The people who hunger for His Holy Spirit He will always fill, but the rest he sends away hungry. "*He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers and to Abraham and his offspring forever.*" The Lord brought His people out of Egypt with the help of Moses to the promised land. He rescued them from slavery and gave them a new future. I think there is a lot in this scripture. Mary talks about how Jesus is mighty and about all the great things He does for us. He fills the hungry and is merciful, but He humbles the proud. He saved Israel but sends the rich away empty. God has done great things for us, too. Even though it can sometimes be hard, God is always there next to us, and He will pull off our heavy burdens and give us joy forever.

Isaiah 52:7-10  
Dot Turnbull

December 1, 2011

Do you have beautiful feet? I'm not talking about pedicures and polish, but the kind of feet Isaiah refers to as beautiful: feet that scramble up mountains, pound the pavement, and traverse deserts in order to bring good news to people everywhere. I'm talking about messenger feet.

This passage reminds me of a woman I met while working as a missionary in Thailand. My husband and I served at the McKean Rehabilitation Center for people who suffered from leprosy. Modern-day leprosy is a nerve condition that causes patients to lose feeling in their hands and feet, rendering those extremities vulnerable to injury and infection. By the world's standards, the bruised, often-infected feet of the patients at the Rehab Center were far from attractive. But I remember one woman in particular who fits Isaiah's description of beautiful feet.

This woman learned about Christian faith through the McKean staff. Her family was Buddhist, and she never verbally acknowledged that she was a follower of Jesus. But this woman was instrumental in sharing the good news of God's comfort, redemption and salvation with some other people who came to the clinic for treatment. The people became Christians because the Buddhist woman shared the good news of Jesus with them.

This good news of redemption, salvation and peace from God through Christ is something that we are wonderfully privileged to share with others. But it's not only a privilege, it is a responsibility. We are called to be messengers on the mountaintops who announce the coming of God's peace and salvation, who proclaim the reign of God over the whole world. We are called to raise our voices in a joyful song that celebrates our redemption, declaring that we have been bought at a price and brought back to God. We are called to witness to the ends of the earth about the salvation of our God.

This passage reminds me of the joyful responsibility I have to be a messenger of God's comfort, redemption, salvation and peace. Have you shared the good news lately? Do you have beautiful feet?

Psalm 80  
LeTisha Shaw

December 2, 2011



Psalm 80:1-7

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Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before  
Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and  
come to save us!

*Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's  
prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given  
them tears to drink in full measure. You make us the scorn of our  
neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

*Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

Isaiah 64:1-9  
Kristie Berglund

December 3, 2011

**Tear the Sky, O God**

Great God and Maker, Lord of all,  
we wander aimless through our days,  
in apathy retrace our Fall  
and walk again our deadly ways.  
Relentless in our vanity,  
pursuing only prideful gain,  
forsaking truth and sanity,  
our eyes grow dim in sin's domain.  
Yet distant words of prophets reach—  
faint voices filled with promise speak  
of outstretched arm and divine breach  
when You broke in to save the weak.  
Lord, tear the sky again! Descend  
to shake our land and wake the dead.  
Hide not your face in wrath, but send  
your loving mercy here instead.

Family Devotion

December 4, 2011

*Opening Prayer:*

We give thanks for the light of Christ,  
shining in the lives of all God's people.

*Scripture Readings & Candle Lighting:*

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace; who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” **Isaiah 52:7**

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”  
**Jeremiah 33:14**

With the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, we watch and wait for the coming of Christ who will bring light and peace to all the world.

*Light the first candle (purple).*

“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.” **Malachi 3:1**

With John the Baptist, we cry out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord! Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” *Light the second candle (purple).*

*Closing Prayer:*

Light of Jesus (*echo: light of Jesus*), show the way (show the way).  
Shine in us forever (shine in us forever); this we pray (this we pray).

### Joseph

In Matthew's first two chapters, Joseph is given guidance in four different dreams. And in Matthew 1, he finds himself in a very difficult situation. His wife-to-be, Mary, is mysteriously pregnant, and he plans to "dismiss her quietly." But then – in the words of Alyce McKenzie, professor of preaching at Perkins School of Theology:

*In his sleeping state, Joseph allowed God to speak to the depths of his heart and to offer a resolution to his dilemma that his human reason had failed to discern. "Here," whispered the angel, "is the key that unlocks your dilemma. Believe her unbelievable story. Marry her, and become the father of God's child. He will need a father to be accepted by others as he grows to manhood. He will need, not just any father, but a father like you, capable of nurturing him, and giving him a name. 'Immanuel' -- God with us."*

Joseph awoke and did as the angel said, committing to a relationship that would be filled with responsibility, challenges and uncertainty.

We can be confident in the account of Joseph and listen to our dreams, or whatever means God is using to speak to us, and if guided, enter into new relationships wherein we are called to nurture others.

True, a commitment like this can seem daunting, but we can take comfort in the three following dreams that Joseph experienced. Each was a "course correction" (flee to Egypt, return to Israel, stay away from Judea and go to Galilee) protecting and enhancing the lives of Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

We can also be confident that the Holy Spirit will guide us every step along the way in these relationships because we have been commissioned for this work of love.

"I read recipes the same way I read science fiction. I get to the end and think, 'Well, that's not going to happen.'"

*~ Anonymous*

Although the prophet Jeremiah is rightly known for his dire predictions related to Judah and Jerusalem, he could also spin a surprising tale of hope. Jeremiah 33:14-16 may be the single sunniest prediction in the prophet's canon. He imagines a time when Jerusalem lived in safety, Judah was saved from the various threats it faced, and justice was the norm. In the context of Jeremiah's day, one can understand why such a prediction would fall on many deaf ears. The Babylonian army was advancing on Jerusalem, and the prophet himself was imprisoned (33:1-5). In better times, the prophet had warned of gloom and doom, and his predictions had gone unheeded. His words had defied the evidence people observed around them in those tranquil times. And in days of "barbarians at the gate," his words of hope were likely met with similar incredulity.

"Faith" has been defined as "believing despite the evidence, then watching the evidence change." That would describe the evidence-defying hope some held for a messiah in the dark times of first century Roman-occupied Palestine. Yet in the birth of Jesus, we believe the hope expressed in Jeremiah 33:14-16 became a reality. Jesus' birth "changed the evidence" – just as our Lord's birth would change the world. Following that historic moment, no hope in God's promises could seem too extravagant.

This Advent, in times that have been called "uncertain," "difficult," and even "despairing," may we dare to hope that God's justice, peace, and joy are coming in a new way. And may we watch and wait for the evidence to change.

Isaiah 12:1-6  
Cory Piña

December 7, 2011

“In that day,” says Isaiah, we’ll be throwing parties and telling the world about our victorious God. But, flip back to chapter 11 for what God’s been working on.

Here’s what we find out: “In that day,” the Lord will stretch out a hand to save the people—again! “The Shoot of Jesse,” a fancy name for king David’s descendant, is coming. And he is coming to bring justice, to set things as they should be. God promises throughout the scriptures that a representative from the family of David, one of Israel’s most important kings, and that he will be our king forever and ever! Psalm 89 reminds us that God takes this promise pretty seriously:

*I have sworn once and for all  
by my own holy name,  
and I won't lie to David.*

Luke’s gospel says Jesus is who we’re waiting for. Joseph is a distant relative of David. A mighty savior, Zechariah sings, will be “raised up” in the “house of David.” An angel tells Mary her son will be given David’s throne forever. Luke’s hoping we’ll catch on.

“That day” has come. We live in a time when Jesus, from the family of David, has arrived to restore us to friendship with the Father. Isaiah knew that in these days we would give thanks to the Lord, who was angry, but whose anger has turned away to comfort us. God has—quite literally—become our salvation.

The time has come. God has provided all-embracing salvation. “That day” is here for which Isaiah 12 envisioned a lot of chatter: singing, calling, making known, giving thanks, and shouting that the Holy One of Israel is in our midst—that our God has done an amazing thing for all the nations.

*Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be known in all the earth.  
Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.*

Mark 1:1-8  
Edward Kenney

December 8, 2011

Boy, are we Americans blessed! We don’t have to kill our own food, build our own house or even utilize our own two feet to make the trip to school or work. Lucky for us we are so very blessed that we have a lot of time to do *other* things, like memorize the Bible and learn to be perfect witnesses. Right? I’m pretty sure it comes overnight while we’re sleeping. Wait, it *doesn’t*?

John, in the Gospel of Mark, is pretty much the kind of person we think we can’t relate to in 2011. He’s primitive. He doesn’t even have a first generation iPhone. He eats things he finds in the desert. Wild honey. Naturally-crunchy grasshoppers. Things that would make our stomachs turn.

And yet God’s perfectly happy to use him – iPhone-less and grasshopper-filled. People flock to him to hear about Jesus. So maybe “preparing the way for the Lord” and “making straight paths for him,” isn’t about having the world at our fingertips or having non-insect-filled stomachs. “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.” What *does* that mean?

Our family cut a straight path on Saturday. Straight to a soccer game at 11am, then straight to fill up with gas, then straight over to Sam's Club to pick up a pizza, then straight home to watch football and cook the pizza, then straight out to celebrate another exciting ACC win. What a “straight” path! But was our path “preparing the way for the Lord”?

How much better would our lives and eternity with God be if we made our lives' otherwise not-so-straight paths line up with God's perfect path! His path is a path dead-set on coming toward us in Jesus. God’s Spirit whispers: “You’re blessed, and you’re here to glorify me and to tell others about me. Make your paths straight: live for me.”

Zephaniah 3:14-20  
Lisa and Clovis Blackwell

December 9, 2011

Darkness hides what we don't know--  
    Ignorance is bliss.  
Light reveals truth and woe,  
    That something is amiss.

Blinding light is pain at first,  
    After a time of doom.  
But that light reveals thirst:  
What flowers need to bloom.



“I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity...” We sympathize with the servant in this verse. Even when we work hard at what God wants us to do, it still seems like nothing changes. The world keeps going on much as it had been before we started. We ask ourselves, if God wants things to change, and we have indeed acted faithfully, working so hard to change things, why does it seem that there has been so *little* change?

But perhaps the change has been greater than we realize. I've been a fan of North Carolina-based singer-songwriter David LaMotte since just before I started college. At one of his concerts, he pointed out that we actually influence the world every day. Our friends make different decisions because we know them. If we're married, our spouses become different people for agreeing to share their lives with us—and vice-versa! If we have kids, the amount of influence we have on who they become is incalculable. And each of these influences ripples out to the friends that *they* meet, the people *they* marry, the kids *they* have, and so on and so on through the contacts each of *those* people make. Not only *can* we change the world, we actually *can't help* but change the world by virtue of our having been in it!

So, just as the servant discovers in this passage, God turns things around. Even though we feel like we're not doing anything at all, God not only calls us to do—but in fact God *will* do, through our actions—amazing things.

*Opening Prayer:*

We give thanks for the light of Christ, shining in the lives of all God's people.

*Scripture Readings & Candle Lighting:*

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace; who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” **Isaiah 52:7**

“The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” **Jeremiah 33:14**

With the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, we watch and wait for the coming of Christ who will bring light and peace to all the world.

*Light the first candle (purple).*

“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.” **Malachi 3:1**

With John the Baptist, we cry out in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord! Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” *Light the second candle (purple).*

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him ‘Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’” **Matthew 1:23**

With Mary, the mother of Jesus, we rejoice, for the Mighty One has done great things for us.

How holy is God's name!

*Light the third candle (pink).*

*Closing Prayer:*

Light of Jesus (*echo: light of Jesus*), show the way (show the way). Shine in us forever (shine in us forever); this we pray (this we pray).

Isaiah 60:1-6  
Mike and Tara Orr

December 12, 2011

I can still remember the first time I sat outdoors for the sole purpose of awaiting the rising sun. It was cold. Shapes and colors were mere hints. Friends were identified by familiar voices, not faces. The eastern horizon took on a pale glow. Silhouettes of trees and power-lines and buildings slowly came into focus. Though it seemed to take forever, the world became visible as the sun shed more and more of its light over the landscape. As we rose from the ground and turned to head back indoors, I could see the world as I had always known it to be: full of rich color, bright detail and dramatic depth.

In many ways our world appears dark. Disease, poverty, pain, divorce, war, injustice, and political unrest are daily headlines in our news. Stress, anxiety, broken friendships, depression, and frustration sometimes dominate our lives. We wait now for the coming of the Son. We wait for the glory of the Lord to rise upon us. The light of God will reveal that the world is to be as God has always intended it to be – full of rich love, bright joy and provision for each person's deepest need. These are not platitudes. These are promises from the God who created everything, who loves us enough to die for us and who is powerful enough to conquer death. Like the prophet in this passage, I invite you to “lift up your eyes and look about you.” God's grace for us does not run out, there is more than enough to go around. Set your eyes on Jesus today and see what his light reveals in the world around you.

*Risen Son, we pray that you would give us strength to bear the dark things in this world, and give us eyes to see your grace, love, and provision in each of our lives. Amen*

Matthew 2:1-12  
Erin Gaw

December 13, 2011

### Herod and the Magi

This season we celebrate the magi – who recognized Christ as the king worthy of their richest treasures in spite of his lowly and obscure birth. In carols and nativity pageants we like to identify ourselves with these “three kings” who were so excited by Christ's birth. I am always thrilled to place the three porcelain figures representing them, which are dressed in gold and jewels, alongside the poor shepherds in my nativity set.

But there is another king in this part of the story. He does not get included in the carols, plays or stable scenes of our advent celebrations. King Herod was clearly a villain, as he plotted and lied and killed to keep control. It's no surprise that he would be “disturbed” by the news of another king born to take his place. But in fact the passage says that all of Jerusalem was disturbed *with* him. Whether because they were afraid of Herod's anger and jealousy (which would eventually end many of their children's lives), or because they were loyal to him, or because they thought the power transition would mean turmoil, no one seemed to be in a hurry to join the magi's caravan to find their newborn king. And even the chief priests who knew where he was to be found did not seek him there.

Acknowledging that Christ is king of our lives can sometimes be hampered by our own rebellious desires for control, or fear of what it will mean for our future, or our allegiance to the rulers of this world. But the magi can serve as an example for us. They understood that in the kingdom of God a wealthy person of learning is no better than a shepherd, and the passage says, “they were overjoyed.”

Ezekiel 34:1-16  
Joey Novak

December 14, 2011

The days are growing shorter. The span of time between twilight and dawn is reaching its zenith. Our Advent waiting is almost complete. Soon, it will be Christmas Day. Soon, we will celebrate the incarnation of the Word in human flesh. Soon, the Son will come again to realign this off-kilter world. Soon, like a shepherd, he will call out and we will be gathered to him.

In this hope, we come to Ezekiel 34. But instead of finding comfort there, we receive a sober warning instead. The basic movement of Ezekiel 34 draws a sharp distinction between the rule and authority of God and that of earthly leaders. Both are likened to shepherds, but the leaders have failed to care for the sheep. They allowed the sheep to wander off, get sick, starve, become injured, and ultimately to die. “Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep?” (34:2) This is the problem. And to solve this problem, God is going to come and reassert God’s shepherd-ship.

God’s way of shepherding is not passive. In this text, God searches, rescues, liberates, heals, strengthens, feeds, and establishes. God feeds the sheep with justice and equity. He binds their wounds and heals them. He finds the lost sheep, collects them and reunites them as one flock. And, ultimately, God promises to establish a new shepherd for the sheep – a good shepherd (see Matthew 18:12, Luke 15:4 and John 10:11).

One interesting piece of this text is that the malnourished sheep do not appear to be held responsible for their condition. The only sheep whom the Good Shepherd punishes are the “fat and strong” (34:16) – those sheep who appear to have benefited from the cruel tyranny of the former rulers. The text seems to say, “Woe to those who willfully benefit from the operations of an unjust and amoral government. Woe to those who huddle together in the warmth of their wealth while others starve alone in the wilderness.” These are the ones judged by the Shepherd. “For the Son of Man,” Jesus says, “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Psalm 72  
Celeste Liversidge

December 15, 2011

There's nothing I love better than to hear the prayers of our girls spoken out loud. During family time, before a meal, or as part of the bedtime routine. They are never limited or small-minded in their prayers as I often am. They *go big*, for sure:

“I pray that everyone in the whole world will have a good time tonight.” “I pray that no one will be sick and that everyone will feel loved and have a nice family.” Or, a recent favorite, “I pray that daddy will win and the judge will say yes, yes, yes to whatever he asks for.” They pray big prayers over the world and each other because they believe God can do it!

In this psalm, David asks God to bless the rule of his son Solomon. He's not just asking that Solomon be liked by his people. And he's not just asking that no one would give him too hard of a time. David is asking God to use Solomon in a big way. To be a world-changer. That he might “defend the afflicted” and “crush the oppressor” and that “all nations will be blessed through him.”

As we journey through this season of Advent, may we be reminded and inspired to “pray big” for ourselves, our church and for our world. It is through the birth of Christ that we are both called and empowered to be a light to all nations, to be agents of compassion and justice and transformation in a dying world.

Jeremiah 31:31-34  
Nate Burcham

December 16, 2011

“This is our hope...” Carefully stitched into the rhetorical fabric between the famous “I have a dream...” and “Let freedom ring...” repetitions in his most famous speech, you’ll find these words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s explanation of the communal hope and faith for the future he had during the Civil Rights Movement still speaks to us today:

“This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.”

Jeremiah, like Dr. King, knew hardship and oppression. Jeremiah had the unfortunate responsibility to prophesy the exile of God’s people into the hands of the Babylonians.

In chapters 30 through 33 God affirms that the exile is only temporary and provides an assurance of God’s love. Though they wallow in despair, there is now hope. Though they roam the chasm of a broken human-divine relationship, reconciliation is now on the horizon. This hope climaxes in 31:31-34 where God tells of the new covenant that will be made with Israel and Judah.

In the same way that Dr. King’s speech is a high point in the ongoing narrative and struggle for racial equality in this country, Jeremiah’s prophecy is a high point in the greater narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures because it points to yet another covenant God makes with his people (and we get to participate in the new covenant by knowing God through Christ!). We live in a world where Jesus has already come and inaugurated his Kingdom. Though it has yet to reach ultimate fulfillment, we are called to participate in the Kingdom by living in a way that anticipates the fullness of life that will accompany the Kingdom’s ultimate fulfillment. As we come nearer to December 25th may we continually celebrate God’s faithfulness to us and the great gift of covenantal hope and fulfillment we’ve received: Jesus.

Isaiah 2:1-4  
Laura Becker

December 17, 2011

In the past I have read this scripture and thought of all of the terrible atrocities that happen around the world...in other places. The wars that are far away, not here; and how we look ahead with hope to the joyful day when they will be no more.

However, today is my anniversary, and as I reflect on the past 17 years that Donnie and I have been married, I remember some of the all out “wars” that were fought in our living room, or in the car, or in the parking garage of the Mall of America in Minneapolis oh so many, many years ago. Yes, believe it or not, although I work at a church, I too am a human being who makes mistakes. I would like to think I am learning from those mistakes.

One thing that I have learned is that even though he and I love one another, at times it is still hard not to hurt one another with our words.

Isaiah 2:1-4 tells of something that we will not find completely fulfilled in this present day here on earth, but we can see the beginnings of it. Christ has enabled us to be reconciled through him with God. And because we love him so much, we do our best to come together in our relationships and to not say or do anything hurtful. We fail, but it is a start.

We will never find nor bring about the perfection described. But as we read Isaiah’s words, we can remember to continue to wait and act in love in our relationships, to seek forgiveness for our transgressions, and to look ahead to the day when Jesus returns to fulfill what God has promised. A day when we will not even prepare for the possibility of war. A day when we will no longer hurt one another.

*Opening Prayer:*

We give thanks for the light of Christ,  
shining in the lives of all God's people.

*Scripture Readings & Candle Lighting:*

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace; who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" **Isaiah 52:7**

"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah."  
**Jeremiah 33:14**

With the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, we watch and wait for the coming of Christ who will bring light and peace to all the world.

*Light the first candle (purple).*

"See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts." **Malachi 3:1**

With John the Baptist, we cry out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord! Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." *Light the second candle (purple).*

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him 'Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.'" **Matthew 1:23**

With Mary, the mother of Jesus, we rejoice,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for us.

How holy is God's name!  
*Light the third candle (pink).*

*Continued on next page...*

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'"

**Luke 2:10-11**

With Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we tell the story of Jesus, the child of Bethlehem who came to save us and is coming again in glory.

*Light the fourth candle (purple).*

*Closing Prayer:*

Light of Jesus (*echo: light of Jesus*), show the way (show the way).  
Shine in us forever (shine in us forever); this we pray (this we pray).

### The Shepherds

The shepherds watched their sheep one night,  
And the angels came and gave them fright.  
The angels spoke of a newborn king,  
And then they all began to sing.  
They praised, loved, and worshipped the Lord,  
And then away to heaven they soared.  
The shepherds went to the king, to see,  
The Savior smiling merrily.  
They spread the word to everyone  
"The newborn king! The Lord's Son!"  
Then they returned and praised the Lord,  
For the new child they all adored.  
And Mary and Joseph sat and smiled,  
And thanked the Lord for this new child.

~ Noah Schmidt





Psalm 98

~

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.  
His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.

The Lord has made known his victory; he has revealed his  
vindication in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house  
of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into  
joyous song and sing praises.

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound  
of melody.

With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise  
before the King, the Lord.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live  
in it.

Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy  
at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He  
will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with  
equity.

John 1:6-8  
Heather Thomsen

December 21, 2011

### John the Baptizer

If you've driven through Montana in the middle of the night, you know the meaning of DARK. On a clear winter evening, some college friends and I were headed to Kalispell. The darkness of the highway seemed to swallow our little car. But I gasped when I glanced out the window, for the stars were unlike any I had seen, a million pinpricks of light dancing on a blanket of black velvet. We pulled over and spilled out of the car onto the side of the road. We stood in silence, necks craned to take in the brilliant army of lights marching overhead. If you've seen the heavens stretched out like that, with more twinkling jewels than your brain can process, with the Milky Way shimmering, and shooting stars chasing each other in a galactic game of freeze tag, you know how easy it is to be captivated by light.

The Gospel of John describes Jesus as the Light of the world who not only brings light into darkness, but gives *life* to all who believe in him. John the Baptizer is captivated by this life-giving Light. He's the character standing on the side of a Montana highway, calling his friends to get out of the car, pointing ahead to the Light that refuses to be conquered by darkness.

One of the important themes of the Fourth Gospel is to bear witness to Jesus. John the Baptizer is an exemplar of this significant motif. John's mission in life was to "testify to the Light, so that all might believe through him." John exists to bear witness to Jesus, so that through John's testimony, others would see and become captivated by Jesus.

This is our job, too – we must bear witness to Jesus. We must point ahead, so that even in the darkness, others might see the true Light who has come and is coming again into the world, and that by believing, we may all have life in his name.

John 1:10-13  
Jessica Robinson

December 22, 2011

"We are called to be in the world and not of the world." This is a popular refrain that is recited in many Christian circles when we work out what it means to witness to our non-Christian neighbors. Yet, as true as this is, the phrase has become trite in our culture. It has almost become an excuse for us to be in the world and act like the world. John, in his Gospel, reminds us that the call to be "in the world and not of the world" is a counter-cultural call in our lives. Although Jesus was in the world – and caused the world to come into being – the world does not know him. The world does not even accept him.

The startling contrast and truth for us to realize is that we do know him. We have received him, and we have believed in his name. And he has no longer called us slaves or servants, but children and friends. This is not a blood lineage call, or a fleshy call, but rather, God's call upon our lives. We are called children of God, and as we celebrate the birth of God's beloved Son and the Kingdom coming to bear on this earth, let us act and live in response to that blessed truth. Let us truly be in this world, with our new family whom God has called together – weeping over the trials; celebrating through the joys; living in a way that is distinctly separate from the world; bearing witness to the Kingdom that has been brought to bear on this earth with the birth of this blessed child. Alleluia! Amen.

John 1:14, 16-18  
Tracee Hackel

December 23, 2011

The words from the prologue to the Gospel of John are like the loud peal of a bell with resounding echoes in the far reaches of Israel's ancient history – all ringing the clear note of the gospel. May God give you great joy, and may this meditation upon the Word encourage you to ring out the beauties of God's unfathomable grace to us in his Son Jesus Christ this Advent and Christmas season.

Your word LORD is eternal. **Psalm 119:89**

*And the Word became flesh...*

Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting... [there] the LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. **Exodus 33:7, 9, 11**

*...and pitched his tent among us...*

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence." **Exodus 33:18-19**

*We have seen his glory, the glory of the one-of-a-kind of the Father, brimful of grace and truth.*

In the future, when your children ask you, "What is the meaning of the...laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" tell them: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand." **Deuteronomy 6:20, 21**

*From his fullness we all have received grace over-against grace. For the law was given through Moses; the grace and the truth happened through Jesus Christ.*

"But," [the LORD] said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." **Exodus 33:20**

*No one has ever seen God, but the one-of-a-kind God, the one who is in the heart of the Father, that one has made him plain.*

Luke 2:1-7  
Ally and Brian Lee

December 24, 2011

High above the Roman city-center in a vast imperial palace lives Augustus – emperor of the Roman empire. His home is a collection of the world's finest treasures. He commands one of the largest armies in the world. His power reaches from Great Britain to Egypt and from Spain to Iraq.

The people love him. Parents dream of their children growing up to be like him – an amazing speaker and an unbeatable general; a person who defies the odds; a person who shows incredible strength and ability. This is Caesar Augustus, and he is worshipped as a hero.

His empire reaches to the small region of Galilee in present-day Israel, and one year he orders everyone in "all the world" to go be counted. So each family journeys to their home city. A young man named Joseph travels the long road from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to be counted. Joseph takes Mary with him. He is engaged to Mary and she is pregnant. After a long journey they reach Bethlehem, but instead of sleeping in a house or a hotel, they have to sleep in a stable outside. There, upon cold, hard earth, Mary gives birth to her son. She wraps him in strips of cloth and places him in a feeding trough. Amid the stench of manure and the sound of donkeys, he cries softly for milk and for the warmth of his mother's touch.

It is tempting to tell the story differently – to make Jesus' birth seem more respectable or extraordinary. But the story of Jesus is not the story of a hero – at least not a hero like Augustus. It is not a success story that inspires us to reach for the stars. Rather, Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us – God fully descending to our brokenness and unabashedly carrying us home. How terrifying! How beautiful! Surely this is the good news the angels sing at his birth.

*Opening Prayer:*

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shining in the lives of all God's people.

*Scripture Readings & Candle Lighting:*

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With Mary, the mother of Jesus, we rejoice,  
for the Mighty One has done great things for us.

How holy is God's name!  
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*Continued on next page...*

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'" **Luke 2:10-11**

With Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we tell the story of Jesus, the child of Bethlehem who came to save us and is coming again in glory.

*Light the fourth candle (purple).*

"This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!' **Luke 2:12-14**

With the choirs of angels, we say: "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to all people on earth!"

*Light the center candle.*

*Closing Prayer:*

Light of Jesus (*echo: light of Jesus*), show the way (show the way).  
Shine in us forever (shine in us forever); this we pray (this we pray).

Notes

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