



Trinity Lutheran Church Devotionals for Advent 2024



*Written by and for the members of
Trinity Lutheran Church*

Theme for scripture excerpts from the First Week of Advent:

The new church year begins with a wake-up call: Christ is coming soon! In these readings both Paul and Jesus challenge us to wake from sleep, for we know neither the day nor hour of the Lord's coming. Isaiah proclaims the day when God will gather all people on the holy mountain and there will be no more war or suffering. Though we vigilantly watch for the promised day of salvation, we wait for what we already have: Christ comes among us this day as the word and meal that strengthens our faith in the promises of God.



The First Sunday in Advent December 1, 2024

*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. **Isaiah 40:1-2***

In many ways, 2024 has been a difficult year. There are ongoing wars in the world that we are feeling the effects of in ways we realize and many we do not. In our own country, we have continually been bombarded by divisive political messages. We can articulate some of the ways this year has been difficult, and there are others that we can't put into words but feel and know in our being. Daily we feel these stresses and troubles in our soul.

We are people in need of comfort.

The people Isaiah is speaking to in Chapter 40 are people who need comfort, too. They are in exile, separated from their homes and families. They have suffered terrible things and are trying to find a way forward. The first words out of the mouth of the prophet are comfort. Not accusation, not direction, not chastisement, but comfort. The prophet comes to them with a word of assurance from God. A reminder that they are not abandoned but are held in the loving arms of the Lord. Cared for tenderly.

God knows their hearts and minds and reaches out to bring them comfort, right where they are.

God knows our hearts and minds and knows that we, too, need a word of comfort in these difficult times. This Christmas season, open yourself to receive the comfort God has for you. We celebrate the birth of hope and presence of God with us now, right in the midst of our struggle and strife. God enters our midst to bring us comfort and reassure us that we are not alone.

Dearest Lord Jesus, Father God, Spirit, in this season bring us comfort and the reassurance of your presence with us right now. No matter what we are going through or have endured, remind us that you are with us. You will not abandon us. You are present with us. Amen.

Pastor Dan Schewe

Monday December 2, 2024

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 64:4

Several years ago, after many years of finding myself exhausted by the time Christmas Eve arrived, I decided to slow down and find more spiritual awareness during Advent. I found a devotional book called *Behold!* by Pamela C. Hawkins. She focused on four words, one each week of Advent. Week one's word was *expectancy*. Before turning the page, she asked you to pause, reflect on it, and pay attention to your first response to see if it aroused any emotions or stories from your life. My first thought, of course, was the memory of expecting our first child and the feelings I experienced – joy, anxiety, stress, how it would affect my job, would I be a good mom, and most of all waiting.

Looking up *expectancy* on vocabulary.com it says, “actively anticipating something” or “waiting eagerly for something” or “the state of thinking (or hoping) that something will happen” and from “expect,” the Latin root means “look for.” We do a lot of *expectancy* in our lives! I am sure most of us have waited for many of the same things: what we will do after graduating from high school, what college we will attend, what career path we will take, when we will marry. I could go on and on!

But one of the next questions after turning the page was, “What role has *expectancy* played in your spiritual life?” Since this was Advent, which means “arrival,” I realized that while waiting for something to happen in my life, it usually meant that I was not sure of the outcome. But we are sure of what is going to happen! Christ is coming and we have the assurance of forgiveness and grace and love and comfort and peace and eternal life! I am reminded of the hymn by Charles Wesley: “*Come thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.*”

Lord, I pray that everyone finds rest in You during this season of waiting. Amen.

Cindy Zientarski

Tuesday
December 3, 2024

*O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. **Isaiah 64:8***

The New Testament quotes Isaiah more than any other prophet. All three parts of Isaiah contain warning, challenge, and comfort. The prophet also proclaims the hope of the coming Messiah. In this third part of Isaiah, many people have returned from exile in Babylonia. In the prophet's view, the people are reaping the consequences of their iniquity.

Yet, in this verse, the prophet shifts from warning to comfort, a reassuring reminder of our intimate relationship with God. "You are our Father." This speaks to me of our ability to trust God even in the darkest times. The Prophet states that God can use challenging or painful circumstances to shape and mold us for good. "We are the clay, and you are the potter; we are the work of your hands."

When we are in the throes of challenging, grievous circumstances, we sometimes question God's love. When C.S. Lewis was grieving the death of his beloved wife due to bone cancer, he wrote in *A Grief Observed*. "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is coming to believe such dreadful things about him." Perhaps we have all experienced such raw feelings. We keep going because we can trust in "our Father's" love and presence.

The Lesson of the Falling Leaves

The leaves believe
Such letting go is love
Such love is faith
Such faith is grace
Such grace is God
I agree with the leaves. —Lucille Clifton

Father, please help us to see that we can always trust you. Thank you for your relentless love and presence. Amen.

Carol Butler

Wednesday
December 4, 2024

*Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved. **Psalm 80:19***

It gives me joy to choose a Bible verse to submit an Advent devotional. I start from the bottom and read verses until one grabs me. Though this is short, it's powerful.

It's the "holiday" time of year, from Thanksgiving dinners and family gatherings to Christmas shopping, baking, cleaning, wrapping, decorating, and parties with family and friends. Busy for a good month. But what happens to our bodies and attitudes during this time?

We become tired and need to be **restored**. If you think about it, what gets restored? What's worthy of restoring? Worn clothes taken to donation centers that aren't worth mending, or furniture that gets put on the street, or is donated. It takes something special and close to your heart to want to restore it. Restoration takes love of the item, knowledge or research as to how to complete the restoration project and gives great satisfaction when it's completed.

The thought of God smiling down on me while restoring my body and soul is amazing! I'm worth being His child! My faith is under scrutiny, assuring me that God loves me and reminding me to be cordial with others at this busy time. No being cranky! I'm being restored by the Lord God of hosts! I discovered this chapter of Psalms is "for the director of music." Keep God's music in your soul this season while He smiles down on you with the promise of eternal life with Him!

Heavenly Father, I pray you keep us in your care - safe, happy, and healthy this season of joy, restoring our resources for your best use. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Linda Taffs

Thursday
December 5, 2024

*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind – just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. **1 Corinthians 1:4-7***

Our God is the source of all strength and power and might. In being connected to Him, we receive all his strength and power.

Enriched to defeat weakness. A young mother comes to work as a cook for many people every day. She cannot read the Bible. I have her come to me every morning, read the Bible FIRST, then go to the kitchen. This brought the light of God's word and confidence into her. Teaching God's word daily is making a "weakling" into a mighty warrior for God. From "weakness" to "strength."

Enriched to turn weakness to strength. Connected to God, we are enriched in every way. We may be bogged down by fears or inadequacies; our past failures may stare at us. We can set them aside and move forward, equipped by God's full armor to face the challenges of life. Satan comes to debilitate us; we must resist. My daughter has polio and walks with crutches. From childhood she learned to trust Jesus; she is a self-confident woman now. She drives her own car, is married, and has a young daughter. God has turned her "weakness to strength" (Heb 11:34) because she is empowered in Christ.

Enriched to serve. Jesus calls us to love Him and He enriches us to serve Him. Today in our Indian society, girls and orphans are "rejects" or "castaways." But we (my husband and I) have taken care of orphans and helped them establish Christian homes. We are blessed in serving our society.

Dear Heavenly Father, you make my life complete by enriching me each and every day. Thank you and Amen.

Gladys Shadrach

Friday
December 6, 2024

*Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. **Mark 13:26-27***

During the Advent season, we look forward to a day we know - the celebration of Jesus' birth. Today's scripture reminds us that we also look forward to a day we don't know - his return in glory.

The world can be a dark and depressing place. Earlier in this chapter of Mark, Jesus has described some terrible times, and his disciples are probably pretty discouraged at this point. But then we see this promise, not only that he will return, but that we, as his people, will be gathered to be part of that glory.

We live in a world that can be difficult and dangerous. But we also live with the promise that our savior will return, in power and glory, and we will be gathered to him. When the world seems dark, be encouraged as we look forward to that day.

Lord, thank you for your promise to return to us. When I struggle with the troubles of this world, may this promise comfort and steady me so I may live according to your will. Amen.

Skip Franklin

Saturday December 7, 2024

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’” **Mark 13:32, 35-37 (NIV)**

This Bible reading is apocalyptic in nature, preparing the disciples and readers for the end times. A good friend of mine has devoted much time to studying with biblical scholars who are focused on these end times. He and his family have made both physical and spiritual preparations for the tribulations they believe are coming. The wars, catastrophic weather, rebellion, and evil in our world are often seen as signs of Jesus’ second coming - and they might be.

But while I listen and learn from my friend, this passage reminds me of a crucial truth: **we will not know the exact time of Jesus’ return**. We are assured He will come again, but the timing is unknown. As Christians, our responsibility is to **be ready**. Scripture instructs us to **WATCH** and prepare, not just for trials but for the ultimate victory that awaits us in eternity.

So how do we watch and prepare? In some translations, the word “WATCH” is replaced with “STAY AWAKE,” encouraging us to be alert, engaged, and constantly growing in our faith. In a biblical context, staying awake is often linked to prayer. The devil, described as our adversary, prowls, waiting to strike when we let our guard down - especially in our prayer life. Be vigilant in prayer! Don’t let him attack.

This means that our preparation should be intentional, not just in physical readiness but in spiritual diligence. **Watch**, pray, and stay ready—because whether we meet Jesus through the end times or at the end of our individual journey on earth, **we will meet Him**. And what a glorious day that will be!

Dear Jesus, help me to always watch for you, stand guard against evil and prepare diligently for an eternal victory. Amen.

Carrie Boer

Theme for scripture excerpts from the Second Week of Advent:

At the heart of our Advent preparation stands John the Baptist, who calls us to repent and make a new beginning. As the darkness increases we turn toward the light of Christ's coming.

For Christians he is the root of Jesse, the righteous judge who welcomes all, especially the poor and meek of the earth. We wait with hope for that day when the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and there will be no more hurt or destruction. From the Lord's table we are sent in the spirit of John the Baptist to proclaim that in Christ the kingdom of God has come near.



LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The Second Sunday in Advent December 8, 2024

*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. **2 Peter 3:8-9***

Peter is offering his final words to the new Christian churches to counteract the dissemination of false teachings. The scoffers are asking, maybe with more than a modicum of sarcasm, "So, exactly when is Jesus coming back to save the world?" Can you hear Peter's passion in his response? He addresses the church as "beloved," and you can feel his anguish, desperation, and motivation to collect all the believers under Jesus' true teachings.

So often, when things are dire and we are literally or metaphorically, cold, hungry, alone, and in pain, we wonder where IS God? Why doesn't he make all this go away? There are dark days in my life when I have struggled with this very thing – when I have felt hurt, isolated, sad, or angry and downright mean, and very much in need of peace and comfort, and it doesn't seem to come when I want it to. (As in right now, God.)

We are reminded that God's timing is not necessarily ours and that, as humans, we can't adequately comprehend a thousand years being like a day to God (also Psalm 90:4). What strikes me about this verse is the reason behind God's timing. Peter tells us that God does not want any of us to perish. God is patiently waiting for his children to turn from sin and come home. And how we must test that patience. But our Lord perseveres and even sends his Son to express and teach and live his love.

Dear Lord, this Advent, this season of waiting, please remind me to be patient – with myself and with others, and especially with you. Help me to remember that you have a plan for this world and your timing is perfect. Thank you for sending your Son as part of that plan. Amen.

Kim Brock

Monday
December 9, 2024

*A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain..." **Isaiah 40:3-4***

We can't imagine being a couple with Isaiah as he led God's people after years in captivity on their return to Jerusalem. We also can't imagine being a couple in 2024 in the very same region of our world as they daily try to survive in a war. Isaiah's words of the Old Testament asked his people to prepare the way for the Lord.

Trinity is a congregation of blessed families that can assist each other in preparing our way. We have had the opportunity to interact and be touched by so many of you. We reflect back on early years of "Know Mercy" softball teams, Stephen Ministry, Helping Hands cooking group, trips to Eastern Europe, and Sunday School teaching. More recently, with our Congregational Council and Family Promise (IHN), we have been taught by many of you the importance of servant leadership.

Praise to each of you on your journey to preparing the way for the Lord. We dream of life in heaven with our Lord, those in our family, and those from Trinity that have gone before us. But we still have so much to do.

Heavenly Father, during this holiday season, we thank you for this congregation who walks with us and leads us in celebration of Christ's birth and with whom we look forward to life ever after with Christ in Heaven. Amen.

Kathy and Bill Bush

Tuesday
December 10, 2024

*Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. **Isaiah 40:5***

The glory of the Lord. *“And the glory of, the glory of the Lord!”* Do you hear Handel's Messiah? The choirs and instrumentalists joyfully proclaim the coming of Christ and the ultimate victory over death. This fills my whole being with joy - with triumphant, confident hope. We shall - it is not a maybe or a might - we shall! All people. Together. Yes, you and I can celebrate together this wonderful, amazing promise. God's glory has been and will be revealed, to us!

When have you experienced God's presence? Can you think of a moment, perhaps many moments, of breathlessness and awe, experiencing the wonder of God's creation? Can you think of a person, a friend who has encouraged you, supported you, walked alongside you, and together with you, helped you stay close to God's love?

During this season, as we reflect on Immanuel - God with us - we have the knowledge and the certainty of the glory that is and will be. We hold onto this promise through the gift of our faith; and together, with the whole community of faith, we have the promise and assurance that we will experience the fullness and glory of God forever and ever. Nothing, absolutely nothing, will or can separate us from this promise, from God's love. Hallelujah, Hallelujah, and Amen!

Dear Good and Gracious God, you are an awesome God. Thank you for this wonderful gift, this promise - faith, hope, love. We shall see your Glory forever and ever, Amen.

Dawn Brackmann

Wednesday
December 11, 2024

*A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. **Isaiah 40:6-8***

As I write this devotional, it's a balmy day in late October. The sun is shining, and it's unseasonably warm. Many of my flower beds still look great, so I continue to fuss over them in hopes that they'll continue to put on a show for a bit longer.

This seems like the summer that will never end, yet inevitably, a hard freeze will soon zap my flowers for the season leaving them brown and limp. It will be such a deflating conclusion to all the hours I spent gardening during the summer...sad, but true.

But then, I'm reminded about the 2054 pages of my Bible that contain rock-solid, time-tested promises from God. Regardless of the season, His word persists to instruct, inspire, and support me in the single quest to live my life like Jesus. God's word is always relevant, and never out of season. There's no expiration date on God's promises to us, and He means what he says! Join me in being grateful that our Savior's promises are good and everlasting!

Heavenly Father, thank you for your guidance that surpasses any season. Your word exceeds any circumstances and will never fade away. Thank you for being an omnipresent, loving Savior for all. Amen.

Lisa Mead

Thursday
December 12, 2024

*I will listen to what the LORD God is saying; for you speak peace to your faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to you. Truly, your salvation is very near to those who fear you, that your glory may dwell in our land. **Psalm 85:8-9***

This year, I began “The Bible Recap” on the Bible App. It breaks the Bible down into daily readings plus a related video to guide you through the entire book in one year. Through this, I’ve discovered a life-changing idea: Fearing God and being afraid of God are two very different things. “Fear,” in a Godly sense, means “awe and delight.” Instead of being afraid and running from God, fearing Him means you draw closer to Him in reverent love.

Now, Jesus has always been my friend. But God... God was the Almighty. And even though I’d developed my relationship with Him more, I never knew which side I’d get – the Old-Testament, wrathful God who might invoke struggle as a teaching tool, OR, the gracious, giving God who sent us His only son. But through reading God’s word in its entirety, I’ve rebuilt my relationship with Him, my Father... the God who didn’t want distance from His sinful children in the Old Testament wilderness, but instead had them build Him a house to take up residence directly in their midst. The God who, when leaders brought Him their concerns and shortcomings in total trust and fear, answered them, guided them, and fought on their behalf. The God who always had it in His plan to send his Son so that we may spend perfect eternity with Him, by grace alone.

Sometimes, it’s still hard for me to reconcile “fear” with meaning anything but “afraid.” But the more I get to know God’s true character, the easier it becomes. He is filling in those spaces in me that used to feel afraid, with abounding awe and delight. I pray, especially this season, that you find this too.

Dear God, give us ears to hear Your perfect and love-filled guidance. Change our understanding of You in a way only You can do, so that we may follow You all the more. Amen.

Maddie Scurfield

Friday
December 13, 2024

*The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, and our land will yield its increase.
Righteousness shall go before the LORD and shall prepare for God a
pathway. **Psalm 85:12-13***

As children raised in the church, Sunday services in December included choirs singing, brass quartets playing, and time spent reading a specific passage reminding us that LOVE, JOY, HOPE, and PEACE were tenets of faith for Christians during Advent.

The 85th Psalm is a psalm of LOVE & JOY that builds as the chapter progresses: the Psalmist expresses that the Lord has shown favor, the Lord has restored the fortunes of Israel, the Lord has set aside His wrath, put away the displeasure, and turned His anger away from the Israelites.

So too, as Christians at this time of year, should we not also seek to be more understanding of others, be less angry with our neighbors, seek to reconcile with those around us? How do we show that the JOY in our hearts and that the LOVE graciously given to us, is the gift of a Savior, born as a child?

The Psalmist progresses pleading “show us your unfailing love.” What God wants is our unfailing love; to each other, to our ostracized brother or argumentative sister, to our disruptive coworkers or fellow racing commuters on the busy roads, to the ‘slow’ left lane driver, and to the cardboard sign holder on the street corner. The list goes on.... God promises LOVE and peace – do we seek it? Are we faithful in giving to others around us peace and JOY; JOY that we both receive at this Advent moment and any time of the year?

We are left with our passage for today: the Lord will indeed give what is good, the gift of blessing us with LOVE, JOY, HOPE and PEACE - God’s faithfulness shown in these four tenets. Are we ready to give these gifts to others this season?

Dear Lord, grant us your peace. Gift our hearts Joy & Love to ‘gift’ to others through our actions this Christmas season and beyond. Amen.

The Guis Family

Saturday
December 14, 2024

*Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. **2 Peter 3:14-15***

Today's verse is fitting for the season of Advent, our time of waiting and reflecting on the humble birth of Jesus. We are reminded to strive to be at peace while we wait, now and all year long.

In my own life, the times I have vivid memories of a deep feeling of peace were concurrent with some of my most difficult times. One very vivid memory was when Steve and I stood at our daughter Keely's casket at the funeral home, just us, heads and hearts reeling. As we walked to open the doors to let our family and close friends in to be with us, a distinct sense of peace filled us both. It was God's reminder that He held us close.

With all that goes on around us during the Christmas season, and the pressure we can put on ourselves to "get it all done," get that perfect gift, cook and decorate for the perfect family gathering, these two simple verses can ground us. To be "found by Him at peace" can be a challenge any day of the year but that feeling of being at peace is so powerful and important. During this Advent season, and every day, allow yourself that gift. Let yourself feel His peace.

Dear God, thank you for all the feelings that make us human. Guide us to find that sense of peace during this time of Advent and every day. Amen.

Amy Stephan

Theme for scripture excerpts from the Third Week of Advent:

A note of joyful expectation marks this week's verses. Isaiah announces that the desert shall rejoice and blossom. Jesus points to signs of God's reign: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear. We wait with patience for the coming of the Lord, even as we rejoice at his presence among us this day: in word and holy supper, in church and in our homes, in silent reflection and in works of justice and love. We pray that God would open our eyes and ears to the wonders of Christ's advent among us.



The Third Sunday in Advent December 15, 2024

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners. **Isaiah 61:1***

The Book of Isaiah was written around 700 BC when Israel and Judah were threatened by surrounding forces, particularly Assyria and Babylon. This was a time of military power struggles between countries in the area of Palestine in the Middle East. Some things don't change. The message of Isaiah was one of awe: God the Holy, the Strong, the Mighty One, the King. God is the source of safety and shaping of the future. Isaiah calls for trust in God, not in the power of military alliances. Isaiah also foretold the birth of Immanuel, bringing a call for justice between men and sincerity in divine worship - one who will establish peace and justice on earth and propagate the knowledge of God.

In these current times of polarization and conflict, our Messiah calls us to peace, justice, and knowledge of God. Especially in this Advent season, we are to be messengers of these calls, for the honor of our God in this world.

Our creator God, we ask that in these times of polarization and conflict, we will have the presence, faith, and commitment to be your messengers in this troubled world. Amen.

Dan Butler

Monday
December 16, 2024

*For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. **Isaiah 61:11***

I love to grow plants, herbs, flowers, and even some vegetables, so I was drawn to this verse where we see the images of gardening, germinating, sprouting, growth, and celebration.

A seed is already destined to grow and become something beautiful and worthy of praise, but many seeds stay in little paper packets for years and years doing absolutely nothing. When cultivated with soil, water and sunshine the seed transforms - it 'springs up' - and produces its fruit. And when something grows naturally and visibly, people take notice. Just think of the recent chrysanthemum exhibit at Meijer Gardens. It was stunning! Visitors were amazed and shared with others so more people would get a chance to experience the beauty.

The same is true for the promises of God. He provides his love, grace, mercy, and salvation to everyone. How often are those 'seeds' left unattended in a paper packet? We must put them in the right environment to see the fruits - the environments of faith, fellowship, and prayer. Only then will we see God's blessings grow and flourish and only then can the world witness God's work of bringing justice and praise to all people.

Holy One, creator of all things, continue to sow in us seeds of your love so those around us can see your work in us and join us in praising you for your almighty promises. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Kristin Bradley

Tuesday
December 17, 2024

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." **Psalm 126:1-2***

I was in the delivery room when our daughter was born. So many emotions filled that moment – from relief to awe, from amazement to apprehension. But the deepest, most enduring emotion was joy.

Advent is a prelude to the birth of a baby. It is a season of joy. But Christmas is not just about a newborn child. This Jesus was no ordinary baby. This child was a baby for every generation, a baby for all people. His birth brings a joy that changes everything – *everything*. Not just for a season, but for an eternity.

The poet of Psalm 126 looked forward to that day, because this baby boy would live to die for the sins of the world and rise again so that we might live. Therefore, this psalm calls us to joy and laughter.

There have been times when the joy of fatherhood faded into the background for me. But then my daughter would do something to restore my joy. There are times when the joy of salvation gets overshadowed by the sufferings and sorrows of life. But Advent reminds me of the great things God has done for us.

Sometimes Christians come off as rather joyless – too intense, too serious. But if there is no joy in your life, there is a leak in your faith. The psalmist reminds us that we have every reason to be filled with laughter and to shout with joy.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come!

Lord, fill us with the joy and laughter of your love and salvation so that we never forget the great things you have done for us. Amen.

Frank Rothfuss

Wednesday
December 18, 2024

*The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed. Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves. **Psalm 126:3, 5-6***

In our daily prayers, we thank God for many things, a beautiful day, our family, and our friends. We thank him for giving us strength, healing, and peace. But have we ever thanked God for our tears?

Nobody is immune to the troubles of life. We all experience seasons of gloom, sorrow, melancholy, depression, and grief; they make their way into our lives in one way or another.

Psalm 126 is a psalm of trouble, but there is hope amid this trouble. God has promised that He will turn our sorrow to joy and our tears to laughter. This is beyond our human comprehension, but God is faithful.

Heavenly Father, thank you for our tears. Jesus told us in this world we will have trouble but to take heart, He has overcome the world. May we cling to your promise of turning our sorrow to joy and our tears to laughter. Thank you for the gift of eternal life through your son, Jesus. Amen.

Kris Baker

Thursday
December 19, 2024

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18***

1 Thessalonians is an intimate letter of encouragement and instruction written by Paul around 51 CE to the flourishing, yet persecuted, very young church in the city of Thessalonica. In these verses Paul suggests ways that Christians going through challenging circumstances might work together to support and build each other up and thereby create a climate of goodwill and peace – even in the midst of tough conditions. He shares his vision that, no matter what, the church might always be a joyful community with a life of prayer nourished by thanksgiving and meditation on God's word.

Reading Paul's letter reminds me of how thankful we can be for Trinity Lutheran Church. Although our circumstances have been far less serious than the persecution encountered by the Thessalonian church, this past year has been a challenge to us all as we bid farewell to Pastor Bob and began our search for a new senior pastor. Now that we have eagerly welcomed the arrival of Pastor Jon and Brianne, let us rejoice that throughout the past year of transition, led by the tireless efforts of Pastor Dan, Pastor Kari, Interim Pastor Smith and our so-gifted staff, we were able to prayerfully and joyfully work together to keep Trinity ministries going – and even begin new ones!

As we celebrate Advent this year, Paul's advice is also appropriate for each of us personally...that with thankful hearts for all our many blessings, we can rejoice always, pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances as we follow God's calling for ourselves and for Trinity.

Dear God, remind us that we are blessed whenever we praise you as our Lord and King, entrusting our lives to you as we serve and worship you in all we do, think, and say. In your name we pray. Amen.

Karen Niemeyer

Friday
December 20, 2024

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Today's devotion and the preceding devotion both address Bible verses in 1Thessalonians. The readings are part of Paul's letter to the young and persecuted Thessalonian church. He ends his letter with the above verses which are actually a prayer. The words are relevant today even though historians believe Paul's letter and prayer "may be the oldest writing we have from the early church" (Lutheran Study Bible, Augsburg Fortress, 2009, p. 1942).

Throughout the letter, Paul praises the Thessalonians for turning to God, away from serving Julius Caesar as "God" and from worshiping Emperor Octavian as a "Son of God." Paul closes his letter with this prayer—that the Thessalonians live lives pleasing to God so they are ready when "our Lord" comes again.

Why is this ancient prayer relevant today? Is that even possible? We can look at our world and ourselves for an answer. Christians are still persecuted for their beliefs, still struggle in everyday life, and still seek God's saving grace. As Christians, we strive to live lives of faith. Paul's prayer asks for God to sanctify believers. He also prays for believers' humble needs and God's greatest gifts, including sanctification, forgiveness, salvation, faith, protection, love, and grace. This prayer is for yesterday, today, and forever!

We can pray these ancient words—or use our own contemporary words—to ask for help and guidance to live faithful lives. We can pray that our "spirit and soul and body" are ready for the coming of Christ. We can pray that the "God of peace himself sanctify us entirely." God's blessings and gift of prayer are timeless.

Dear God, thank you for being our loving, forgiving, and forever God. Help us live so that we glorify you. Guide us in your ways. Open our eyes, ears, and hearts as you walk with us each day. In your name we pray, Amen.

Jan Palm

Saturday
December 21, 2024

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. **John 1:6-8***

This verse says that God sent a man named John to Earth. John was not Jesus. Rather, God sent John as a witness to the things Jesus did during his time on Earth. God did this so John could testify to all of the miraculous and wonderful things he had seen Jesus do, so others could come to believe in Jesus through John.

As Christians, we believe that each and every one of us is also a unique human being who was intentionally created by God and sent here to Earth, just like John. John saw Jesus do miraculous and wonderful things. Today, while Jesus is no longer physically here on Earth, we see his representation in others when we see them show love, compassion, and caring to others in His name. When we witness these miraculous and wonderful things and testify to them, we can influence others to believe in Jesus, just like John.

Dear God, we praise you for all of the miraculous and wonderful things we witness each and every day. We confess that sometimes, in the midst of our blessings, we fail to see the needs of others around us. Thank you for continuing to bless us anyway. Please help us to bear witness and testify to the love, compassion, and caring we see all around us, so that we, too, can influence others to believe in you. Amen.

Susan Knoll

Theme for scripture excerpts from the Fourth Week of Advent:

Isaiah prophesies that a young woman will bear a son and name him Emmanuel. The gospel is Matthew's account of the annunciation and birth of the one named Emmanuel, God-with-us. During these final days of Advent we pray, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," a beloved hymn based on ancient prayers appointed for the seven days preceding Christmas. On this final Sunday in Advent we prepare to celebrate the birth of the one born to save us from the power of sin and death.



The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 22, 2024

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Luke 1:26-28, 30-33

Paintings of The Annunciation, whether by Botticelli, da Vinci, or any other Medieval or Renaissance artist are very consistent. A mature Mary in beautiful, flowing gowns with gold trim, and perfect hair stands in palace-like surroundings with groomed gardens nearby, humbly greeting the winged and sunlit Gabriel.

Barbara Robinson, in her book, "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever," paints an entirely different picture. She casts the Herdman children, who snuck into the church because they heard there were snacks, as the main nativity characters. She writes, "They looked like the people you see on the six o'clock news – refugees, sent to wait in some strange ugly place, with all their boxes and sacks around them. It suddenly occurred to me that this was just the way it must have been for the real Holy Family...." Gladys, the youngest, and maybe the scrappiest, of the skinny, stringy-haired kids, was cast as the angel Gabriel. Barbara writes, "Since Gladys was the only one in the pageant who had anything to say, she made the most of it: "Hey! Unto you a child is born!" she hollered, as if it was, for sure, the best news in the world."

Indeed, it was the best news in the world.

Dear Father, please help us accept that the true spirit of Christmas lies not in perfection, but in the unexpected and imperfect ways we come together and experience the awe and wonder of Christ's birth. Amen.

Steve Heacock

Monday
December 23, 2024

*For nothing will be impossible with God. **Luke 1:37***

As I sit in our beautiful and acoustically renowned sanctuary... looking at Christ on the Cross and hearing music dancing in the air, it brings to memory thoughts of the past...some tragic and some blessed.

One tragic event was the passing of my wife, Marilyn, after several years of ever-increasing pain. This was a time when we felt the absence of our loving and caring God; a time when we felt alone with no place for comfort. One Christmas, we received a card with the story of one set of footprints in the sand. This brought to mind that God had not left us, but we had left him. Not surprisingly, we once again, found God. After nearly 40 years of marriage, she entered God's realm - loved and pain free.

Subsequently, after missing several high school reunions, I am convinced that God nudged me to attend my 45th. Thus, "...for God, all things are possible." (Mark 10:27) Sitting next to me was Sue – also at a turning point in her life. Long story short, we became engaged, and in February, we will celebrate our 25th anniversary. God has played a very important role in our life together and our life outside our marriage! We hope and pray that we are able to give back as we have received. We are dedicated to making these scriptures our mandate.

Lord, we thank you for your caring, support and unconditional love. Please continue to guide us in helping others as they face their tragedies and celebrate their blessings. Above all, help us to help others to never lose faith in you. In your name, Amen.

Jim Coates

Theme for scripture excerpts from Christmas Eve:

On a long winter evening we gather to proclaim the coming of the light. Isaiah announces that the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Paul reminds us that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all. In the familiar account of Christ's birth, the evening sky is bright with the heavenly host singing, "Glory to God in the highest." Amid our broken world we proclaim that the prince of peace is born among us. God comes to us in human flesh—in Christ's body and blood—so that we may be bearers of divine light to all the world.



Christmas Eve December 24, 2024

But the angel said to [the shepherds], "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people... 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...!" Luke 2:10-14

On this Christmas Eve where it seems the divisiveness in our country continues to grow — among friends, family, and strangers — how can we reconcile this tension with the angel's proclamation of "good news of great joy for all the people"?

It was not delivered to the first hearers during a time of world peace, freedom, and harmony. The Roman Empire exerted great power over large swaths of the ancient world, from current Israel to Spain, Italy to northern Africa. This good news was not delivered with the promise of more power to overthrow Rome, but with the promise of a baby, a "Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord!"

How can a baby save us?

As a brand-new grandmother, I can assure you, one baby can accomplish a lot! The glow emanating from my squishy little grandson blocks out a lot of noisy bad news! Jesus came into the world, not to make us stronger and tougher than any of the big bullies out there but came to save us and empower us for lives of love, justice, kindness, peace, service, and dignity. Jesus found himself caring for and seeking out those on the fringes, those cast aside, those who were hurting, diseased, and those who were downtrodden. Jesus came in love. Powerful enough to turn hate into love. A love that's strong enough to bring us through life and on into eternal life.

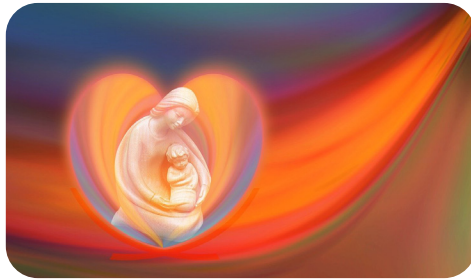
Jesus entering the world as a baby also invites us to inward reflection, just as Mary pondered with her baby. In his book *The Centering Moment*, Howard Thurman, famous in his role as spiritual director to Martin Luther King, Jr., says, "It is very good to turn aside from the rush and weariness and the anxieties... to rest in the presence of God. It is good to pause to make an end of so much that bothers and harasses the spirit. To assess the meaning of our lives in the light of the movement of the Spirit within us."

How might baby Jesus be inviting you to pause and reflect today? Who might Jesus be calling you to pray for? To care for? To call or send a letter? To do a kind deed? Who might Jesus be desiring for you to see their pain and fear, and extend comfort?

Let us pray. Jesus, guide us in the way of service and love. Guide us today and each day to small little bits of spreading your love in the world - in ways gentle and bold. Amen.

Pastor Kari Fast, Associate Pastor for Pastoral Care

Christmas Day
Wednesday, December 25, 2024



*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 2:13-14***

Peace on earth! How many Christmas cards did you receive this year with that greeting? With all that has happened in the centuries since the angels first rang out those words in the midnight sky, I'm glad that they have not lost their power over us. Even though we do sometimes act as if they have, with the grudges we hold and the pain we take out on other people, I do believe that deep down we want to believe that those angels were telling the truth: that peace is both possible and real.

Maybe that's why, for a message this consequential, the world needed more than just one lone messenger in the night. That would be relatively easy to shrug off and dismiss. Instead, God sends the entire choir – the multitude of the heavenly host! – as if to assure us that this greeting is far more than just comfort for today, but also a promise for tomorrow.

The message of Christmas is that, in the midst of our human need, God does not simply wish us peace from afar. In Christ, God makes a home with us in the most intimate way possible: using our bodies, our hands, and our voices to heal and bless this world he so loves. And like those angels, God does not send any of us into the world by ourselves. The body Mary held in her arms is now alive in *this* body: the communion of all who bear his name.

Through us, he will stand against all the powers of this world that obscure the dignity and worth of God's children. Through us, he will not let fear and division have the final word. Through us, he will not rest until every burden is broken, every oppression is lifted, and every debt forgiven. This Christmas, as always, he glories in answering the prayer we sing: "Be born in us today!"

Lord Jesus, we welcome you. With Mary, we offer you our very selves as your home. Warm us with your love, open our hearts, and shepherd us in the ways of peace. Amen.

Pastor Jon Niketh



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