

WELCOME

SHEPHERD — SAVIOR — KING

A JOURNEY WITH THE
PROPHETS AND THE GOSPEL WRITERS
TO THE MANGER

ADVENT DEVOTION GUIDE
2021

ALAN H. BEASLEY
SENIOR PASTOR

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
JASPER, ALABAMA

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, © 2011.

There are no rights reserved. Permission is given to reproduce, share or transmit in any form or by any means.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel" – which means "God with us."

Matthew 1:22-23

Introduction

Welcome. A word we all want to hear. A word of inclusion that signifies we are part of a group. It warms our heart and is music to our ears. We approach the season of the year when we welcome Jesus once again. It's called Advent and we anticipate it every year, well we really anticipate Christmas, with a mixed bag of emotions. Huge amounts of anxiety exists because of schedule and preparation. We're not sure if it will all get done but somehow it does. There is great joy as we welcome the Christ-child, Jesus – Shepherd, Savior and King.

The best news about Advent is that we not only welcome Jesus into the world but He welcomes us into His world. He came to be with us and welcomes us with open arms to the kingdom He has come to initiate into the world. A kingdom like no other.

I welcome you to join with me as we hear the voices of several prophets announcing the coming of a Savior and King. Then we will join with the gospel writers telling the story of the birth of Christ. We will be together until time to usher in a new year.

We need Advent. It has been a long twenty months of distancing and limited gatherings to welcome and be welcomed. Open your heart and mind and welcome Jesus into your world this Advent season. I hope and pray these devotional thoughts will assist you on the journey. Each day will be a scriptural selection, a short meditation to follow, and a brief prayer related to the meditation.

We welcome you, Jesus Christ – our Shepherd and Savior and King!

Joining you on the adventure of a lifetime,

Alan H. Beasley
Senior Pastor

First Sunday of Advent, November 28, 2021

Verse

7 Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. 8 Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. 9 Lift up your heads, you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. 10 Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty—he is the King of glory. - Psalm 24:7-10

Meditation

When the devotions became my original writings every day eight years ago, these verses became the theme for Advent that year and became the foundation for writing a daily devotion. Every day my heart is to unfold the King of glory in some way so you the reader, and me the writer, may let Him in the gates of our heart and soul. A little context. Cities in ancient Israel were totally secure, fortified, with almost impenetrable walls. There were very few gates, very few ways in. Jerusalem for instance had only four gates. In most cases, you couldn't get in unless the gatekeeper let you in. I encounter many people who have built impenetrable walls around their heart and have very few gates. It's hard for even the King of glory to get in. Which seems strange that someone strong and mighty, who is given a proper name the second time, the Lord Almighty, would be shunned in any way. If I unpack the meaning of Lord Almighty it comes down to this. He is unbeatable! In any facet of life, he cannot be defeated. Jesus ultimately revealed the depth of this truth. Early in this Advent journey let's open all our gates, and keep them open, to give the Lord full access to our life. The gatekeeper's main responsibility was to determine if a person or group of people were friend or enemy. With God, that responsibility is off the table. He's your friend. And he's strong and mighty and desires to do battle on your behalf. We need to lift our gates and embrace the Lord Almighty!

Prayer

To the Lord God Almighty, the King of glory, we praise your holy name. We lift our gates and invite you into the depths of our heart. We give you full access no matter your desire for us. With obedience and surrender we lift gates. Come and defend our lives with your strength and your power. Forgive us if we have shut gates or high walls. Come in, King of glory! In his strong name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Monday, November 29, 2021

Verse

41 Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? 42 Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" - John 7:41-42

Meditation

Some thought He was, some thought He wasn't. They knew all about him and they still questioned his authenticity. What would the general population of your city say about Jesus? This was Jerusalem, in the temple, the center of faith, and there were still questions. As distrusting as people are today, I am sure the same questions would arise, wait, they are indeed asked. We know all about him, we know the Christmas story so well. And we still question his authenticity. No, we don't question the details, we may not even question his existence, but our lives often reflect questions about his Messiahship. We question the reality of Jesus being the Messiah in our own life when we make decisions to the contrary and become distracted from living as One who is Savior and Lord would desire us to live. No words are necessary. No questions need to be verbalized. The harsh reality is our life tells the story and many times the story finds the Messiah at number four or five or ten on our importance meter. It's pure hypocrisy when we want everyone to believe Christ has come as the Messiah and yet our behavior reflects something totally different. And so for all practical purposes we ask the same questions, is Jesus the Messiah or is he not? Do we trust him to lead our life for our good and the good of the kingdom? Or do we try to help? Maybe our Christmas journey to the manger should include deleting the questions.

Prayer

Jesus, be the Messiah of our life. Plain and simple, Lord, be the Messiah of our life. We declare our trust in You today that whatever that means and however it shapes us we will accept and live accordingly. Bind Satan from stealing the opportunity for us to experience the fullness of Christ in our lives. We place you at the headship of our heart. Lead us to goodness and grace. In the Messiah's name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Verse

13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. 15 He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right." - Isaiah 7:13-15

Meditation

When Isaiah spoke these words to the people, they didn't just hear a name, they heard a presence. Isaiah spoke Immanuel, they heard God with us. It probably stopped them dead in their tracks or took their breath away or they asked Isaiah to repeat that again. This was the first time they had heard it put this way. Hints to a Messiah yes, God with us not so much. And when Isaiah said God was going to be with us he meant really with us because even God was going to grow into the ability to discern between right and wrong. Presence was such a huge step of understanding when the prophecy came forth. They were more familiar with God at a distance and certainly not in human form that would have to learn to choose right and wrong. The unidentifiable was made plain when the idea of God's presence was associated with a very understandable idea of choosing. This was such an important word to a struggling people and is still important to us today. Don't take the reality of His presence for granted. Receive the blessing of presence. He is indeed God with us! When struggles come, remember Immanuel. When struggles seem few, remember Immanuel.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the simple truth and blessing that you sent your Son to be with us, in every way with us, the reality of your presence. Thank you for your presence in our lives today. Let us cherish your companionship. Guide us in our choosing, in our coming and going. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Verse

2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. - Isaiah 9:2-3

Meditation

When Isaiah penned his prophetic words about the birth of Christ, he wrote much of it giving us a snapshot of life after He comes. It wasn't just an announcement or a prediction that may or may not happen. Isaiah confidently went a step further and began describing the transformation that will take place which centered around light and joy. It is where Jesus starts with every human being. Our relationship with Jesus is initiated when we open our arms to the grace-filled invitation to let him into our life. In a moment the darkness of sin and death is turned to the light of love and life. That moment satisfies the longing of every heart to experience real joy. We search in so many places trying to find joy and we find it when we embrace the love of Christ. This concept of light and joy doesn't end with this first open arm moment. Each of us can most likely testify to several light and joy moments that have come to us since we first said yes to a loving Savior. Hearing the familiar words of Isaiah again may open your hearts to a place of darkness in your life that needs the light of Jesus. A place of joy that is being suppressed because you are seeking joy in every place except at the feet of Jesus. Let this Christmas season be a time of discovering that light and joy moment which will transform your life. Once again.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may our dark places be filled with light and bring great joy to our life. Reveal the darkness and unleash the light. Humble us to the place of being willing to open our arms to the grace and love of Jesus once again. We give thanks for your ever-present light which brings joy to our life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thursday, December 2, 2021

Verse

6... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. - Isaiah 9:6

Meditation

Of all the names used that reference the coming of Christ, these four stand out as the most familiar and well loved of all the prophetic voices. And well they should. These four descriptions capture the essence of who Jesus Christ came to be. He came with a clear purpose to redeem all humanity which could not be accomplished if he was only one of the four. Some people needed him to be a loving Father while others needed the peace that passes all understanding to become real. At times he had to be mighty and strong and at other times he needed to be wise and gracious. He knew every situation and some required a blend of all four Isaiah carefully crafted. In every situation and in every manifestation of the presence of Christ, his purpose was to redeem people and continue his journey toward the final act of redemption. He knows your situation, he knows your hurt, he knows your heart, and he comes as only the Son of God can come. He comes to redeem your life to a better place in Him. And He will be called. Exactly what you need Him to be.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are a blessed people that you had the wisdom to send your Son to be exactly what each person needs as a child of yours. Expand our understanding of who Jesus is so we might see him in all his fullness. May we never be hesitant to call on Him because he is all we will ever need to walk us through our own journey. We honor your name for your goodness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Friday, December 3, 2021

Verse

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. - Isaiah 9:6

Meditation

And these.

Jesus. Immanuel. Messiah. Light. Savior. Way. Truth. Life. Word. Lamb of God. First Born. Good Shepherd. Alpha and Omega. Christ. I Am. Holy One. God with us. True Vine. Friend. Son of Man. Ancient of Days. Servant. King. Bright and Morning Star. Bread of Life. Son of David. Door. Resurrection and Life. Unspeakable Gift.

They are more than names to be called. They are relationships which create an eternal connection crafted with love, and grace, and mercy. They are God Himself relating to your particular need at the precise moment. They are God Himself fulfilling your most intimate desires. They are God's will coming to life in you to the glory of His Son and His kingdom. There are many more. Paul got it right and put it in the context of Advent when he called him an Unspeakable Gift. May Christ reveal himself to you in each of these ways during these days of Advent and forevermore.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may Christ be revealed to us to your glory in ways which deepen our relationship with You. Allow us to see him in new ways, and old ways with the fresh fragrance of your spirit. May Christ touch our needs today as only he can. Open our minds and hearts to experience the fullness of Christ. Help names become manifestations of glory. In Christ name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Saturday, December 4, 2021

Verse

7 Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. - Isaiah 9:7

Meditation

We would do well not to forget the verse after the verse. You've heard of the meeting after the meeting in the parking lot where all the decisions are really made. This verse may not have the impact of the previous one but it has its own importance. The significance is easily missed but is found in one word, forever, previously stated with two words, no end. We look at our life at times or the downward spiral of the moral condition of our culture and we want to throw up our hands and wonder why all the chaos. It's at that moment we need to live into the promise and authority of this verse. God's reign, his righteousness, will rule forever. It is up to us to declare that truth over our life. What has authority in our life is what we allow to have authority. I'm sure we would all agree life is better when God's greatness, his peace, his justice and righteousness, has authority in our life. And it's promised not only to us as his children but it's a promise for all his created order as well. We may not see it, but it is true. As his children we should claim the authority given us and maybe we will see the evidence of righteous not only in our life but in our culture. At some point claiming and declaring the authority of God may not look and sound politically correct, but so be it. Remember we are to live in the world with all measure of grace, but not be the same as the world. We live under the authority of the King of kings and it makes all the difference in our life and in the world.

Prayer

King of kings and Lord of lords we stand boldly to declare your power and authority over our life and the world. May your righteousness and your peace reign forever and forever. Forgive us for allowing the authority of evil have presence in our life. We are a people of faith who desire to live by faith. May it be so. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent, December 5, 2021

Verse

*7...The **zeal** of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. - Isaiah 9:7*

Meditation

I checked five or six translations besides the NIV which I use. They all use the word *zeal*. It must be the correct translation of the Hebrew word. Accomplish what? You probably recognize this as the concluding thought to the well-known Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Jesus will reign forever prophecy. One translation, the New Living Translation, used *passionate commitment* in the place of zeal. The Hebrew word is also translated as *jealousy*. Join me in a bible study exercise and let's rewrite verses six and seven and possibly gain a deeper understanding of God's love for you. It would read something like this: *God is passionately committed to Jesus reigning forever as our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace with authority because He is jealous for us to be called His children*. I must confess that I am guilty of having read this passage and simply thought zeal meant excitement. Cool. God gets excited. But when I was drawn to that word this morning and began to snoop around for meaning and found it goes much, much deeper, my heart melted in Christmas joy. I can hardly fathom God's passionate commitment fueled by jealousy to reign over my life. Yet one more aspect of God's love for each of us I cannot wrap my head around. Most endeavors, even on a human level, which are done with passionate commitment are accomplished. I have no doubt God will accomplish this. Jesus will reign forever!

Prayer

Lord God Almighty, we enter into your presence with humility overwhelmed by how much you love us, how jealous you are to occupy our hearts, how committed you are to pursue us until forever. May your holy passion and jealousy overwhelm us today. May we with open arms welcome you. With gratitude and joy we receive the gift of Jesus Christ to reign in our lives forever. Amen and amen.

Notes -

Monday, December 6, 2021

Verse

1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord— 3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. - Isaiah 11:1-3

Mediation

So many different images were used by the prophets to help us understand who this child, this Son, was, what he was going to do, and how things would be. This image Isaiah portrays comes from the plant world and is quite interesting because it begins with a stump, indicating difficulty or death. It is from the roots this branch will come which will not only grow, but bear fruit and flourish. The birth story begins with resurrection, out of death will come new life. It will be a branch and by nature branches serve many functions, including being pivotal to growth and allowing rest in many forms to happen. The picture the prophet paints is powerful. Your mind should be jumping to the New Testament and linking all the different references and exact fulfillment. Important to this word is the resting concept. I will eagerly await and receive the newborn King knowing the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him and therefore rest on me. Don't miss these powerful words describing the Spirit. They are our gift as well. Wisdom. Understanding. Counsel. Power. Knowledge. Fear of the Lord. We live in the assurance the Spirit of the Lord is resting in our souls as we live with Christ within us. Call on the Spirit to guide your life in the same way it guided the Branch as he lived to bear fruit and flourish in his Father's kingdom!

Prayer

Spirit of the Lord, rest on me. Guide me with wisdom and understanding and counsel and power and knowledge and fear. Inscribe those characteristics on my heart by your Spirit. Let those grow and flourish in my life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

Verse

5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waste. - Isaiah 11:5

Meditation

Men in particular understand the necessity of a belt because we wear pants with belts most every day. Wearing pants without a belt in certain situations may be helpful, necessary, or trendy, but men, let's be honest, it soon becomes a headache. Pants begin to fall or get crooked and shirts prematurely start looking unkept. The belt keeps our clothing in order. Righteousness keeps our spirituality in order. It is the guide which keeps us from getting all out of order. Not a checklist of laws, but the grace-filled love of God which shapes our right living. Sashes in our day have mostly ceremonial or formal significance. Think beauty pageant or tuxedo. Some female attire includes sashes but as we trend toward simplicity it's seen less and less. To understand the sash in context think girdle. Think support. Several places in scripture we read "gird up your loins." Same root word. In ancient attire the sash is what was wound around the waste several times to support the tunic. Jesus was coming to champion the message of righteousness and faithfulness. The righteousness of God will be our guide and His faithfulness will be our support. The good news of Jesus Christ coming into the world and into our life is that it takes a lot of the decision making out of our hands. We lean into Jesus to guide us and support us. Belts and sashes are fashionable after all.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, be our guide and be our support through your Son Jesus Christ being present in our life and working through our life. Forgive us for letting the ways of this world guide us at times. Forgive us for not trusting you at times. May we always look to you for the order we need and the support you give. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Verse

6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. - Isaiah 11:6-9

Meditation

When Christ comes things will be different. No ifs, ands or buts about it. Sometimes we don't see the change and wonder why some things don't change, but when Christ comes things will change and be different. Isaiah was such a gifted writer, beautifully describing the difference Christ will make by drawing from the animal kingdom as well as little children. What he describes is simply not possible without the presence of the supernatural. Without Christ a healthy and growing spiritual life and relationship is virtually impossible. Some of the situation Isaiah describes makes me a little sick in my stomach but the depth of the change is what makes me gravitate toward Christ's love for me. I'm good with the animal illustrations, but when you talk about an infant and cobras and young children and vipers, then I can really see the radically nature of Christ's change in my life. If we come out on the other side of Christmas and there is no real difference in our life then it's just another season of the year without much meaning. Trust that Christ desires to meet you at your point of need and make a difference in your life this Christmas.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may we all understand that we were once blind but now we see and there are blind spots yet to be dealt with. Make a difference in us in those places of great need in our life. Come Lord Jesus and let the lion's of our life lay with lambs. In your precious name we pray. Amen.

Thursday, December 9, 2021

Verse

10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. 11 In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people . . . Isaiah 11:10-11

Meditation

One of the themes occasionally addressed during the Advent season is the second coming of Christ. The obvious theme is to dwell on his first coming and how Christ might be born into our present reality. But there are verses like this one and others that at the same time we are focusing on his first coming we must acknowledge the reality of his second coming. Honestly, most people would prefer not mentioning the second coming because of its finality and Christmas is all about the beginning. And honestly, I rarely do. But on this sixth day of Advent, let us spend a moment or two thinking forward, thinking on that day when Christ will come a second time and gather his remnant. Because in fact it will be a beginning as well, the beginning of the new heaven and the new earth. There are so many questions about it that cannot be answered and it leaves us wondering about the details. But here is one thing I know for certain. I want to be included among the remnant and if I do I will prepare for that day with the same passion I prepare for his first coming, that day we call Christmas. Much effort is put forth by preachers and Sunday School teachers to encourage people not to miss Christmas and its message. I want to encourage you this day not to miss Christ's second coming. May our hearts be found right with the Lord today.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant us grace as we not only prepare for the celebration of your first coming but also as we seek to be ready for your second coming. Forgive us for not seeking you with our whole heart. Give us passion to seek and to live and to serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Friday, December 10, 2021

Verse

5 *“And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” - Isaiah 40:5*

Meditation

It's true. The story is true. What was prophesied and affirmed by the great prophets came into being and the Son of God lived in the glory as it was spoken. We acknowledge and celebrate it each year not because it is a captivating story, which it is, but for its truth. A myth would have long died out as truth was revealed over time. The story of Christmas played out every year changed the trajectory of history as well as individual people's story and it continues to do so today. It may seem a little more difficult in 2017 to describe the change but it still happens because the power of the story remains the same. All people seethe glory of the Lord. Some reject. Some accept. As we awaken each and every day with news that is mind boggling, we realize the more than ever the great need of the truth and power of the Christmas story to find its way into all people. The truth and power of the story which came to life in Bethlehem is not just for church people, it is for all people. It is for you because there is a part of you that needs to experience the birth of Christ afresh this year. It is for the greater church as the Body of Christ needs a fresh touch of the story. It is for those who have never accepted so their personal trajectory will be changed toward heaven. As we experience this Advent season, may this true story be truth for you in a very life changing way!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, first we give you thanks for revealing your glory through your Son on that starry Bethlehem night. We believe it was true then and it is true now. May the same power that birthed a child to a virgin be birthed in us today. May this season of Advent be one for the ages as we celebrate again the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Saturday, December 11, 2021

Verse

9... “Here is your God!” 10 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. - Isaiah 40:9-10

Meditation

Earlier in this chapter Isaiah first spoke the words John the Baptist used to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. As part of that same prophecy we this perspective of Jesus. Yes he will be powerful and rule in that realm as no one has before. In addition comes two other things spoken of much less. Reward and recompense, but not as we would normally think of these two concepts. Usually reward is something received because of what we've achieved. In this case, our reward is a result of something He does. Recompense happens on a human level when decisions are made to try and correct errors and somebody has to pay the price. One person becomes satisfied, one is disheartened. Jesus comes to right that which is wrong, sin, and he bears it all on his shoulders. No sadness. Our wrong is righted and Jesus does it with gladness because of his love for us. In other words, Jesus was born into the world with much power and might and uses that authority to reward his people and bring reconciliation to the world. We've done nothing and deserve nothing but we receive both. A pretty good gift to receive.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we receive your Son and his gifts and bow in thanks. With power and might comes reward and recompense and we receive with gracious hearts. May all of this be manifested in our life today. Not of our doing, but only out of your love for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Third Sunday of Advent, December 12, 2021

Verse

10 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him.
11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.
- Isaiah 40:10-11

Meditation



The wolf will lie with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yedding together; and a little child will lead them. — Isiah 11:3

I have a solid white figurine on my desk very similar to the one pictured. It portrays perfectly for me the idea that embedded in the Christmas story, in Jesus Christ, is both powerful and gentle. The power and might of the lion, the gentleness of the lamb. Yes, Jesus entered the world as the perfect combination of a Five Star

General and a Bedouin Shepherd. The images of Isaiah are powerful. Powerful and mighty Sovereign Lord. A shepherd holding us, lambs, in his arms close to his heart. Like the Israelites who first heard Isaiah speak these words we excitedly rally around the idea of a mighty and powerful King. But most often it's the gentle shepherd who we benefit from. We need both. Only God could embody both in a baby boy named Jesus.

Prayer

Mighty Warrior and Gentle Shepherd, be both for us today. And all things in between. Whether it's a disobedient heart or a hurt heart, be to us the living Christ. Be the lion and the lamb. In His name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Monday, December 13, 2021

Verse

5 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land." - Jeremiah 23:5

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." - Luke 1:30-33

Meditation

Preacher types like me repeat numerous times about how the prophecies related to Jesus' birth happened just as they were spoken. We can look at the big picture of this principle and gain insight into the authority and power of God. We can look at particular details like I have provided today and gain insight into who Jesus is. We can see He will rule over a kingdom forever with righteousness and justice. I don't know about you but that is plenty of good stuff for me. However, we can keep looking deeper and see the significance of the prophecies and their fulfillment to all people. And it has everything to do with lineage. It has everything to do with David. When Jesus was born and people realized that he was linked to the greatest king ever, hope arose. Israel had enjoyed its greatest prosperity ever during the reign of David and now there was the anticipation the same rule and reign could happen again. The Gentiles most likely knew the history and when Jesus came for all people there was excitement all around. Jesus changes things and this hinge point in history gave new perspective to who would enjoy favor from this point forward. It was God's people, all people, all nations and races, who would now enjoy favor. And it happened just as it was foretold by the prophets. And this kingdom will reign forever. Our king is great and as followers of him we should claim our place in the kingdom. Glory be to God!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, guide each of us to the place of living in the kingdom favor where our heritage is grounded. Forgive us for living as if we are not the chosen people. May we always live in your greatness as part of the reign of the Son of the Most High. Revive us and our country to live under your authority. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, December 14, 2021

Verse

5 The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Savior. - Jeremiah 23:5-6

Meditation

"I can't do anything right today." Or, "Nothing about this day has gone right." Can you identify with either one of those statements? Yeah, me too! For Israel, isn't wasn't just a day it was their entire history. It wasn't a bad day that had them worried, it was their entire history. Oh, some days had gone very well, but historically they were trending straight down. In fact, you might make a case for many, many very good days. But when all was said and done, they needed a Savior who would correct the misery of their day. Yeah, me too! We needed a Savior who with justice and righteousness would bring correction into our lives. Jesus was righteous in order to bring correction to our misguided ways. Some days it is hard to accept what is just and right until we realize it is for our salvation. Israel didn't understand the true nature of the Savior to come and, at times, neither do we. Correction to our waywardness is a difficult path and can be prickly. The good news of Christmas is Jesus knew all about prickly before he was ever born. He's up to the challenge. Jesus came to make things right in our hearts and I have no doubt in my mind he will do it.

Prayer

Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our Righteous Savior, come and make straight our paths so we might live a righteous life. You came to put things in order so today, order our lives after your righteousness. We boldly ask you to remove the unclean, the wayward, the sin. Replace it with your holy character. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Wednesday, December 15, 2021

Verse

2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." - Micah 5:2

Meditation

Every detail mattered. Every detail of Jesus' birth became part of the story that only God could orchestrate in his creative mind. Every detail was spoken centuries before and happened just like the prophets uttered them, including Micah. There were others as well. In our lives every detail matters and becomes a part of the story being lived out by each of us every day. The details of Jesus birth point to the miracle it was and then that miracle DNA is lived out through us as we allow Christ to become part of who we are. It is hard for humans to comprehend the summation of details which unfold daily, but we place our faith in the hands of a holy God who is mysteriously designing a story that only He understands. Stop for a minute and think about your life at the moment, your relationships, where you live, all the details. All you can think of didn't just come together in the normalcy of life. There is a story behind your story. When we put our life in God's hands then our story takes on a piece of the divine. God designed it that way because your life matters to Him. Every detail of your miracle matters. Keep living in step with Him.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, keep watch over us as you create a masterpiece story in and through our lives. May our trust in you grow every moment that your love will pour into us as you appoint each step we take. Do not let us dismiss the details. You are in the details. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Verse

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. - Isaiah 7:14

2 But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." - Micah 5:2

Meditation

I put these two verses together because they are just two examples which point to the perfection of God. We often overlook the perfection by which God orders life because we live in such an imperfect world. Long before the first Christmas God used prophets to foretell of the miracle of a virgin birth and pinpointed the exact location. And it happened just that way! Not in a way that can be explained by our finite mind but it happened within the mystery of God. He used a simple girl and an insignificant city to adorn the world with a Savior. I doubt Mary realized any divine intervention in her life previous to being told she was with child. She lived her life making the same decisions every young girl would make, some good and some not so good. Just Mary being Mary. Bethlehem wasn't ready either. No ticker tape, no keys to the city, no proclamations by the mayor. Just Bethlehem being Bethlehem. Our lives march on day to day. Just Alan being Alan. Just you being you. With the mystery of God in the midst of it. We certainly can't explain it because at times it makes no sense or it hurts so bad. Out of you being you might come a miracle God has been planning since the dawn of the first day. You'll never realize what God is up to until you are in awe of the majesty of His miracle. Light for the lost. Hope for the broken hearted. Just because God had planned to use you to birth the Savior in some mysterious way.

Prayer

In the perfection of your holiness, O God, we bow before you in awe and wonder. We place our trust in you that our lives are ordered according to your very holiness. We wait and live with anticipation to experience the miracle of your mystery. We give thanks you would choose to use the unworthiest of people, us, to unveil a perfect plan. Humble us to be your willing servants today. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Friday, December 17, 2021

Verse

4 He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. 5 And he will be our peace. - Micah 5:4-5

Meditation

We all need a shepherd. We may not think we do but our lives point to the necessity of one. We need someone who will unconditionally care for us to the point of putting his life on the line for the sake of one. We need a shepherd who operates in the realm of the supernatural and does it not for his own reputation and reward but for the sake of his Father in heaven. And yet, we are the recipients of the reward. Recently I asked a group of people if they opened a gift on Christmas Day and it was exactly what they wanted what would the gift be. I gave them no further instructions other than there were no wrong answers and it was a guilt free question. To my delightful amazement many people answered in one form or another security and peace. If you consider the role of a shepherd tending actual sheep, it is to secure them at all times and remove the fear of being attacked or lost. The reward which comes from the Shepherd of the Sheep, Jesus Christ, is security and peace. He compassionately cares for us in such a way that we sense security and out of that security we have the peace that passes all understanding. Jesus desires to guard us from potential chaos and confusion. Shepherding in the supernatural realm gives him the strength to do just that. Having a shepherd is a good thing. He is great and his greatness will be with us to the ends of the earth.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we join with your Son in his sheepfold. We desire security and peace and pray we will experience it in some way today. We also join with him to live our life in the majesty of your name, O Lord. May your greatness be seen all around us because we have yielded to the shepherd of our life. Thank you for caring enough about us to be our shepherd. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Saturday, December 18, 2021

Verse

1 This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: . . . 17 Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah. - Matthew 1:1, 17

Meditation

When genealogy is recorded in scripture it is the part we usually skip over to make the reading go faster. The first seventeen verses of Matthew is genealogy but I invite you to peruse through it and check out the people who appear in family of Jesus the Messiah. You will find some interesting, important, and maybe surprising names. Abraham. Tamar. Boaz. Rahab. Ruth. David. Josiah. There are some mighty big names in the list but there are mostly people just like me and you. Very ordinary. Some were leaders and kings while others we know very little about. When David asked the question in Psalm 24, "Who is this King of glory?" one answer is surely the king of all people. People with an assortment of history to their credit. Jesus came to be everyone's king and it is portrayed in the simple list of names we often overlook. He comes to save the world, not just part of the world. He came to save us so we might be transformed into his likeness, free from the burden of sin. He comes to save people from every race and creed. He comes to save the kings and the slaves. The free and the oppressed. The saints and the sinners. Arms open wide to welcome you and me because we will blend into his family just fine. We all need work and He welcomes us. Welcome to His family, the family of the Messiah.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we rejoice today to be included in the family of King Jesus. We rejoice because we are included even though our family tree may not look too good. We are thankful it's good enough for your grace and mercy. We bow into humility at the honor of being part of the family of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 19, 2021

Verse

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. - Luke 1:19

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." - Luke 1:26-28

Meditation

Gabriel was one lucky angel. Picked among all the angels to be the bearer of good, even great, news. First to Elizabeth and then to Mary. News that changed the lives of two families for sure. And ours. Gabriel was given the honor and breaking into the mundane routine of two lives and proclaiming the unbelievable. Proclaiming a miracle of life. A barren and elderly women having her disgrace removed. A young virgin giving birth to the Savior. No doubt Gabriel's news was the best news. Christmas is all about the best news. And our Christmas position might find us on either side of the equation. It's an honor no matter which side we find ourselves. God could be fashioning the moment when you become Gabriel for someone who yearns for great news to be poured into their life. Stand in His presence and listen for your name to be called. What an honor! God could be fashioning the moment when you finally hear the great news a Gabriel is speaking into your life. Stand in His presence and listen for Gabriel to call your name. What an honor! Both are miracles. Both include standing in His presence. Both embrace the Christmas story.

Prayer

Place us in your presence, O God, in holy moments, to hear you calling. Whether we hear the call to speak or hear the call to be spoken to, we want to hear from you. We acknowledge you have something special, some miracle, this Christmas for your children. Honor us according to your very best for each of us. Honor us with great news! In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Monday, December 20, 2021

Verse

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." - Luke 1:23-25

Meditation

Many people have but I would say most of us have never experienced public disgrace. Elizabeth had. We may not have experienced public disgrace but we have all experienced private disgrace, or disgrace among a few. Elizabeth's disgrace was about as deep as a female could experience in her day and time. She was barren, she could not conceive and give birth to a child. She would never experience the joy of motherhood and always face the disdain of the general public. Or at least she thought. She and Zechariah were old, way beyond child bearing age when God intervened and they became part of the Christmas story. Just when they thought all hope was lost of ever Elizabeth ever fulfilling one of the expectations of every women, God shows up in their life and she becomes pregnant. It's the story of a miracle of epic proportion in a couple's life who had given up hope of ever turning around this disgrace. But it happened! And she gave birth to John who would play a prominent role in Jesus be ushered into the world and into his ministry. Don't give up on whatever you might be calling disgraceful in your life. You might be on the verge of God showing great favor in your life and taking it away. We will never understand God's timing but we've experienced his favor. And you may soon be able to sing the same song as Elizabeth and testify to the goodness of God who has taken away your disgrace. Remember, Zechariah and Elizabeth were both upright before the Lord and obedient to his commands and beyond child-bearing age. A godly couple shown favor when it was least expected. Don't give up on God's favor.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we lay before your altar whatever in our life we might label as disgraceful and hindering us in our relationship with you. Show favor into our lives and fill our lives with grace which removes the disgrace. Whether public or private, show favor and restore us to experience the joy of our salvation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Tuesday, December 21, 2021

Verse

27 . . . The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God." - Luke 1:27b-30

Meditation

Because of human nature we tend to default into thinking the worst in most situations especially when caught unaware. Mary was no different and was afraid. I'm sure she thought she was in trouble as this was a very unusual situation. Angels didn't come and speak very often. But when they did, it's good news! We learn three important things in this angel encountering the virgin story. I'll share them briefly lest you think it's about to be a three point sermon and three pages long. Mary found favor with God. The Lord was with her and would be with her throughout the impending journey. Therefore, there was no need to be afraid. As we close in on Christmas, you may encounter a God moment, an angel, somewhere along the way most likely being nudged to be used by God in a very special way. Don't be afraid. You're being chosen because you are the right person in the right moment. You have been favored for the very moment you find yourself in. And the Lord will be with you and provide every word and every resource you need. He did for Mary. I can say that because I know the rest of the story. Keep your eyes open and your ears in tune for an angel calling your name and the Lord preparing to use you mightily to show forth Christ in all his glory!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, show us favor so we might hear from an angel and be Christ for somebody seeking to find a glimmer of light in their life. Or let us hear for to affirm your presence in our life. May the Spirit speak mightily in our lives today for the sake of the kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Wednesday, December 22, 2021

Verse

30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." - Luke 1:30-33

Meditation

We would probably all agree *hope* is a universal theme of Christmas. Both the secular and the religious embrace *hope* during this season. I even recall seeing something with *Hope* on it at Starbuck's one year. It's probably so common and spoken so often we hardly even give it a second thought. Yep, hope. However, to engage in a quick reality check we might discover hope is hard to find. Where is hope? Here. Jesus will be great. Jesus is the Son of the Most High. Jesus is on the throne of this kingdom. His kingdom will NEVER end. My circumstances, your circumstances, events in the world, moral decay of our culture, none of these may indicate there is hope. But hope rises when we declare and believe and live in the truth that the kingdom of Jesus Christ will never end! As children of the King of the kingdom we have hope He rules in his kingdom now and we will be part of an eternal kingdom. Hope supercedes all things when seen in the light of His kingdom. I choose to believe regardless of what I see and experience in this world, God wins because His kingdom will never end. That's hope!

Prayer

Son of the Most High, we acknowledge there is no greater power and authority than you. We place our hope in you today. We declare that power and authority over all the things of this earthly existence. We confess our inability to understand, but in faith stand firm in the hope of your kingdom authority. Wrap hope around our heart so everything about this day is surrounded by it. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Verse

38 "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her. - Luke 1:38

Meditation

Places of vulnerability create moments of great anxiety and Mary found herself in one of these places. It was the place she came to realize put her right where the Lord wanted her to be. Simply a servant with an obedient spirit. When all was said and done with Gabriel's visit I'm confident Mary had many more questions than answers. She was certain about a few things. Favor. Pregnant. Mother of a child with lots of names and a complicated future. Possibility with God. She was uncertain about several. Her future. Her role. Her husband. Mary was willing to lay aside all the uncertainties created by what she knew and what she didn't know to find herself in a place of complete vulnerability before the Lord and answered, "I am the Lord's servant." Mary was clearly more willing to be an obedient servant than wilt in self-centeredness. She didn't know what it meant or where it would take her but she was willing to say yes. No buts, no conditions. She simply laid her life before God and declared that whatever His desire was she was willing to serve Him. Her answer may have been laced with anxiety but the hope of fulfilling the word of the Lord which came through Gabriel overshadowed the anxiety. Mary was faithful way before she understood the outcome. She was unconditionally obedient. We should be challenged by Mary's story. And say yes before we know all the answers.

Prayer

Lord, give each of us a spirit of obedient which overcomes all the hesitations we may have and they anxiety we create. We want our response to your call to be likened unto Mary. May the Christ of Christmas strip away all the conditions we place on our willingness to be your obedient servant. In His name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Christmas Eve, Friday, December 24, 2021

Verse

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. - Luke 2:4-5

Meditation

A census paved the way for all the pieces to fall into place. A Roman emperor paved the way for all the prophecies to be perfectly fulfilled. The most unlikely circumstances and people sit right in the center of the most important story of all time. And it continued. An unlikely place for a birth. Unlikely visitors. An unlikely King. The story filled with hope, joy, love, and peace was fulfilled in all of the most unlikely ways with all the most unlikely people and Jesus turns out to be the most unlikely Messiah. At least to those who experienced him first. But for those of us who sit on this side of his life, Jesus is the most likely Savior born into the world on a day we call Christmas. It is just like the Savior of the world, Jesus, to teach timely truths which are timeless, to heal the brokenhearted and the broken bodied, to comfort the hurting, to forgive the sinful, to transform humanity and the world. Your run up to Christmas Day this year may have been the most unlikely path you've ever walked. The hours left before the celebration of his birth may lead you to unlikely places. I have great news for you. Right in the midst of the unlikely is where you will find Jesus being born into your world.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, lead me to an experience of Jesus wherever I find myself today and in the midst of whatever situations and circumstances I encounter today. It may be just what I expected or the most unlikely, just help me to see Jesus. Don't let me be distracted by the unknown or the unwanted for I want to experience the birth of Christ my Savior. Prepare my heart for tomorrow. In Christ's precious name I pray. Amen.

Notes -

Christmas Day, Saturday, December 25, 2021

Verse

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14

Meditation

Christ is born! The Christmas gift has arrived. We imagine a baby crying and identify with proud parent hearts. While Matthew and Luke eloquently tell the Christmas story and each detail creates an image full of profound truth, John teaches the story and its truth. In the first eighteen verses of John often referred to as a prologue, the story is unpacked. Life. True light. Children of God and many more concepts become part of the explanation of this miracle birth. Full of grace stands tall among them all. Lying in a manger was grace for all people, the opportunity to become a redeemed people. Lying in a manger was a relationship with the heavenly Father that we could not attain on our own. Our life is forever changed because Mary wrapped grace in swaddling clothes. Maybe the clothes barely fit around Jesus because he was so full of grace. Full of truth stands tall as well. Humanity often struggles with understanding right and wrong, debating basic moral issues, dividing ourselves because we want to determine truth when all along truth was born and lived for us. Christmas joy comes as we realize the fullness of grace and truth that was born into the world. A great gift indeed.

Prayer

Gracious God, we receive your grace and truth today. We give thanks for grace which makes redemption possible and we give thanks for truth which allows us to walk in the path of righteousness. May the fullness of grace and truth be evident in our life as we live for you and proclaim your glorious name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Sunday, December 26, 2021

Verse

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

Meditation

With Christmas Day still in sight, in the midst of gatherings involving food, family, gifts, and possibly chaos, include a heart of worship as a take away from your Christmas experience. You may even be returning home to a sense of normalcy having played a game in which you took away a gift you didn't want or can't possibly use. The gift of worship is important and beneficial as a take away from Christmas. It's a gift you should want and use. I'm not talking about what you do in a building on Sunday, I'm talking about an attitude of your heart toward the Messiah who began as a child in a manger and finished as a Savior on a cross. He is worthy of occupying a place of worship in our heart that influences who we are and what we do. The wise men brought gifts and a desire to worship. I imagine it was an experience they left from changed from the inside out and carried with them as a spirit of worship in their heart. May Christ as a worshipful spirit be a take away planted in your heart this Christmas.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we desire to worship you in our heart not just in these days of Christmas but every day we take a breath. May a Christmas gift we take away be a spirit of worship of your holiness implanted in our heart so our life reflects you at all times. Receive our worship as we seek to glorify your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Monday, December 27, 2021

Verse

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. - Luke 1:41

Meditation

Only a pregnant woman knows the joy of a child in her womb moving, or leaping. Unbridled joy. And at times pain. In this case Elizabeth not only experienced the joy of her baby leaping but was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Simply at the sound of Mary's voice. There had to be something more than just the voice. If it were just the joy of seeing Mary which emotionally stirred Elizabeth that would be one thing, but it's the filling of the Holy Spirit which forces me to drill down deeper. The Lord was in the house and his presence does the unexpected. Like causing babies to leap and people being filled with the Spirit for unknown reasons. It's within God's grand design that the presence of the Lord works in us in very mysterious ways. Elizabeth was not anticipating or expecting anything that happened in the moment. But we can. When in God's presence our hearts leap with joy, our countenance is guided by the Spirit, our life in some way reflects His glory. His presence through us then becomes contagious. Awareness of the principle, anticipation of God in our midst, and expectation of His desire to do the mysterious in and through us is His design.

Prayer

Holy God, be present in our life today, all day, in fact, every day. And may your presence be reflected in us as joy. Fill us with your Spirit afresh so your mysterious ways unfold in our life and change us to be more like you. May our hearts leap because of you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Tuesday, December 28, 2021

Verse

46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name." - Luke 1:46-49

Meditation

We love Mary. We love her singing and we have never heard her. Or maybe we have heard her in our mind as we can hear the sweet sound of her voice. The sweetness of her voice resonates because this song is about her but it is not about her. It is about what happened to her but it is about her Savior, her God, who has honored her and from the abundance of blessing comes her desire to honor him. Two words help us see this come about. Humble and servant. From the beginning she realized the best posture of any person is one of humility and ultimately we are all servants of the King of Kings. She will be called blessed not because of what she has done but because of what God has done through her. She understands her position in relation to what God is doing in the world and her realization of that is attractive. Would it be that we are most concerned with what God is doing in the world through his people. Would it be that we are most concerned that our soul is glorifying the Lord. Would it be that we are most concerned with being a humble servant and pleased when God is pleased. Holy is his name!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, as you choose to bless us with your presence may we receive your activity in and through us humbly and be a servant pleasing to you. Let everything in our life glorify your name and honor you and your work. We cry holy with the angels because holy is your name. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Wednesday, December 29, 2021

Verse

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . .16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. - John 1:14, 16

Meditation

Although John did not give us the details of Jesus birth like Matthew and Luke, he did give us a look into the power of the story. John used the metaphor of light and it illuminated the truth of Emmanuel, the incarnation, the divine made humanly alive and literally being among people. He went further and linked grace and truth to the marvel of the Savior who brings blessing after blessing after blessing. It's easy to miss the blessings because of the clutter and chaos of everyday living. But they come out of the fullness of his grace. Verse sixteen tells us a lot about who Jesus is and how he lived his life. He blesses all people simply out of his love and the desire to give us what we haven't earned or deserve. That's Jesus and that's the power of him coming to dwell among us. It shines light on his great love for us. In these few days since we celebrated Christmas try to dig through the clutter and see and experience the blessing. Jesus, God's Son, is with us. We can all live into the new year with that blessing.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, what a blessing it is to live with and walk daily with Jesus. Thank you for sending him to be among us and not just an entity to be imagined. Thank you for grace and truth and blessings. With grateful hearts we move toward the celebration of His birth and ask you bring greater awareness to each person of the meaning of grace and truth being with us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

Thursday, December 30, 2021

Verse

19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20 and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." 21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene. - Matthew 2:19-23

Meditation

Two more dreams and Joseph and his family were in a town they did not intend to be. At least it was familiar territory as they began this journey in Nazareth. It was, however, according to God's plan thus the statements confirming a prophetic word. Joseph was probably tired of the dreams because they created anxiety and last minute change of plans. We on the other hand would love to have a dream or two involving an angel of the Lord when trying to answer the why questions or figuring out God's plan for our life. Angels appearing in dreams seem to be rare, but God moments when a clear word is placed in our minds and hearts aren't. We must be intentionally attentive when we sense God speaking. How do we know? When you have a thought or an impression of some spiritual nature which is clearly outside the realm of your normal thinking and reasoning, then most likely God is speaking into your heart. I've learned from experience it's best to agree with God and move forward. I've also learned from experience the word of the Lord comes to people at odd times and places. As you seek God for answers or direction, be attentive at all times. He might use unlikely people and circumstances to speak into your life. Like Joseph, and Mary, and Herod, and Bethlehem, and a stable. Listen closely. He might be about to use you to make a significant difference in his Kingdom.

Prayer

Dear Lord, give us ears to hear, eyes to see, and hearts to receive. We've prayed that many times but we pray it again because we yearn to hear your voice. We yearn to know we are following your will for our life. Forgive us for ignoring you. Forgive us for arguing with you. Forgive us for choosing our own way. Direct us in a better path. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Friday, December 31, 2021

Verse

11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. - Romans 13:11-12

Meditation

We are steam rolling toward a new year. Tomorrow we will turn the calendar to 2022. We will worship as the gathered community of faith on January 2. I want to encourage you to launch into the new year with your full armor of light shining brightly into a world of darkness. You may not consider yourself as having been spiritually asleep but there is every evidence around us that the community of faith has been. Let us awaken to a new day in a new year and declare the greatness of God. Let us declare that the night of the church sleeping is over and our communities are going to see the light of Christ in all its brilliance. As you give thought to the new year, consider the ways in which you can put on the armor of light. Alongside of losing weight and exercising more, add being light to the list of things you want to do in 2022. There will be a lot of new things in this new year but let's join together as the unified community of faith and declare an ancient truth. Jesus came 2000+ years ago as the light of the world to shine and overcome darkness. As faithful people, let's put aside the deeds of darkness and be the light of Christ in a new way in a new year.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, let the light of Christ shine through me so it is perceived that my countenance is surrounded by an armor of light. May every deed I do be one that reflects the light of Christ so that people are drawn to the light and love of Christ. We pray that we will be change agents as we are light in the midst of darkness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Notes -

S.O.A.P. BIBLE STUDY NOTES

SCRIPTURE

verse or verses THAT STAND OUT TO ME

OBSERVATION

WHAT DO I FEEL GOD IS SHOWING ME IN THIS PASSAGE?

APPLICATION

WHAT WILL I DO ABOUT IT? WHAT DO THESE VERSES ASK ME TO DO OR CHANGE?

PRAYER

THANK HIM & ASK HIM FOR WISDOM TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND AND STRENGTH AND COURAGE TO HELP YOU APPLY THESE TRUTHS.

AN-ABUNDANT-LIFE.ORG

Appreciation

Thank you for joining with me as we journeyed to the manger and beyond. I trust this experience has been valuable to your spiritual life and your Christmas season. I am blessed to be able to share these simple yet profound truths with you each day. I pray your eyes were opened and your mind expanded to gain maybe one or two new insights about the Christmas story. Most of all I am praying you experienced Christ in your heart afresh in a life-changing way.

Thank you to the wonderful congregation of Jasper First UMC and all those beyond who receive the devotion guides and read and study God's word each day. It's a joy to mature in the faith together.

If you are new to the daily devotion I write and would like to continue, simply email me and I will send it to you via email. The devotion follows a guide similar to this one, the difference being I write them new each morning. You can also read them on Facebook as I post them there as well. I write a devotion each morning, Monday through Friday.

It's always an honor to join you through the means of this written devotion. If this is your first time, I trust our paths will cross again one day.

Living the Advent story together,

Alan H. Beasley

abeasley@jasperfirstumc.com