

Simple Christmas



2020 Advent and Christmas
Devotional

Created by the Point Place and
Shoreland Churches

Simple Christmas
Advent and Christmas Daily Devotional
A project of the Point Place and Shoreland Churches

We all have cherished traditions. Traditions, at their best, root us in what is best about our past, teach us about who we are, and re-focus us on what is most important. Nowhere do traditions take centerstage more insistently than the Advent and Christmas seasons. Many of us yearn to reconnect with these traditions each year, whether they be in the home, out in public, or in our churches. We must also acknowledge that it is the depth of these connections that can make the holidays such a difficult time when traditions fade, loss hits us with a fresh intensity, or expectations are not met.

The year 2020 has been a year that has certainly shattered expectations and we have been faced with loss of many kinds. As the Body of Christ in Point Place and Shoreland, we have had to release some cherished traditions like our Thanksgiving Service and Christmas VBS as we seek to do our part to care for one another and curb the spread of COVID-19.

But sometimes loss opens up space for new opportunities. Certainly, all of our traditions began somewhere! This devotional is our effort to witness to the unbreakable bond of the Spirit that we share through Emmanuel, God-with-Us. The hope is not only that the words will inspire hope, peace, joy, and love, but that something of who we are as sisters and brothers will emerge through page and ink.

In this devotional, may you be blessed by the voice of Emmanuel this Advent and Christmas season, for we **know that God's voice often comes to us through the** vocal cords or pens or keyboards of those who partake in the Divine nature alongside of us.

And whatever trappings of Christmas we may be missing this year, may we learn the lesson of that convert to love, The Grinch, when all the glimmer and **shine of tradition were stripped away: "Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store. Maybe Christmas— perhaps— means a little bit more."**

The Rev. Mike DeLong
(CrossPoint Community Church)
The Rev. Cindy Getzinger
(Messiah Lutheran Church)
Pastor Donna Ebanks
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The Rev. Jon Komperda
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The Rev. Amy Kuhlman
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Fr. David Cirata
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November 29, 2020
The First Sunday in Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 64:1, 3-4

Our God comes down! Isn't that what Christmas is about? Our God became incarnate in Jesus Christ and lived among the people. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14). But our God did not only come down to earth as this baby born in Bethlehem. Our God has a pattern of coming down and being amongst God's people. In the Old Testament, there are stories of God being with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and all God's prophets. And in the New Testament, God came down and met the Apostle Paul and Paul experienced a conversion. Our God comes down and makes a difference in our lives. So during these Advent and Christmas seasons, celebrate not only the birth of the Baby Jesus born in Bethlehem, but celebrate that we have a God that comes down and walks with us through all the stuff life throws at us. By God's powerful presence with us, God gives us hope for all our tomorrows. Allow God to come down and make a difference in your life and in your heart during Advent, Christmas, and beyond.

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you that you are a God that has a powerful presence amongst your people. You are not some far-off God that is absent from your people, but you are a God in the midst of your people bringing hope for our tomorrows. Amen.

Pastor Cindy Getzinger,
Messiah Lutheran Church

November 30, 2020
The First Monday in Advent

Scripture: Matthew 4:18-22

Jesus began to call His disciples in this reading. I think **of the hymn “Jesus Call Us”**: **“Jesus call us o’er the tumult of our life’s wild, restless seas...”** Is this a description of the year 2020 for many of us?

Our months have been filled with a new vocabulary: shelter in place; self-isolation; social distancing; community spread; contact tracing; and WEAR YOUR MASK!

The disciples left their nets to follow Jesus. It may be hard for us to step away from our comfort zones, but now may be the time to be creative in ways to reach out to others.

Large gatherings of friends will probably not be wise this year. Instead, look around to older neighbors. Maybe we cannot visit them due to the virus, but a phone call or holiday card could lift their spirits. This may be a good year to put holiday lights in your windows or yard. Let us show our community that the light of Christ is coming soon as they look out their windows or pass by on our street.

Prayer: Let us pray to God who loves us, that we stay safe as He leads us through this Advent season.

Margaret Kolling
RiverPoint Ministries UMC

December 1, 2020
The First Tuesday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 10:21-24

I was channel surfing one day, and I saw the onset of **the many Christmas shows coming up** (*It's a Wonderful Life, A Timeless Christmas, A Christmas Carol, Forever Christmas, Enchanted Christmas, Time for Me to Come Home for Christmas, etc., etc.*).

All of these shows portray Christmas as a magical time of year, but never truly capture the reason why it is. They tell us that Christmas has the power to give people purpose to live, and show the joy of being with family and friends, and convey a longing for the spirit of joy and giving throughout the year. And, all of these things are right and good. But, they miss the fact that Christmas is so much more.

On the first Christmas, God revealed Himself to us through Jesus. On the first Christmas, Jesus (the Almighty God come in the flesh) was born into a lowly family and revealed to shepherds. The true message of Christmas is that God chooses to reveal Himself to us in gentleness and humility rather than on a grander scale to the leaders of the world.

Now let us dedicate ourselves this season, and throughout the year, to share the true redemptive, eternal power of the true Christmas message to everyone.

Prayer: Lord, help us to understand the true message of Christmas this year, and help us to share its truth and power to others. Amen.

Dan Gardner
CrossPoint Community Church

December 2, 2020
The First Wednesday in Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 25:1-10

The words that begin our reading today might inspire images of a powerful warrior or a haughty king. But God shows us that He is a good king for different reasons than we might expect. He promises a kingdom where the poor are cared for, the king feeds His people **“rich food and choice wines,”** and the Lord Himself reaches to **“wipe away the tears from all faces.”** What mighty, powerful king has ever ruled like this?

Some have called the Kingdom of God the “Upside-Down Kingdom” because the way God loves and leads is so counter-cultural to anything we expect from rulers or governments. We see this Kingdom prophesied in **today’s reading, culminating in the image of the mountain that points to Calvary.** On this mountain, God will destroy death – not as a richly adorned king, but as a humble man on a cross. The triumph of this King comes in humility and sacrificial love.

It’s clear that God doesn’t fit into our expectations of Him, and isn’t that so true at Christmas? The king of the Upside-down Kingdom comes to save the world as a baby in a manger. Take some time to reflect on how wonderful it is that our God loves us in such a humble way.

Prayer: Lord, I am in awe at all the ways You take my expectations by surprise, and I want to deeply delight in Your love for me. Thank You for making a way for me to enter Your great Kingdom. Open my eyes to all the humble, personal ways You are loving me this Advent season, and teach me to love You more.

Maggie Pawsey — St. John the Baptist

December 3, 2020
The First Thursday in Advent

Scripture: Matthew 7:21, 24-27

This passage reminded me so much of the story of THE THREE LITTLE PIGS. You know it: one built a house, of straw, one a house of sticks, and one a house of bricks. The big bad wolf came along and huffed and puffed and blew the first two down but couldn't blow the house of bricks down as it was built on a solid foundation.

Are our houses/lives built on a rock foundation? As Christians, our foundations are built on a very strong foundation when we devote ourselves to God's word and doing His will. We read and study the New Testament and follow the teachings of Jesus and try to be more like Him. To do God's will and follow in Jesus' footsteps, our opportunities are endless. We have more than enough food to feed the hungry. Jesus taught us to love one another. We can show that love to our neighbors, to strangers who need some support, to those who look different than we do. We can be forgiving. We can voice our opinion when justice is not being granted. We can make a dinner or send a card when someone needs to be touched when that person is ill or saddened or even a cheery greeting. As stated, endless. During this time of Advent reflection, add more to this list as you think of them.

Don't be like the foolish man and turn our backs on doing God's will. We have a solid foundation in Jesus and let us share that gift with others.

Prayer: Oh Lord, help us to be more like you. Open our eyes and ears that we will see the needs before us and hear when someone calls. Enable us to touch the lives of all your children. Amen.

Donna Zeller — Messiah Lutheran Church

December 4, 2020
The First Friday in Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 29:17-24

Recently, I was reading from the book of Isaiah 29:21, **“Those, who with a word make someone out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice,”** when I recalled something in my childhood.

Back in 1964, I was doing some filing in my father’s court file room. I was shocked to find that my father and his father had committed my paternal grandmother to the Toledo State Hospital. When I asked why – my dad told me that she had come to my mother and me with a butcher knife - so it was for my safety since we were all living in the same house.

Recently, I was awakened early in the morning with a memory of a dream I had just experienced. In my dream – someone spoke to me and said – **“Your grandmother thought you and your mother were intruders in her home –in her mind (suffering from senile dementia) you were not family – but strangers in her safe home. That’s why she came at you with a butcher knife – she was protecting her home – it wasn’t because she wanted you dead.”**

So – suddenly I saw the situation from a different mindset. I certainly forgive her – and feel love in my heart for Grandma Edna – not fear. Thank you, Lord – for this memory correction. And thank you, Lord, for forgiving me after all those years.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for speaking to us - sometimes in very different ways - and help us to listen and to be receptive to your message. Please forgive us for misunderstanding others actions toward us and forgive us for our bad feelings toward them. Help us to refrain from hurting others even when we think they have hurt us. Amen.

Cindy Trudeau — Point Place UCC

December 5, 2020
The First Saturday in Advent

Scripture: Matthew 9:35 – 10: 1, 5a, 6-7

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. Even though **it's cold outside, it's that time of year when memories of** past Christmases warm our hearts. I remember spending **lots of Christmas Eves at my Gramma's house with my** family and extended family, then going to worship at church. When I got a little older, I enjoyed going to the late Christmas Eve service to sing in the choir. Christmas can mean many things to many people. But to me it meant the happiest time of year, spending it with family, friends, and worshiping and singing in the choir.

Christmastime has changed for me over the years, and **I'm sure it has for many of you. Most of my family are** not around anymore for different reasons. Now I focus more on the spiritual side of Christmas. Celebrating Christmas means enjoying worshiping at church. I really love seeing everyone at Christmas—**that hasn't changed.** This year we are not sure what the season will look like. However, we can make more warm Christmas memories in a new way. Remember to stay safe during Christmas **gatherings with family and friends. Also, I'd like to remind you to “. . . share the good news . . . that the kingdom of heaven”** is coming near in the form of a baby—our Savior, who is always with us to make life more joyful and a little easier.

May this Christmas season bring you lots of joy and more, if different, warm memories.

Prayer: Holy Wisdom, Holy Word, Holy Wind, bless your creation and ALL your children during this Christmas season and always. Help us to grow together in faith and to share the Good News with all that we meet, in kind words and with helping hands. Amen.

Linda Martz — Messiah Lutheran Church

December 6, 2020
The Second Sunday in Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 10:1-2

The upcoming arrival of Christmas, for some, brings the feelings of anxiety, hopelessness, sadness, and pain. Maybe we may have lost a loved one and the thought of celebrating without them hurts too much. Maybe we do not have the money to buy the gifts that we really want to purchase. Or maybe Christmas brings about undesirable feelings from the past. None of these feelings, whether mourning or pain or anger or **whatever other emotion that you're going through** - none can be healed with comfort items such as teddy bears and blankets, or even the best comfort foods - but only time, love, and God.

Thank God there is good news from the prophet Isaiah. **God himself says "Comfort, comfort, my people... speak softly and tenderly..."**

When we need comfort, we need to remember, first, that God is our Sovereign Lord. He will meet us, in our moments of hurt and pain, with his powerful love and grace. Our Father is a loving and compassionate God full of grace and mercy.

Whatever you are going through today, and through this Advent and Christmas season, you can take comfort in knowing that just like a shepherd with his **sheep, God carries us close to his heart and "will never leave us nor forsake us."** (Deuteronomy 31:6)

Prayer: Holy God, the season of Advent and Christmas brings for some, feelings of hopelessness, pain, and anger. Be with us Lord, hold us close to your hearts, and help us to lean into you, always. Amen.

Pastor Amy Kuhlman — RiverPoint Ministries UMC

December 7, 2020
The Second Monday in Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 35:1-10

The Promise of Joy – Yet to Come

Reading Isaiah 35, I am struck by all of God's promises that WILL overtake us. While acknowledging our earthly pain, God promises joy will be mine. Yet, how can this be in the midst of the darkness? In the midst of the struggles and pain I currently face? I find it in the One we celebrate at Christmas. The One who promised hundreds of years before He walked this earth that He **WILL bring joy because He brings Himself! Here's the great news - Joy HAS overtaken us!** It is a promise **fulfilled. "Rejoice IN THE LORD always,"** **Philippians 4** tells me, and therein lies the secret. He is my source of Joy, the beautiful promise of Emmanuel, God with me, penned so long ago. Jesus brought His great promises of hope, joy, love and peace on that beautiful Christmas morn and I am struck how His promises walk with me every day as I walk in His Way, even when walking the dark, painful roads of life. And what is yet to come? That glorious day when sorrow and sighing WILL be vanquished forever. On that day my Joy WILL be complete!

Prayer: Glorious Father, we praise you for your promises not only for our future security, but for the fulfillment of those promises already given as we walk this earth. May we shine Your hope, joy, love and peace as we walk in Your Way, that those who do not know of your great promises will come and receive from You the beautiful gift of Christmas - **the gift of Jesus. In Jesus' Name - Amen**

Amy Gardner
CrossPoint Community Church

December 8, 2020
The Second Tuesday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

Mary was given a great deal of information: how God favored her, what was going to happen to her body in accordance with God's will, what she was to do in response to God's will, and who this special child was to become. Her answers were very simple and straight forward: "How can this be?" and "Let it be." How often do we complicate God's call in our day-to-day life? How often do we say "Let it be" when asked to do something on God's behalf or on the behalf of those in need around us? It is easy to get caught up in the details of work to be done, preparations to be made, activities to plan, etc. But when we do this, we get caught up in the details of the work and miss the simplicity of just saying yes and allowing God's love and work to flow through us to others. Sometimes we get so busy that we miss the simplicity of finding joy in doing God's will at each moment just as Mary did.

Prayer: Lord, so many times I get busy and overwhelmed with the details and miss the opportunity to simply follow Your will with trust and abandonment, knowing that You see the full and bigger picture. Help me to be free to just serve You without reserve by serving and helping others that You place in my pathway every day. Help me to remain simple as Mary was. Thank you for all that You do for me. Amen.

Faith Weber
St. John the Baptist

December 9, 2020
The Second Wednesday in Advent

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

When I read this Scripture passage, I was reminded of all the families and friends of the many people who have passed away due to the Coronavirus. Matthew is telling us that God will help them carry their heavy loads and make the burden light. These survivors will perhaps focus on Christmas as the **beginning of Christ's life on earth. He was sent to be our Redeemer, the Messiah, the one to bring the message of God's love for us. He came as a babe to remind us of our helplessness in times of sorrow.** We have a need for God to care for us, not us deciding what God can do to heal us. We can know that in time of grief, He will carry the load for us and our burdens will turn to joy. God is with us in good times and in bad. We should thank Him for the grace we have received. What a blessing to know He will always be there to heal our pain. That is His gift to us at Christmas: His Son.

Prayer: My God, please comfort those who are suffering from the loss of a loved one from the Coronavirus. Help each person to realize Your compassion, to trust in Your love, and to be able to see a future without worry and pain. Keep us all in Your loving care. For this we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Vicki Fahim
St. John the Baptist

December 10, 2020
The Second Thursday in Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 41:13-20

When you think of Christmas time, you picture snow covered ground, smiling people shopping for their loved ones, and little ones in line to see Santa Claus. Your thoughts are usually filled with joy, laughter, and celebration. For some, it brings a dark cloud over our heads. Memories from Christmas past, reminders of loved ones who are no longer with us, or just reminders **of those less fortunate. The Lord says, "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them. I the God of Israel will not forsake them"** (Isaiah 41:17). It is a gentle reminder that through darkness there is light. Hold on to the blessings, because you have God in your corner no matter what. He will love you and provide for you through thick and thin. When you hold fear and doubt close to your heart it is hard to see the light. The opposite of fear is faith, and you gotta have faith.

Prayer: Our swift savior, please remind us this holiday season that through faith our cloudy days will turn into laughter and celebration. Bless those who struggle between fear and faith. Bless the ones within our hearts and minds. Amen

Courtney Fleck
Point Place United Church of Christ

December 11, 2020
The Second Friday in Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 48:17-19

One week before Christmas and my days were split between two jobs. My business was full with my regular clientele and new clients redeeming gift cards from the previous year. I was also wrapping up another quarter teaching. Personal time was non-existent and all the things I loved about Christmas—card-making, tree decorating, and gift shopping—was severely delayed. There was just no time for Christmas. Additionally, I was nine months pregnant. Many people had told me, "You're a first-time mom, your baby will for sure come late!" But alas, many people were wrong. The advent of Mara's birthday came one week before Christmas, two weeks early. Mara came into the world without caring that my class didn't have a substitute, that projects and final grades needed to be distributed, that my Christmas tree was not up, that I hadn't licked one Christmas card envelope, nor was I prepared to stop working for an undetermined amount of weeks. Mara simply was born into our world just as it was. Christmas Eve arrived with no tree, with unwrapped presents for some and no gifts for others. I refrained from attending worship that evening and missed singing my favorite hymns. It certainly didn't feel like a celebration of Christ's birth. That night as I rocked Mara, I was overwhelmed with emotion. With the hustle and bustle of the season muting the presence of God, Mara's birth reminded me that God is here. God came to earth as a baby to be the light of the world, offering peace to all. Consumed by love, I sang softly to her "Silent Night, Holy Night all is calm, all is bright. 'Round yon Virgin, mother and child. Holy Infant, tender and mild. Sleep in Heavenly peace. Sleep in Heavenly peace."

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for giving us your Son in the midst of chaos to give us hope for our future. Amen.

Leigh Beining—Messiah Lutheran Church

December 12, 2020
The Second Saturday in Advent

Scripture: Zechariah 2:10

The year was 1982 and I was in the sixth grade. My small group of friends and myself had decided to exchange gifts for Christmas. I saved all my change and bought three lip balms from Avon, I added three containers of cheap body oil to go with them. My mom helped me wrap each one and I was so proud. The day of the gift exchange finally came. My best friend Kitty gave us her gifts first and suddenly my gifts seemed so **sad. Times were hard, and Kitty's family had very little money. Kitty's mom helped her create unique animal pillows** for each of us. Mine was a kitty cat pillow and it was extra special because Kitty had one exactly like it since we were best friends. That pillow was the best gift I had ever gotten as far as I was concerned. I slept with it every night for years. Years later, I made several pillow copies and gave to special friends of mine. That simple pillow meant so much to me and is proudly displayed on my bed some thirty or so years later. Whenever life gets me down, I hold it and it comforts me just like Christ comforts me. Such a simple thing: hand-made and given to me at Christmas.

Prayer: Holy God, Simple is sometimes the best gift of all, help us in these times of craziness to appreciate and embrace you. Amen.

Amy Disbrow
RiverPoint Ministries United Methodist Church

December 13, 2020
The Third Sunday in Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-2a; 61:10-11

Prophets like Isaiah often preach words of warning or even doom. But these verses overflow with expressions of joy as the prophet talks about the coming Messiah. In a time of negativity, bad news, and sorrow, these words are full of optimism and good news. How excited would you be if you just found out you would be released from a dark, terrible prison? How happy would you be to find out there is a way out of your poverty?

I love the descriptions of utter delight and joy in these verses. There is a wedding scene, where the groom and bride are all dressed up, bejeweled, and ready to go. There is a garden scene, as we see green plants **sprouting up everywhere, like they can't help themselves**. This reminds me of spring, when the cold deadness of winter gives way to abundant and irrepressible life.

In the same way, Jesus, God's anointed one, brings fresh new life, righteousness, and praise everywhere – all over the world. His coming brings delight and joy to all who receive him. Wherever Jesus goes, life springs up seemingly out of nowhere.

Prayer: Giving God, thank you for the life-giving good news of the Messiah, the anointed one. Fill us with joy and delight, just like a bride and groom on their wedding day, as we consider the coming of our Savior and Deliverer, Jesus. Amen.

Michael DeLong
CrossPoint Community Church

December 14, 2020
The Third Monday in Advent

Scripture: Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a

The one who hears the words of God. Again, we are given a prophecy: The Messiah is coming.

Advent has lost its meaning in these modern times. It's now about planning get-togethers, parties, gifts, Christmas cards, etc.

This year the Lord is showing us what is important. He **is saying, "Stop! Remember my words." Since COVID-19, families can't get together. We have to be careful.** The Lord is trying to let us know we have forgotten Him. We need to look within ourselves, acknowledge our shortcomings, and change. COVID is here for a reason. The Lord, as He did in Biblical times, is sending us a message.

We need to make acts of kindness, generosity, and compassion to others.

This is the time to prepare for the coming of our Lord, spending more time in prayer and random acts of kindness to others.

Open the Bible and read of all the times God has spoken through the prophets. The prophecies have proven true. We need to spend Advent preparing for our Lord. We truly have the blessing of Scripture.

Each reading brings us back to the Lord. This year, look at Advent differently.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we have strayed from the truth. Please forgive us. Wrap Your loving arms around us. **Hold us tight, and don't let us go. For centuries You have been showing us your power and love. In Jesus' name, we pray.**

Kim Maros
St. John the Baptist

December 15, 2020
The Third Tuesday in Advent

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13

Zephaniah was a prophet from Jerusalem during the Old Testament time of 640-622 BCE. This time period immediately follows the reign of King Manasseh, who is remembered as being the most evil king ever, and sadly, the longest lived.

In the beginning of Chapter 3, Zephaniah is perhaps speaking to a country still under the lingering influence of its prior evil king.

Zephaniah was attacking the soiled and defiled leaders of Jerusalem at that time. After describing a bleak future for humanity, starting in verse 9, Zephaniah offers a ray of hope for the people, a promise of salvation for the remnants of the Israelites.

When these verses are read through the eyes of Christians today, we find a cry of hope and the promise of salvation. Our God is offended by human sin, yet this same loving God sent his only son to die on a cross for that salvation to those who believe. Emmanuel – God with us!

My prayer during this Advent season is that we all turn **our hearts to Jesus' birth, and focus on the joy and peace** it brings.

Prayer: Loving God, may we await in eager anticipation for Christmas morning, at the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ, the King of all kings, to whom we bow. Amen.

Diane Barbara
Messiah Lutheran Church

December 16, 2020
The Third Wednesday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 7:19-23

The people in the time of Jesus had different expectations of what the Messiah would be like, just as we have different expectations for what our life should be and God's plan for us. I can think of my life and faith life like a cross country drive. In my childhood, every year we would drive across the country to California to visit my grandparents. We would drive through the flat farmland of the Midwest, through the magnificent beauty of the mountains, and across the hot, unbearable desert in our un-airconditioned cars of the 1950's and **1960's. Our lives are mostly spent in the "normal" with** some highs and lows mixed in. We have expectations that God gifts us with the "normal and routine life" and that God is with us. This year has been anything but normal and we have had to give up some of our expectations, especially about our holiday celebrations. I am going to use Advent to be more faithful to reading Scripture and praying to lose some of my self-centered expectations that my life should be always exactly how I want it and be more open to what God wants me to do in these different days. I plan on sending more Christmas cards and making phone calls to friends and those I know that will be alone for the holidays. We can use this time to be aware of and find the presence of God in the beauty of the simple and ordinary rushing through Advent and Christmas.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please keep our minds and hearts open to Your presence and blessings during the **season of Advent, Christmas, and the New Year's, and** guide us in the ways that we can help others. Amen.

Laurie Mocniak — St. John the Baptist

December 17, 2020
The Third Thursday in Advent

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

Genealogy. My dad was big into genealogy. He even set up an account on Ancestry.com and did a lot of research. He went back about as many generations as it seems Matthew does here. I knew it was important to **my dad, but at the time, I just didn't muster up the enthusiasm that matched the effort he put into the research.** My dad passed two years ago and now I realize that he was trying to help my siblings and me **understand where we come from. I think that's what Matthew wants us to understand here.** At first glance, the names might not seem important. Matthew says, **"Look! This is who your Savior is! This is where he comes from!"**

As I recognize names from stories I've heard before, I understand the stories that make up the humanity of Jesus. Jesus is descended from King David, who was far from perfect. We first meet David as a young shepherd boy, who bravely slew the giant Goliath and became king. But then as king, he had an affair and a man died because he tried to cover it up. Jesus became part of our **imperfect human family and loves us in ways we're always just beginning to understand.**

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for Jesus. We thank you that He proved who He was. Help remind us who we are in Him. Amen.

Kristen Olsen
Messiah Lutheran Church

December 18, 2020
The Third Friday in Advent

Scripture: Jeremiah 23:5-8

My hydrangeas did not bloom very well this year, in fact they did not last year either. I want to prune them so that next spring they will grow beautiful flowers. My research tells me that my kind of hydrangeas should be pruned in summer once they have finished blooming. **These hydrangeas bloom on “old wood”. Blooming on “old wood” means that buds will flower on the wood** grown in the previous season. The buds are carried through winter on last year's growth – the old wood. After these plants bloom, they begin forming the flower buds for the following year. After pruning this year, I look forward to the beautiful flowers that will grow on **the old wood next spring, just like a new “Branch”** grew up from the old lineage of David to reign wisely and gloriously. As we in 2020 are faced with changing or **“pruning” our traditions and celebrations, let us** remember that a new branch that is beautiful and glorious can grow from the old wood.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending Jesus the Messiah, our Righteous Savior. Please watch over us as we navigate new and different ways to celebrate and observe this Christmas season.

Tina Harmon
RiverPoint Ministries UMC

December 19, 2020
The Third Saturday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 1:5-25

These verses show me that it is better to give than to receive. My heart is filled with so much pleasure when I do this great deed. When you give to someone, it teaches them to also do these deeds themselves, even if it causes you a little hardship. You will recover from this hardship with all the pleasures of giving.

God sees you and will know what you are doing and reward you with all his teachings. This should be done all the time instead of only at Christmas, even though this is the Most Wonderful time of the year.

This reminds us also that every good thing that we have **comes from God. When we give away God's blessings that were originally ours to others, we become God's** channels of blessing to those in need. This alone is such an honor to have, and causes glory and praise to be given to God.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus Christ, please help me to fulfill **this wonderful deed. In your name's sake. Amen.**

Tom Stagner
CrossPoint Community Church

December 20, 2020
The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

God keeps His promises. Seems like an obvious statement, but as we draw ever closer to the celebration **of the Nativity of the Lord, it's a powerful point of reflection. It's not just that God keeps His promises, but** He does it in awesome and unexpected ways! The promise of an enduring kingdom and throne that shall stand firm forever, made to the Israelite king, is now to be fulfilled in the most spectacular way! Not through an **earthly kingdom, but through a virgin "full of grace" that accepts God's promise for her life: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."** God is about to do the unthinkable—take on human flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary! God is about to fulfill His promise in a way beyond all our expectations. As someone who was not ordained as a Priest until I was nearly 40 years old, I know God keeps His promises in unexpected ways. During these final days of Advent, I hope to take the opportunity to thank God for His surprises and ask Him to help me see His Hand in my life, even when I least expect it!

Prayer: Pour forth, we beseech You, O Lord, Your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ Your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Fr. David Cirata
St. John the Baptist

December 21, 2020
The Fourth Monday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 1:39-45

As Christmas approaches, we invite you to take this day to **“write your own devotional.”** With all of the changes this year, how are you experiencing waiting, anticipation, the advent of Christ in a new way? What is the message you want to share with others? Who needs to hear it?

Take this space to write or contemplate how God is speaking to and through you. And then share the Good News with someone else.

Prayer: As John leapt in Elizabeth’s womb at the nearness of Jesus, may we too rejoice in the privilege of being near You. May we, like Elizabeth, burst with the blessings we have received, and with her, become an encouragement to others. Amen.

December 22, 2020
The Fourth Tuesday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 1: 46-56

In this COVID year we are all looking (or being forced) to simplify. Our church services are shorter and include simply the basics. We are substituting ingredients that are already in our cupboards rather than running to the store for one or two items. Work is more consolidated, operating from home and shortening hours. Students have been sitting and viewing lessons on a computer screen. While learning to cope families are biking, hiking, or camping – simpler activities in smaller groups and closer to nature.

I'm reminded of a symbol of simplicity – a star. With its points we are given direction. We look up to the sky – a direction that gives us hope. Stars on school papers or video games are used to reward work well done. Stars dazzle. My first Christmas decoration as a young adult was a star. I was a poor exchange student in Austria. A friend gave me a handmade star of straw that I hung on the window of my one-room habitat. No tree, no garland, no glitter. It was only that simple star and it still hangs from my window each Advent season. It is to me a symbol of hope, direction and reward as we celebrate the birth of our Savior. Mary, a simple woman, listened to God, praised Him and humbly accepted her role as the mother of a would-be star. As we move forward into a new year, let us remember that Jesus is the star that gives us direction, hope and reward.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for Mary, a simple woman **of faith, who followed God's star. That star gave her** direction, hope and reward. May we all realize the reward this season that is Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Lori Winne—Point Place United Church of Christ

December 23, 2020
The Fourth Wednesday in Advent

Scripture: Luke 1:57-66

One handicap I have when reading the Bible is being literal. **If it's in the Bible, it must be fact, and that's how I interpret it. In Luke's passage, John was born to simple elderly parents but grew to play a significant role in pointing the way to Jesus. The closing of the passage in Luke says: "What then will this child become?' For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him."** So in my literal thinking, I can picture John using his index finger to literally "point" to Jesus. **But John does much more than point his finger toward Jesus. John's pointing to Jesus includes his words and his actions. I continue to be challenged to not think so literally about God's Word. And John the Baptist reminds me that there are many ways to "point" to Jesus. Sometimes I have to think outside of the 1960's box of the way I was taught in Sunday School. What are some of the ways that I can point to Jesus during the Christmas season? Already, I pointed to Jesus by donating to the Thanksgiving fund which provides a Thanksgiving Meal for families of Mustard Seed. I also pointed to Jesus by participating in our Christmas Outreach mission which helps families who signed up through the Salvation Army. As the New Year approaches, I can continue to point to Jesus by studying the Word and making time for prayer and repentance. I can point to Jesus by loving my neighbors even when they disagree with me. And I can point to Jesus as I persevere in letting the light of Christ shine through me. Advent is a good place to start reflecting on "pointing" to Jesus, but I can't let it stop at Christmas. I want to make it a part of my daily life.**

Prayer: Dear God, help us to approach the New Year with an open heart longing to point the way to Jesus. Amen.

Chuck Pintner – Messiah Lutheran Church

December 24, 2020
Nativity of the Lord/Christmas Eve

Scripture: Luke 1:67-79

What's your favorite Christmas carol? On Christmas Eve, we usually light candles, pass them down the row, then the sanctuary lights go down while we lift our candles and sing, "Radiant beams from thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace."

There are Christmas songs in our Gospels too. They **sound different from many of our carols. And that's** because they are songs from the underside. They are a glimpse of what Christmas hope looks like from the angle of the colonized, the oppressed, the sorrowful, and the vulnerable. They are, in one sense, protest songs: songs that proclaim that the world is being turned upside-down. **That's the song Zechariah is singing. It's the song Mary sings as well.**

When we strip Christmas down to its most bare essentials, we find a God born into the world as a child, to a poor family among a colonized people.

If there is any fire on which to roast chestnuts in this story, it is the prophetic fire of those who proclaim, with Zechariah, that God meets us at the margins, in vulnerability, among the poor and oppressed, in all the places that make us most uncomfortable—all the manglers and cross of the world—and from there, a new day will dawn.

Prayer: Surprising God, meet us in our discomforts, our vulnerabilities, even our sorrows this Christmas. In them may we find Christ and hear the songs of the oppressed. Amen.

Pastor Jon Komperda
Point Place UCC

December 25, 2020
Christmas Day

Scripture: Luke 2:14-20

Have you ever heard news that was hard to believe, it was so fantastic?

When I was a young mom, a friend of mine was shot responding to a police call. When shots rang out, there was no place to run except behind a slim, young tree. He knew he would take a bullet, but that tree shielded his vital organs, and he only got hand wounds. Not only was my friend saved, but a series of events, including my friend forgiving that shooter, altered the **young man's life**.

When you hear good news, you “ponder” it, like Mary, or react like the Shepherds, who went praising and glorifying God. He is an amazing God who purposes to do good in our very lives! We can trust Him to provide **that “tree” that will shield us from what the world** throws at us.

Prayer: Father, thank you this Christmas for giving us your son that you promised so long ago, who lived up to all that would follow - becoming our Intermediary, Friend, and Savior. Amen.

Beth Lewis
CrossPoint Community Church

December 26, 2020
The Second Day of Christmas

Scripture: Acts 7:54-59

We see Stephen, one of the first deacons of the church, being stoned to death for his belief in the Gospel. He never wavers in his faith; he endures his trial to earn his crown of martyrdom. He did not let his fears or circumstances distance him from God.

And for us, today, in this terrible year of the pandemic, we need to be like Stephen and not let fear or circumstances distance us from the true meaning of this season. In a way, the ugly cloud of the coronavirus has shown a silver lining. We cannot celebrate the season as we have in the past; we must scale back our plans. That is the blessing...by not having to make grandiose plans and complicated schemes for the celebration of the season, we can calmly and serenely reflect upon what this season REALLY means.

We have a Savior. We have the Son of God, come to earth just for us, to save us from ourselves. We have the gift of salvation, undeserving though we may be, because our God loves us without reservation. So love those in your lives this season without reservation. Take the time to thank God for the gift of His son. Stephen knew that God was with him through all of his trials; we need to realize that He is there for us through our trials as well. And we need to thank Him for that from the bottom of our hearts this season.

Prayer: Try saying this prayer at the beginning of each day for the rest of this season: Heavenly Father, during this year of stress and strife, of fear and uncertainty, I humbly ask You for the Grace and Peace which only You alone can give. Calm me and assure me of the love which You have for me. Help me to ponder what is truly special and beautiful about this season, and never let me forget that all I have and all I am is because of You. Amen.

Deacon Mark Genovesi — St. John the Baptist

December 27, 2020
The Third Day of Christmas

Scripture: Luke 2:22-32

On this, the third day of Christmas, we can look back and know that God has fulfilled the promises God made. We have spent Advent waiting and watching in devotion and preparation. We have heard the Good News proclaimed once again. We lit our candles, sang the songs, and celebrated with friends and family.

Now we are tired, and it is time to clean up and put it all behind us. Or is it? First of all, we did a lot of work. Why not enjoy all twelve days of Christmas? One day is not enough.

But secondly, and more importantly, we cannot go back to life as we have known it. The birth of the Christ child changes us, and every year it changes us again. It makes us want to re-create the world as God proclaims it can be. It makes us want to let the light, which God revealed in Jesus, shine through us to others. It allows us to live each moment for God, so that the peace God gives may spread to the world around us.

It is almost 2021. Let us live it in gratitude for the Christ who has come!

Prayer: O Lord, may we remember your salvation in Jesus the Christ every day of our lives, that we may indeed live in peace.

Rev. Martha Gross
RiverPoint Ministries UMC

December 28, 2020
The Fourth Day of Christmas

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-18

This story seems so inappropriate to the Christmas season, doesn't it? Yes, God saved Jesus and his family...but all those children.

The coming of Jesus isn't a quick fix. To live in Emmanuel's world, it is essential that we make space, even in a season of feasting, for lament. Take today to take a deep breath and fill this page with your own lament. And trust that Emmanuel is present even in your grief...especially in your grief.

Prayer: Emmanuel, even as we rejoice in these days, we must be honest with you and with ourselves. The world is not as it should be. Where are you? How long? Help us find you when faith seems way to abstract for the painful realities of the world we live in. Amen.

December 29, 2020
The Fifth Day of Christmas

Scripture: 1 John 2:3-11

Genesis 1:26 says we are all made in the image of God. The year 2020 has been a year of fear, hatred, violence, shootings, killings, and racial tensions. It can feel as if the darkness is winning, but as children of God we are called to be the light in the darkness. One of the fastest ways to spread our light is to start seeing our brothers **and sisters in God's image. We can do this by showing** love, kindness, and encouragement to a tired world and by being color-blind and religion-blind. Let us agree between this week of Christmas and the New Year that we will put the light of Jesus Christ front and center for all our brothers and sisters to see through us and know there is hope and love in this light and that this light can overtake the darkness. Let us also agree to start using **God's eyes to see our brothers and sisters with.**

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to see with Your eyes when looking at my brothers and sisters and to be part of the light that holds back the darkness. Amen.

LaNette Hacker
Messiah Lutheran Church

December 30, 2020
The Sixth Day of Christmas

Scripture: Luke 2:36-40

After only 7 years of marriage Anna became a widow. It was not what she was expecting when preparing for her wedding. She spent the remainder of her days in the temple worshipping, praying, and fasting in preparation and expectation of the very moment she would meet Christ.

There are plenty of preparations and expectations to go around during Advent. It is not only the preparation for the birth of the expectant Christ. It is the time we spend preparing for and expecting the very moment we meet Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, We thank You for the precious gift of your son. As we prepare, help us to spread the light and warmth of Your love. Amen

Linda Longman
RiverPoint Ministries UMC

December 31, 2020
The Seventh Day of Christmas

Scripture: 1 John 2:18-21; John 1:1-18

I remember being in a campground once, and I had to **use the facilities to get ready for a good night's sleep** in our cozy little pop-up camper. There was only one problem: by the time I was ready to head back, it had become dark and I became disoriented as to which way was back to my family and our camping spot. They all looked the same with their glowing campfires and their tiny embers floating up towards heaven. They reminded me of summer fireflies. However, no matter how much light they gave, it was not enough for me to see where I needed to go. That light did not have specific directions for me to find my particular path.

So it is in the world today as we struggle to find our way, but the Lord of all life and light came to show us the way back to the Father. He came to deliver us from the curse of death and make a way for us to become our true selves, our child of God selves by leading and guiding us in the specific ways we need to go.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for creating this world. And then for saving us and re-creating us back into the image of your children through the gift of your Son that holy Christmas night.

Terry DeLong
CrossPoint Community Church

January 1, 2021
The Eighth Day of Christmas

Scripture: Luke 2: 16-21

...and Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

What memories do you cherish? What makes these memories so special? In these verses from Luke, the mother of Jesus took the time to reflect on the events of **her Son's birth. In doing so, she cherished the memories** mothers have of their first experience of childbirth and the depth of a newfound love, gazing into the eyes of their newborn. When the Virgin Mary heard the words of the shepherds, proclaiming that her Son would be the Messiah and Lord of all, she held them silent in her heart. And as she gazed into the eyes of the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, snuggled close in her arms, the words of the shepherds confirmed what she **already knew... she was holding the true gift from** heaven. What pure joy Mary found in those quiet moments. Mary is a model of faith. She was open to **God's Word before she ever became His mother. As we reflect on today's scriptures, we can look to her for** guidance in our own journey of discipleship. As we **begin a new year, let us consider Mary's place in our** own hearts and faith journey. She is the Mother of God and our role model for living the Christian life that we are called to live.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your love. May we ponder anew the true Christmas gift from heaven. Like Mary, may our hearts overflow with your light and joy forever. Amen.

Lorie Hafner
St. John the Baptist

January 2, 2021
The Ninth Day of Christmas

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

In this passage Jesus calls out to those who are weary and carry heavy burdens, to come to Him and find rest. So many of us are looking for hope. We are weary and our burdens are deep and wide as the Grand Canyon. Along with everything else in our lives, COVID-19 has changed our world overnight and has affected every area of our lives. We are all suffering one way or many ways. One aspect I find very troubling (but not any more than any other change from this pandemic) is the fact that a lot of our elderly and infirmed are holed away to protect **them**. Many haven't seen their family or friends for over 10 months. No Sunday drives that usually end with a trip to their favorite restaurant. They are dining alone at separate tables or in their rooms. Many have been quarantined for 14 days after a necessary appointment outside the facility. No giving or receiving hugs from loved ones. I would now invite you to **"plug in your troubles" here into this devotional. Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you, let me teach you. For my yoke is easy to bear and the burden I give you is light."** Really, when I imagine or see pictures of yokes on oxen they look cumbersome, heavy and painful. Why would I want that? Life is already difficult. But after a little research on this passage, I found a yoke is a tool to allow the animal to submit to its master and, if properly fitted, will be comfortable or easier for **the oxen. EPIPHANY!!!! Jesus's yoke is perfectly formed for us**, so we can find comfort in following Him. Yes, the troubles of this world are still with us, yet are easier to deal with because, as a community of believers, we are all guided by the same yoke from Jesus, who teaches us to love and care for each other.

Prayer: Gracious God, may you continue to encourage and **guide us to do what we can to ease one another's** burdens. Now and always. This I pray through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sue Sherlock – Messiah Lutheran Church

January 3, 2021
The Tenth Day of Christmas

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

As we journey through our days of COVID-19, we are feeling the pain of seemingly losing many traditions. Our scripture for this day is steeped in tradition. We love the familiar so much that sometimes what we believe to be true, may not be true. How many times have we come upon a Nativity scene and we find the wisemen present at the stable? Early in our story the **Gospel writer Matthew shares a key word, after: “Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king” (v. 1, ESV). We find verse 11, “And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.”** No mention of shepherds, no mention of a stable, indeed we find a house. It is my hope that we realize there are many traditions we can still hold on to, and even new ones to create. God knows our need for the familiar and will continue to lead us into the unknown.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for helping us to share the story of Jesus through your Word and traditions. We long for the day when we may bring our gifts of service and love as we stand before our King and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen

Donna Ebanks
Northpoint Church of the Nazarene

January 4, 2021
The Eleventh Day of Christmas

Scripture: 1 John 3:22 – 4:6

In today's world we hear a lot of talk about spirit. We talk about team spirit, Christmas spirit, good and evil spirits, as well as others. The one we don't always hear a lot about is "The Spirit of God." In 1 John 3:24 we learn, "those who obey his commands live in him and he in them." How do we know that God lives in us? "We know by the spirit he gave to us," which was given to us through God's Son, Jesus Christ. As we walk through our daily lives we are warned in 1 John 4:1 not to believe that all spirits are good, and that we should examine them to know their true nature so as not to be led away from God. So how do we test them to see if they are from God? Verse 4:2 "every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but if it does not acknowledge this, then it is not from God.

Is it wrong to have team spirit or Christmas spirit? No!! As long as they are not used to distract you from, or **diminish your faith in God. We all have God's spirit in us** and we need to acknowledge that. We do that by praising God and letting his light shine through us in the world around us. Even when you are having a bad day, know that God is with you and trust in him to guide you and walk with you through difficult times.

Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you for the Spirit of your Son, Jesus Christ, who lives in us. We pray that we may trust in him to walk with us through each day and to guide us through the day. May we be a light to others for You. Amen.

Jim Getzinger — Messiah Lutheran Church

January 5, 2021
The Twelfth Day of Christmas

Scripture: Mark 6: 34-44

I am reminded of my simple Christmas year-after-year as a child. We were a small family, only 2 children. Our Christmas was always a happy time. We two children looked so forward to our stockings which consisted normally of an apple, orange, and a few nuts, which had to be cracked (nothing of convenience in those days). We usually got a couple small things like a game of jacks, dominoes, etc., plus one bigger item.

One gift I will always remember is my doll, which I still possess. So simple, but so beautiful. I would like to think that as we celebrate Christmas this year that we will have learned something from the COVID-19 pandemic. That we ask for very little, be content with what we receive, and thank God for all the blessings he gives us each day.

Prayer: Gracious and Holy God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time. AMEN!

Barbara Langston
RiverPoint Ministries UMC

Thank you to everyone in the Point Place
and Shoreland churches who contributed to this
devotional as well as all who participated in this
devotional journey through Advent and Christmas.

You are an invaluable witness to Christ
and his prayer “that they may all be one.”

Be blessed throughout this strange season
and may the grace of God refresh you
for the year to come.