

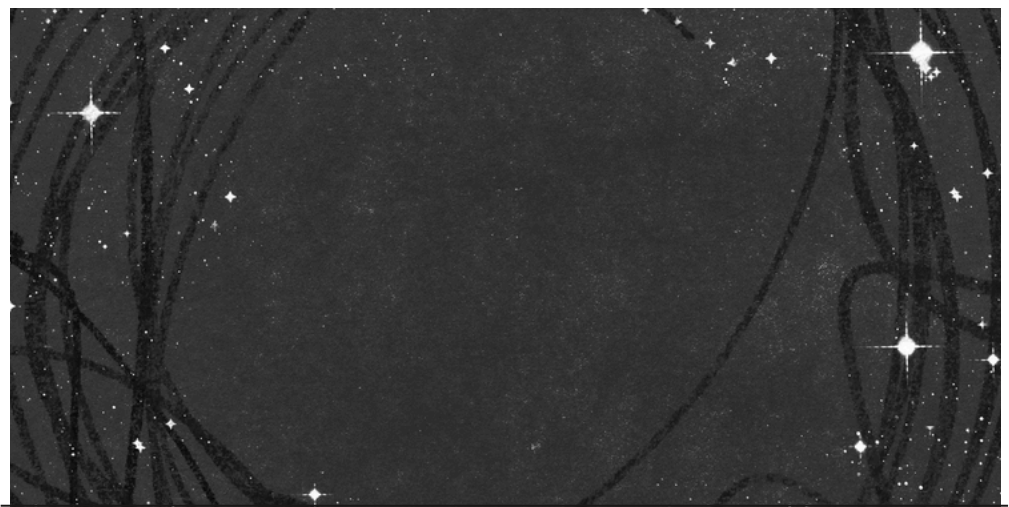


COME
Wonder
WITH US

Advent Devotional Guide
HARVARD AVENUE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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Introduction

The season of Advent is a time of waiting, preparation, and hope as Christians anticipate the celebration of Jesus' birth and look forward to the promise of Emmanuel, *God with us*. The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming" or "arrival." During these four weeks leading up to Christmas, we are invited to slow down, reflect, and make room in our hearts and lives for God's presence. It is a season marked by longing and wonder—a sacred time to remember that God's light breaks into our darkness, bringing peace, joy, and renewal to the world.

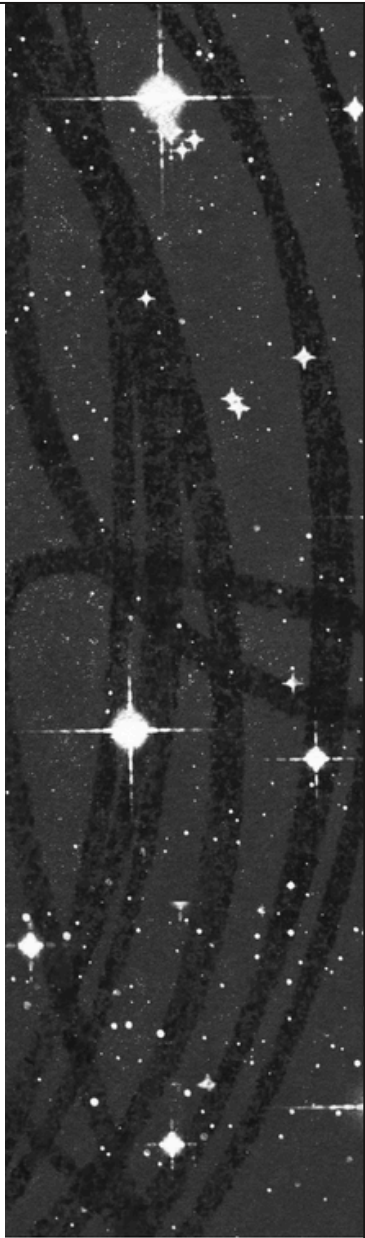
Come Wonder With Us is our theme for Advent this year at Harvard Avenue Christian Church. As we embark on our journey to the manger, we want to focus our hearts and minds on how Christ engages our sense of wonder and inspires us to look at the world with delight, curiosity, and possibility. We want to ground ourselves in the wonder of creation and marvel at how hope comes alive when we take seriously the redemptive love that God shares with us.

This devotional is designed to help you slow down and rediscover the awe of God's unfolding story through daily Scripture, reflection, and prayer. Across the four weeks of Advent, this devotional will take us from the trembling mountaintops of Isaiah's prophecy to the quiet fields of Bethlehem, tracing God's steadfast faithfulness and love that shake the earth, inspire songs of joy, give us purpose, and illuminate even the most ordinary moments.

As we wait for Emmanuel—God with us—we are invited to listen, sing, repent, and rejoice. We will prepare our hearts to receive the light of Christ anew. Each day of Advent, you will be provided a Scripture reading, questions for reflection, and space to journal your prayers and insights. Hopefully, this devotional guide encourages a meaningful spiritual rhythm for you throughout the season.

For those who want to engage in group study with a Life Group or informal group of friends, there is a section of group discussion questions is also included to help you wonder together at the mystery and beauty of Advent.

We hope that this devotional guide inspires your sense of wonder this Advent season and encourages you to pay attention to the ways God is alive and at work in the world!



Advent Week 1

WONDERING
THROUGH THE
MOUNTAINS

Devotional

It makes sense that the Prophet Isaiah invites the people of God to imagine mountains quaking and people shaking in their sandals as they long to find themselves in the presence of the Lord. During their journey out of Egypt and exile in the wilderness, the Israelites were often called to gather near a mountain. Once gathered, they would turn their heads upward to hear a word from the Lord or glimpse a miraculous moment. On the side of Mount Horeb, God revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush and declared that Moses should remove his shoes while standing on holy ground. The Israelites heard Moses recite the Ten Commandments atop Mount Sinai.

Mountains seem to be where the people of God hear God's voice most clearly and bear witness to the holy, wonderful, and difficult work God does in the world. In the final build-up to entering the Promised Land, the Israelites received a promise from God atop Mount Gerizim: *All these blessings will come to you and reach you if you obey the Lord your God.* In equal measure, the Israelites were also warned: *Cursed is anyone who does not fulfill the words of this Law by doing them* (Exodus 27). When it was finally time for the people of Israel to finally enter the Promised Land, Moses addressed them one last time from Mount Nebo—encouraging the people of Israel to remain faithful and steadfast, so that their lives would be filled with God's blessing, wonder, and amazement. Otherwise, they would experience consequences.

This quick topographical and theological overview explains why Isaiah's invocation of mountains quaking as the heavens tear open feels tinged with both hopeful wonder and penitent apprehension for God's people almost 1,000 years after entering the Promised Land. While there were some fruitful years and good moments for the people of Israel, things did not exactly go according to plan. God's people failed to remain faithful and steadfast. Israel's rulers were often more focused on their personal agendas and power than they were on the ways of God. They did not observe the Laws. Instead, they continued to worship idols, oppress the poor, and turn away from the Lord. Essentially, the people of Israel forgot the lessons they learned in the wilderness, and their mountaintop blessings were bereft by consequences that plunged them into valley depths and cast them into exile again when the Babylonians decided that Israel was weak and vulnerable enough to invade.

Written in the second half of what's known as Israel's *kingdom period* (8th century BCE), Isaiah addresses primarily the people who have been displaced by the Babylonian captivity. Though the majority of Isaiah highlights how woefully and repeatedly the people of Israel have broken their covenant with God, its final chapters focus on lifting up the return of God's people to the Promised Land.

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Isaiah assures the people that God's faithfulness has never faltered. Yes, they may have had to leave their homes, but they have not left the presence of God. They can and they will return to the mountain where they will once again bear witness to the wonder of God at work in the world, as well as God's work in His people.

Let us hear the final words from the Prophet Isaiah in today's reading: "Now consider, we are all [God's] people." We have all been drawn to the mountainside, where God hopes we will witness how God is at work in the world and in us. Even when we have fallen short and failed to let ourselves be wholly formed by the wondrous ways of God because of our wayfaring world or our wandering hearts.

Our Advent journey begins with a promise that God will never stop looking for ways to get our attention. God will shake the foundations of the earth and our very beings, turning our lives upside down in hopes that we will call upon His name, seek to follow His ways, and allow our lives to be shaped by His promises of hope eternal and love everlasting. As we prepare our hearts and world to welcome Emmanuel, God with us, may we remember the lessons of the prophets, the words of the poets and psalmists, and the promises God makes from the mountaintops.

As you make your way through this first week of Advent scriptures, you are invited to imagine how the past, present, and future people of God have, do, and will make sense of God's promises as they become tangible and real in our lives. We will reflect on several more passages from Isaiah, each revealing a deeper understanding of the hope God provides for his people, even when they struggle to understand how they can overcome their own selfishness and struggles.

Isaiah 2 encourages us to envision what life will look like when we are able to ascend the mountain of the Lord, where war, destruction, and hurt no longer exist. In looking forward to the wondrous things the Lord will do, we are invited to also look at ourselves and discern how we will be faithful partners who follow the teachings of God.

Isaiah 35 depicts what it will mean for us to follow God as though we are a holy highway, blazing a trail through the world so that we might arrive at a destination—more so spiritually than physically—where we are able to perceive and rejoice in the new thing that God is doing, which the prophet describes in Isaiah 43. It is sometimes difficult for us to detect or discern God's movement in the world, because the world around us is so loud. Our human desire to hear God and see Him at work in the world is what fuels so many of our prayers—giving voice to the hope we wish to have and vision to the world we long to live in.

Devotional

In our reading this week, we will reflect on a few prayers and petitions from the Psalms. The Psalms tell us the story of the conversations we have with God. They are holy and hard conversations that speak to the deepest joys and the most bitter sorrow we experience. In reading the Psalms, we have an opportunity to see what it looks like to lay our souls bare before God and be brutally honest about our mistakes, misfortunes, and misgivings in our relationships with God and one another.

Every raw edge of our human experience is exposed in the Psalms. In Psalms 25 and 80, we read about Israel's longing for guidance and deliverance, a poignant reflection on the life of the writer and God's beloved people who desire to live their lives differently going forward. Because these psalms were written by someone who was willing to confront the sin and shame within the lives of God's people, we have an opportunity to understand how we can still feel confident that God wants us to look with hope towards our future with Him ... even when we struggle to follow where he leads.

The promise of a future with God is a phenomenal and foundational element of our faith. What will that future look like exactly? We cannot say for sure. When Jesus is born, we rejoice in what it means for God to come down from the mountaintop, or the heights of heaven, and walk alongside us-- incredibly close and deeply familiar with the valleys of our lives. Our final reading this week from Luke 21 provides us an opportunity to consider how Jesus' teachings can simultaneously stir up excitement and inspire awe about what comes next when we find ourselves in the presence of Christ Jesus who dares to journey alongside us.

Just like the people of God centuries ago who longed for a Messiah and wanted to know what it would mean for Emmanuel to show us what living faithfully truly looks like, we come with expectant hearts and watchful eyes-- ready to see God's love somehow break the barrier between heaven and earth again.

We have all been drawn to the mountainside, because we are willing to watch and wait for what God is doing next. We come with hope in our hearts, that we will feel God moving in the world and in us. Even when we have fallen short and failed to let ourselves be wholly formed by the wondrous ways of God because of our wayfaring world or our wandering hearts-- God still encourages us to find our way back to Him because God has been waiting for us.

Isaiah 64:1-9

O that you would tear open the heavens
and come down,

so that the mountains would quake at
your presence—

²as when fire kindles brushwood

and the fire causes water to boil—

to make your name known to your
adversaries,

so that the nations might tremble at
your presence!

³When you did awesome deeds that we
did not expect,

you came down; the mountains
quaked at your presence.

⁴From ages past no one has heard,

no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any God besides you,
who works for those who wait for him.

⁵You meet those who gladly do right,

those who remember you in your
ways.

But you were angry, and we sinned;

because you hid yourself we
transgressed.

⁶We have all become like one who is
unclean,

and all our righteous deeds are like a
filthy cloth.

We all fade like a leaf,

and our iniquities, like the wind, take us
away.

⁷There is no one who calls on your name

or attempts to take hold of you,

for you have hidden your face from us

and have delivered us into the hand
of our iniquity.

⁸Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;

we are the clay, and you are our potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

⁹Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord,

and do not remember iniquity forever.

Now consider, we are all your people.

Reflection Questions

What would it feel like to see God “tear open the heavens” and come close—how might that change the way you see the world?

Where do you see signs that God is shaping you, like a potter with clay, during this Advent season?

How can our waiting to see or feel God at work in the world become an act of wonder and hope instead of impatience?

Personal Reflection

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Isaiah 2:1-5

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

²In days to come

the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains

and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

³ Many peoples shall come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,

to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction
and the word of the Lord from
Jerusalem.

⁴He shall judge between the nations
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into
plowshares

and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against
nation;

neither shall they learn war any more.

⁵O house of Jacob,
come, let us walk
in the light of the Lord!

Reflection Questions

What do you imagine a world at peace—where swords become plowshares—might look like today?

How can walking "in the light of the Lord" prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming?

What small acts of peace could your family bring into your home or community this week?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]

Isaiah 35:1-10

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;

the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly

and rejoice with joy and shouting.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.]]^[a]

³Strengthen the weak hands

and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴Say to those who are of a fearful heart,

“Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you.”

⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,

and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;

⁶then the lame shall leap like a deer,

and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness

and streams in the desert;

⁷the burning sand shall become a pool

and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp;

the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸A highway shall be there,^[c]

and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it;^[d]

but it shall be for God’s people;^[e]

no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

⁹No lion shall be there,

nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;

they shall not be found there,

but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰And the ransomed of the Lord shall return

and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Reflection Questions

How does the image of the desert blooming help you see God’s renewing work in the world?

Where do you sense joy breaking through the dry or difficult places in your life?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Psalm 25:1-10

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

²O my God, in you I trust;

do not let me be put to shame;

do not let my enemies exult over me.

³Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.

⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

⁶Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of
your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.

⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth
or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love
remember me,

for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!

⁸Good and upright is the Lord;

therefore he instructs sinners in the
way.

⁹He leads the humble in what is right
and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰All the paths of the Lord are steadfast
love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and
his decrees.

Reflection Questions

What does it mean to lift up your soul to God during this season of waiting?

How can remembering God's mercy and love fill you with hope and wonder?

What paths might God be showing you to follow more closely this Advent?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the
cherubim, shine forth

2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and
Manasseh.

Stir up your might,
and come to save us!

3 Restore us, O God;

let your face shine, that we may be
saved.

4 O Lord God of hosts,

how long will you be angry with your
people's prayers?

5 You have fed them with the bread of
tears

and given them tears to drink in full
measure.

6 You make us the scorn of our
neighbors;

our enemies laugh among themselves.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts;

let your face shine, that we may be
saved.

But let your hand be upon the one at
your right hand,

the one whom you made strong for
yourself.

18 Then we will never turn back from you;

give us life, and we will call on your
name.

19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;

let your face shine, that we may be
saved.

Reflection Questions

How does it feel to ask God to "shine your face upon us" and bring new life?

Where do you long for restoration or renewal in your own heart?

What helps you hold onto hope when God seems silent or distant?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]

Luke 21:25-36

²⁵ "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man."

Reflection Questions

What stirs in you when you imagine the heavens filled with signs of God's coming?

How can you "stand tall" with hope rather than fear when the world feels uncertain?

What practices help you stay alert and ready for the coming of Christ?

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Isaiah 43:14-19

Thus says the Lord,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
For your sake I will send to Babylon
and break down all the bars,
and the shouting of the Chaldeans will
be turned to lamentation.

¹⁵ I am the Lord, your Holy One,
the Creator of Israel, your King.

¹⁶ Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,
¹⁷ who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down; they cannot rise;
they are extinguished, quenched like a
wick:

¹⁸ Do not remember the former things
or consider the things of old.

¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth; do you not perceive
it?

I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

Reflection Questions

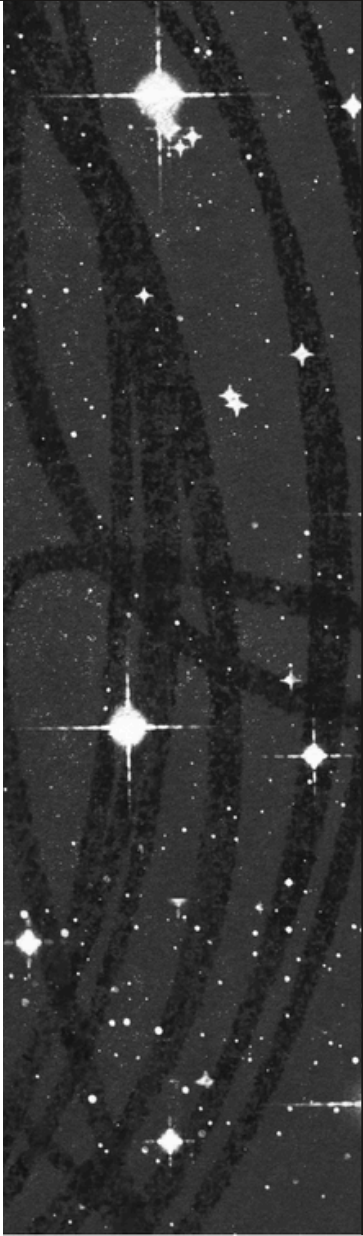
Where do you see God making "a new thing" in your life or community?

What old ways or worries might you need to let go of to notice what God is doing now?

How can paying attention to new possibilities help you live with wonder this Advent?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]



Advent Week 2

WONDERING
THROUGH SONGS
AND SILENCE

Devotional

This week's scripture readings begin with one of the most famous songs recorded in the New Testament, known as Mary's Magnificat. *Magnificat* comes from the Latin, meaning to glorify, exalt, or praise. When Elizabeth declares to Mary the joy and blessing she feels because she knows Mary will give birth to Jesus, Mary replies with this song, declaring, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior."

Biblical scholars point out that Mary's song is one of many sung in the first chapters of Luke, as the world prepares to welcome the Messiah. Zechariah sings when he breaks his silence and declares the hope that God has given him. The heavenly hosts will later glorify God as shepherds quake but ultimately join them in their proclamations of good news and good will. Christ the Messiah will usher in. David Lose, a former preaching professor and current President of Lutheran Theological Seminary, asks a great question, "Why all these songs?"

Fortunately for us, he answers his own question and explains that singing is an act of joy, camaraderie, and also resistance. Mary confidently sings of "the Lord's promise to upend the powers that be, reverse the fortunes of an unjust world, and lift up all those who had been oppressed" because "one of the most unexpected and powerful things you can do is sing."

Singing does have a profound spiritual, emotional, and psychological impact on us, in all of life's circumstances. Song allows us to resist despair, danger, and desolation that plague our weary world. Music draws us into deeper relationship with one another by strengthening our desire for and ability to connect. The melody and rhythm of a song inspire us to rejoice with our voice, our body, and our spirit. Mary's Magnificat is an invitation for us to recognize that God has gifted all of God's beloved with a desire to glorify God.

Throughout this week's readings, you will have opportunities to read and imagine a few more songs within scripture that provide the theological soundtrack for the approaching birth of the Messiah as well as inspiration for Mary's song. You'll read Hannah's song from 1 Samuel 2:1-10, words of praise offered shortly after she dedicates her son Samuel to a life of serving God in the temple. Hannah and her husband had longed for a baby for many years, but they struggled to conceive. When Hannah finally gave birth to a healthy baby boy, her first impulse was to bring him to the temple, so that he can be a blessing and testament to God's faithfulness. The commitment that Hannah makes to proclaiming the goodness of God—both in her

Devotional

song and dedicating Samuel to a life of service– reflect a larger theme throughout scripture.

God wants us to be people who are able to imagine how goodness grows within and around us, even when we are feeling defeated, confused, or uprooted from the life we expected to live. This idea is what breathes a melody into so many of the psalmists' sung prayers, including Psalm 126 that we will read this week.

Psalm 126 inspires a sense of awe and comfort within us as the psalmist composes what is known as a song of ascent. Songs of ascent were sung by God's people as they traveled to Jerusalem for festivals to prepare themselves to return to the heart of the Promised Land. One commentator refers to songs like the one found in Psalm 126 as "a concept album" about returning to God's presence, which seems to perfectly encapsulate the beauty of the psalmist's proclamation: "Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves."

Not all of scripture seems to have a melody or soundtrack that underscores the awe we experience as God's story unfolds in our lives. A couple of this week's scriptures are decidedly lacking in lyrical meter and musicality, but we still see how God is being glorified and exalted as people dare to attune their spirits to the will and work of God.

There are the incredible proclamations from Matthew 1 and Luke 1 of angels that produce skepticism and fear within Joseph, Mary, and Zechariah before they allow their awe and trust in God's revelation to overwhelm them. A seemingly boring recounting of Jesus' family tree from Matthew 1 allows us to glimpse how God's faithfulness through the generations invites the most surprising people to dedicate their lives to sharing God's love and grace. We see, hear, and believe that God is going to be revealed to us in ways that uplift our spirits, change our perspective on life, and make it hard for us not to cry out with joy.

As we proclaim the good news of the incarnation, we rejoice because God's love is made real and tangible for us in human flesh. It makes sense that there are many songs we can sing that glorify God's name, declare Christ's power, and empower us to feel the thrill of hope. Each of the songs and scriptures that we will read in our devotional this week offers us an opportunity to rejoice in the good news of the arrival of Emmanuel and to embody God's hope come alive.

Devotional

How God's hope comes alive for each of us is personal and unique. The ways in which we will embody God's hope—whether it is through singing to make a joyful noise, serving to transform our world, searching for people who need to hear good news, or so many other ways—will serve as a testament to the enduring truth of Mary's song:

"My soul magnifies the Lord."

Luke 1:46-55

"And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

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

and holy is his name;

50 indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly;

53 he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

54 He has come to the aid of his child Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Reflection Questions

What amazes you most about Mary's joy and trust in God's promises?

How does Mary's song invite you to see God at work in surprising and humble places?

What could it look like for your own soul to "magnify the Lord" this week?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me
 because the Lord has anointed me;
 he has sent me to bring good news to
 the oppressed,
 to bind up the brokenhearted,
 to proclaim liberty to the captives
 and release to the prisoners,
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
 and the day of vengeance of our God,
 to comfort all who mourn,
 to provide for those who mourn in Zion
 — to give them a garland instead of
 ashes,
 the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
 the mantle of praise instead of a faint
 spirit.
 They will be called oaks of
 righteousness,
 the planting of the Lord, to display his
 glory.
 They shall build up the ancient ruins;
 they shall raise up the former
 devastations;
 they shall repair the ruined cities,
 the devastations of many generations.

For I, the Lord, love justice,
 I hate robbery and wrongdoing;^[a]
 I will faithfully give them their
 recompense,
 and I will make an everlasting covenant
 with them.
 Their descendants shall be known
 among the nations
 and their offspring among the peoples;
 all who see them shall acknowledge
 that they are a people whom the Lord
 has blessed.
 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord;
 my whole being shall exult in my God,
 for he has clothed me with the garments
 of salvation;
 he has covered me with the robe of
 righteousness,
 as a bridegroom decks himself with a
 garland
 and as a bride adorns herself with her
 jewels.
 For as the earth brings forth its shoots
 and as a garden causes what is sown
 in it to spring up,
 so the Lord God will cause
 righteousness and praise
 to spring up before all the nations.

Reflection Questions

Where do you see glimpses of God's healing and justice in your world?

How does the promise of God's good news stir your anticipation for Christmas?

What might it mean for you to be part of God's work of rebuilding and renewing?

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Psalm 126

When the Lord restored the fortunes of
Zion,^[a]

we were like those who dream.

² Then our mouth was filled with laughter

and our tongue with shouts of joy;

then it was said among the nations,

“The Lord has done great things for
them.”

³ The Lord has done great things for us,

and we rejoiced.

⁴ Restore our fortunes, O Lord,

like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵ May those who sow in tears

reap with shouts of joy.

⁶ Those who go out weeping,

bearing the seed for sowing,

shall come home with shouts of joy,

carrying their sheaves.

Reflection Questions

When have you experienced joy so deep it felt like a dream come true?

How can remembering God’s past faithfulness help you wait with hope now?

What are you most looking forward to God restoring or renewing in this season?

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Luke 1:18-25

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." ¹⁹ The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

²¹ Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering at his delay in the sanctuary. ²² When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. ²³ When his time of service was ended, he returned to his home.

²⁴ After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, ²⁵ "This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

Reflection Questions

How do you relate to Zechariah's doubts and questions about God's plans?

What helps you keep wonder alive when God's promises take time to unfold?

How might silence or stillness help you prepare for the miracle of Christmas?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."^[a] ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"^[b] ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born^[c] will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Reflection Questions

What part of Gabriel's message to Mary fills you with the most awe or wonder?

How can you say "yes" to God's call in your own life this Advent?

What does it mean for you that "nothing is impossible with God"?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Matthew 1:1-21

An account^[a] of the genealogy^[b] of Jesus the Messiah,^[c] the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram,⁴ and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon,⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse,⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,^[d]⁸ and Asaph^[e] the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah,⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos,^[f] and Amos^[g] the father of Josiah,¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel,¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud

the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor,¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud,¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, who bore Jesus, who is called the Messiah.^[h]

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah,^[i] fourteen generations.

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

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

Reflection Questions

How does this family tree remind you that God works through ordinary people?

What family stories or blessings help you feel connected to God's larger story?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah prayed and said,
 “My heart exults in the Lord;
 my strength is exalted in my God.^[a]
 My mouth derides my enemies
 because I rejoice in your victory.
 2 There is no Holy One like the Lord,
 no one besides you;
 there is no Rock like our God.
 3 Talk no more so very proudly;
 let not arrogance come from your
 mouth,
 for the Lord is a God of knowledge,
 and by him actions are weighed.
 4 The bows of the mighty are broken,
 but the feeble gird on strength.
 5 Those who were full have hired
 themselves out for bread,
 but those who were hungry are fat with
 spoil.
 The barren has borne seven,
 but she who has many children is
 forlorn.
 6 The Lord kills and brings to life;
 he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
 7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich;

he brings low; he also exalts.
 8 He raises up the poor from the dust;
 he lifts the needy from the ash heap
 to make them sit with princes
 and inherit a seat of honor.
 For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,
 and on them he has set the world.
 9 He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
 but the wicked will perish in darkness,
 for not by might does one prevail.
 10 The Lord! His adversaries will be
 shattered;
 the Most High^[b] will thunder in heaven.
 The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
 he will give strength to his king
 and exalt the power of his anointed.”

Reflection Questions

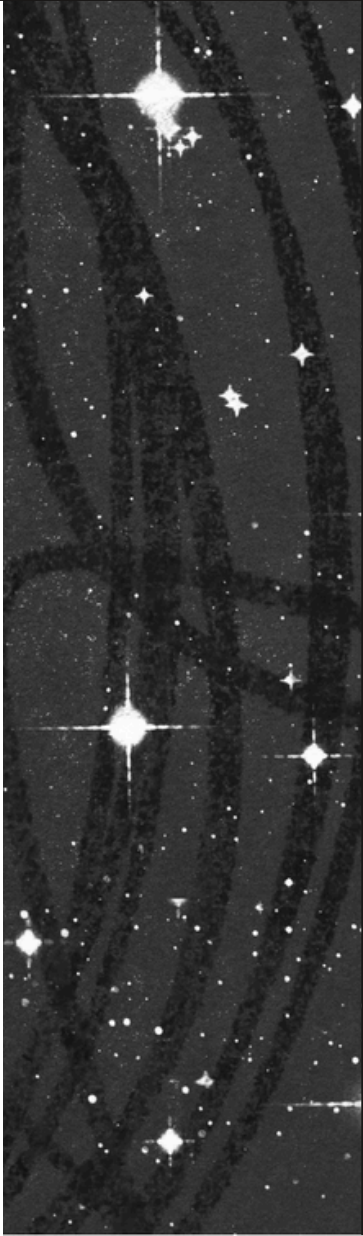
What do Hannah’s words teach us about joy after a long season of waiting?

How does her song help you see God’s power at work in quiet or humble places?

When have you experienced God turning sorrow into joy?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]



Advent Week 3

WONDERING
THROUGH THE
WILDERNESS

Devotional

From the moment humans began wondering and writing about faith, we have desired a direct, personal connection with God. While we could propose and outline several reasons for that, one that illuminates and motivates our desire to connect with God is our desire for purpose.

"Purpose is, in its simplest sense," Melissa Bane Sevier explains, "being in tune with the world around you and God's voice in it." How many hours of our lives have we spent trying to figure out what our purpose is? We pursue degrees and try out jobs, in hopes that we will somehow be edified or fulfilled by what we learn and the work we do. We attempt to hone natural talents and acquire new skills in hopes of discovering a way that we can make a unique or meaningful contribution. We pour our time, energy, and effort into so many people, projects, and things because we are hopeful that in the process we will discover some greater aim, design, or goal for our lives. For some of us, discovering our purpose comes with ease. For others of us, we are still searching for that something that allows us to be in tune with where the voice of God is calling us to be and serve.

As we begin this week's devotional reading in Matthew 3:1–12, this feels like a safe assumption to make: John the Baptist clearly understood his purpose in the world and was unabashedly ready to share how he was hearing God's voice at work in him and the world. John was not concerned with appearances, status, or social expectations—he was clothed in camel's hair, fed on locusts and wild honey, and proclaimed a message that both comforted and unsettled: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

When we meet John in Matthew 3, he appears fearless and faithful—ready to usher in this coming kingdom because he trusts in the future God has promised. John understands his role in the story that is unfolding. He knows that he is able to recognize and respond to the voice of God in his life because of the generations of faithful servants who have gone before him. Before he was even born, John's purpose in life was a promise on the lips of angels, a silent prayer on his father's heart, and a hopeful kick in his mother's womb— all miraculous stories within scripture that make it easy for anyone to understand how and why John is able to so confidently follow in the footsteps of the prophets to prepare the way for the Messiah to enter the world.

John's preaching in the wilderness fulfills the words of Isaiah 40, where a voice cries out, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

Devotional

The wilderness has always been a place of revelation in Scripture—a sacred space where God’s people are formed and re-formed. Here, John’s message resonates with a lineage of hope that reaches back through generations. The covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, where God promises to bless all nations through his descendants, provides a reminder for John and those who heed his wondrous warning to remember how God has always offered his people an opportunity to transform their lives and walk into a new life. The prophetic vision of Isaiah 11:1–10, where a shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse and peace shall cover the earth reassures John and us that nothing and no one will be cut off from the love of God that brings new life. Psalm 72 is a royal prayer that solemnizes a deeply felt and seldom met longing throughout Israel’s existence: a longing for a just ruler who defends the poor and brings righteousness to the afflicted.

In each of these passages, we see the same divine rhythm: God calls, humanity responds, and the world begins to change. John moves within the spirit of this tradition—offering not only a new beginning but also a continuation of God’s ongoing faithfulness and an embodiment of the purpose with which God imbues our lives. We only need to be willing to listen to God and to follow him in order to fulfill our purpose and bear witness to the good things that faithfulness will bear. John’s call to repentance is not merely about personal guilt; it’s an invitation to reorient our lives toward God’s purpose, to remember who we are and whose we are.

Like the chaff that is separated from the wheat, we are afforded an opportunity to take stock of our lives, to examine who we are and whose we are. We are invited to notice how the very essence of who we are is good. We are encouraged to take stock of the ways in which we’ve allowed the world to shape us, recognizing that some of our habits, behaviors, and experiences do not embody the love of God fully—but that is okay, because God offers us grace.

The psalmist captures this hopeful spirit in Psalm 85, which sings, “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” That poetic image is the heartbeat of John’s message: that in turning back toward God, we open ourselves to a peace and renewal only God can bring. Even when John’s words seem harsh—speaking of fire and judgment—they are meant to refine, not destroy. His voice echoes across time, urging us to make room for the new life that Christ will bring.

And so, this season of preparation is not only about repentance but also about expectation. Zechariah’s story in Luke 1:11–20 reminds us that even when we doubt

Devotional

or struggle to believe God's promises, God is still at work, birthing something new in us and around us. John's birth itself is a sign that God's covenant continues, that purpose is still being revealed, and that no one is beyond the reach of divine transformation.

When you hear God calling to you, it is a personal calling, particular to you. And your response to that call is equally particular. John's wilderness proclamation reminds us that the kingdom of heaven is not a distant dream but a present possibility—breaking in wherever we listen for God's voice and respond with our lives.

When John declares that he prepares the way for the long-awaited Messiah, he is letting us know that all of the examples we have heard or read about how faithful, steadfast, and nearby our God is will soon be illuminated by the power of the incarnation. God is not only close to us, but God is with us in the person of Jesus Christ. From his infancy and childhood, Jesus will grow into a wise teacher, gifted preacher, and spiritual healer who will speak directly to the hearts of God's people. And in doing so, all of our lives will be changed because of the personal relationship we are able to have with him. Because he loves us and trusts us, Jesus instills an abiding sense of worth and purpose within each of us.

This week, as you are reading through your Advent devotional and anxiously awaiting Christmas, as you look at the world around you—what do you sense Jesus might be calling you to in this season?

Perhaps you are being called to prepare a way in your own heart, to clear away what keeps you from joy.

Perhaps you are being called to proclaim hope to someone who has forgotten what hope feels like.

Perhaps you are being called to live with a renewed sense of purpose, trusting that God's promises are still unfolding in and through you.

However you are being called, may you hear God's voice in the wilderness, know the grace that refines and restores, and discover your purpose within the great story of God's redeeming love.

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."^[a] ³ This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight' "

⁴ Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶ and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his^[b] baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

¹⁰ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ "I baptize you with^[c] water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with^[d] the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Reflection Questions

What do you think it means to "prepare the way" for Jesus in your own heart?

How can repentance be an act of hope rather than fear?

What might God be clearing away to make space for something new to grow?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Matthew 3:1-12

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."^[a]

Reflection Questions

What would it be like to follow God into the unknown, trusting only the promise of blessing?

How does Abram's journey inspire you to watch for God's unfolding plan?

What new beginnings might God be inviting you into this Advent?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,

and a branch shall grow^a out of his roots.

² The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

³ His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,
⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor

and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;

he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,

and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist

and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed^b together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,

and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord

as the waters cover the sea.

Reflection Questions

What does the image of a "shoot from the stump of Jesse" tell you about God's power to bring life from what seems dead?

How can you help create peace—the kind where the wolf and lamb live together—in your world?

What fills you with wonder about God's vision for a renewed creation?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
2 May he judge your people with
righteousness
and your poor with justice.
3 May the mountains yield prosperity for
the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
4 May he defend the cause of the poor of
the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.
5 May he live^a while the sun endures
and as long as the moon, throughout
all generations.
6 May he be like rain that falls on the
mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
7 In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is
no more.

Reflection Questions

What kind of king—or leader—does this psalm make you long for?

How does this vision of justice and peace shape your anticipation for Christ's reign?

What blessings of peace and righteousness would you like to see grow in your community?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's
hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the
Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway
for our God.

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

⁵ Then the glory of the Lord shall be
revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out!"
And I said, ^[a] "What shall I cry?"

All flesh is grass;
their constancy is like the flower of the
field.

The grass withers; the flower fades,
[[when the breath of the Lord blows
upon it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers; the flower fades,]] ^[a]
but the word of our God will stand
forever.

⁹ Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good news; ^[a]
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news; ^[a]
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him
and his recompense before him.

¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms
and carry them in his bosom
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Reflection Questions

What does it mean to you that God comes with both power and tenderness?

How can hearing "Comfort, comfort my people" bring peace to your waiting?

Where do you need to prepare room in your heart for the coming of the Lord?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13

Lord, you were favorable to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
2 You forgave the iniquity of your people;
you pardoned all their sin. Selah

Let me hear what God the Lord will
speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him
in their hearts.^[a]

9 Surely his salvation is at hand for those
who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each
other.

11 Faithfulness will spring up from the
ground,
and righteousness will look down from
the sky.

12 The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness will go before him
and will make a path for his steps.

Reflection Questions

How do you see God's mercy and faithfulness meeting in your own life?

What helps you listen for God's peace in a noisy or busy world?

How does this psalm invite you to live in harmony with God's goodness?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]

Luke 1:11-20

¹¹ Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. ¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." ¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." ¹⁹ The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. ²⁰ But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

Reflection Questions

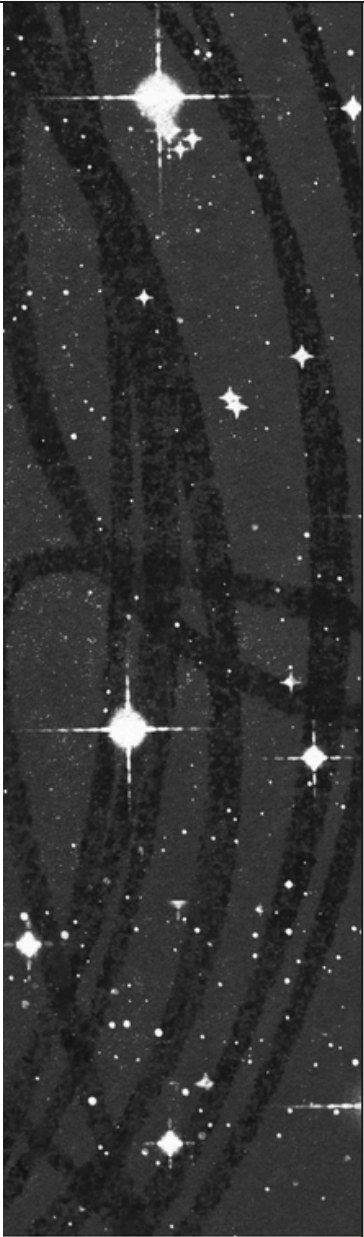
What do you imagine Zechariah felt when he saw an angel in the temple?

How does God's promise to bring joy through John's birth fill you with anticipation?

What might God be preparing in you that you can't yet see?

Personal Reflection

[illegible]



Advent Week 4

WONDERING
ABOUT GOOD
NEWS

Devotional

There is something beautifully ordinary about the setting of the shepherds' story in Luke 2. It is nighttime. The air is cool, quiet, and dark. The shepherds are simply doing their jobs—watching over their flocks, staying alert to the sounds of the night. Nothing about their circumstances suggests that they are on the brink of a holy encounter. And yet, it is precisely into this quiet, unremarkable moment that heaven breaks open with light and song.

"The glory of the Lord shone around them," Luke tells us, "and they were terrified." But the angel's words turn their fear into wonder. "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people."

The message to the shepherds carries the weight of divine fulfillment. The shepherds are the first people to hear the good news of Jesus' birth, and it is important that we recognize the bold, beautiful statement the heavenly hosts are making by telling the lowly shepherds of the hills the news before the mighty rulers of the world. It echoes the promises first whispered by the prophet Micah (5:2-5)—that from Bethlehem, small and seemingly insignificant, a new kind of ruler would come who would shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, and "he shall be the one of peace."

These words, spoken centuries before, now come alive in the cry of a newborn child. The good news declared to the shepherds is that God has chosen to dwell among us—not in royal courts or grand temples, but in the vulnerability of human life. Just a few verses earlier, in Luke 2:1-7, Mary wrapped the infant Jesus in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger because there was no room in the inn. The simplicity of this image reminds us that God's glory is not confined to comfort or power, but is revealed in humility, hospitality, and grace.

In the same way, John 1:1-10 opens our eyes to the cosmic scope of this event. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The light that shines in the darkness is the same light that first spoke creation into being. The shepherds may not have had words for such mystery, but they felt its weight and wonder in that field. The Word has become flesh, and suddenly, heaven and earth are singing the same song.

When Paul writes in Romans 15:4-13, he reminds the early church that the scriptures were given "so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." Paul connects the birth of Christ to the hope that extends beyond Israel to all nations, fulfilling God's promise of inclusion and peace:

Devotional

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." The same message given to the shepherds—good news for all people—becomes the foundation for a new community shaped by grace and unity.

Like the shepherds, we are invited to respond to God's revelation with movement and joy. They did not stay where they were; they went with haste to find the child and then returned glorifying and praising God. Encountering Christ always calls us into action—whether it is a journey of faith, a proclamation of hope, or a song of praise.

The shepherds remind us that revelation often happens in the ordinary, that holiness can interrupt even the most familiar rhythms of our lives. And when it does, we are changed. The light of Christ shines upon us, through us, and before us, guiding our path just as it guided theirs.

So, as you reflect on this week's reading, take a moment to notice where God's light is breaking into your life.

Where are you seeing glimmers of good news in unexpected places?

Where do you sense that God might be calling you to move with haste toward the holy?

How might you, like the shepherds, carry that good news back into your community, praising God for all that you have seen and heard?

May we, too, glorify and praise God for the light that shines in our darkness and the peace that is born anew in us each day.

Luke 2:8-20

⁸ Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,^[b] praising God and saying,
¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those
whom he favors!"

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, ¹⁹ and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Reflection Questions

What fills you with wonder about the shepherds' nighttime encounter with the angels?

How can you make space to "go and see" what God is doing around you this Christmas?

What good news do you feel called to share with others?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Micah 5:2-5

2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

3 Therefore he shall give them up until the
time
when she who is in labor has brought
forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

4 And he shall stand and feed his flock in
the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord
his God.

And they shall live secure, for now he
shall be great
to the ends of the earth,

5 and he shall be the one of peace.

If the Assyrians come into our land
and tread upon our soil,
we will raise against them seven
shepherds
and eight rulers.

Reflection Questions

How does it move you that something world-changing begins in a small town like Bethlehem?

What does this prophecy teach you about God's quiet, surprising ways?

How can you welcome Christ, the bringer of peace, into your home and heart?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Romans 15:4-13

⁴For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel for Jews and Gentiles Alike

⁷Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors ⁹and that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

"Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles

and sing praises to your name";

¹⁰and again he says,

"Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people";

¹¹and again,

"Praise the Lord, all you gentiles,

and let all the peoples praise him";

¹²and again Isaiah says,

"The root of Jesse shall come,

the one who rises to rule the gentiles;

in him the gentiles shall hope."

¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reflection Questions

How does the promise that "the God of hope" fills us with joy and peace shape your waiting?

What helps you stay united in hope with others as you prepare for Christmas?

How can your life reflect the light of Christ to those around you?

Personal Reflection

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Luke 2:1–7

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

Reflection Questions

What do you notice about the simplicity of Jesus' birth story?

How can you find holiness in small, quiet, or unexpected places this season?

What makes you pause in awe at the mystery of God coming near?

Personal Reflection

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

John 1:1-10

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. ⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.^[b] ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.

Reflection Questions

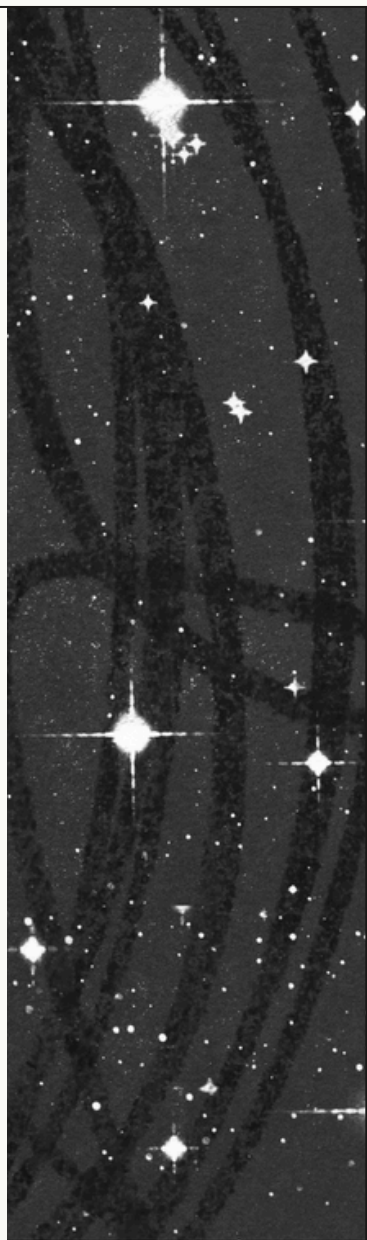
What fills you with wonder about the Word—Jesus—bringing light into the darkness?

How do you see traces of God's light shining in the world today?

How can you welcome that light more deeply into your life this Christmas?

Personal Reflection

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Group Discussion Questions

WONDERING
TOGETHER

Advent Week 1 Group Discussion Questions

1. The devotional recalls how God's people encountered the divine on mountaintops—often with trembling and awe. When have you experienced a “mountaintop moment” of faith or clarity in your life? How did that experience change you, and how have you held onto it in the valleys that followed?
2. Isaiah reminds the people of their unfaithfulness, yet also of God's unwavering presence. In what ways do communities of faith today risk repeating Israel's mistakes—forgetting justice, mercy, or humility? What practices help us stay grounded in God's vision for the world?
3. The prophet describes God tearing open the heavens and shaking the earth to get our attention. How do you understand “holy disruption” in your own life or in the world around you? When might disruption be a form of grace?
4. The Psalms capture raw human longing for deliverance, forgiveness, and renewal. How do honesty and lament play a role in your spiritual life or your community's worship? What might it look like to make space for that kind of authenticity during Advent?
5. Jesus speaks of cosmic signs and earthly distress, yet tells his followers to “stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” How can we cultivate a posture of hope and anticipation, even amid uncertainty, conflict, or fear?
6. As we enter Advent, what does “preparing the way for the Lord” look like in a modern context? How might your small group, congregation, or community make God's love more tangible for others during this season?

Advent Week 2 Group Discussion Questions

1. David Lose describes singing as both an act of joy and of resistance. How do you see those two things connected in Mary's Magnificat and in Hannah's song? When has music—or any creative expression—helped you hold onto hope or resist despair?
2. Mary, Hannah, and the psalmist each respond to God's presence through song. What "song" does your life sing right now—through your actions, commitments, or relationships? How might you rewrite that song to magnify God more fully?
3. Psalm 126 and Isaiah 61 both celebrate restoration and renewal after seasons of grief or oppression. What does it look like to trust in God's promise of renewal when the world still feels broken? How can your community help others "sing again" after loss or disappointment?
4. In Luke 1, both Zechariah and Mary receive shocking news from angels—one responds with doubt, the other with wonder. How do you personally respond when God's call or movement surprises you? What helps you shift from fear or skepticism toward trust and openness?
5. Matthew's genealogy might seem mundane, yet it reveals how God works through generations and imperfect people. How does seeing God's faithfulness across time help you imagine your own place in God's unfolding story? Whose faithfulness has shaped your journey?
6. The devotional describes God's hope becoming "real and tangible for us in human flesh." In a world marked by fear and division, what might it look like to embody that hope—individually and as a church community—during Advent and beyond?

Advent Week 3 Group Discussion Questions

1. In a world marked by fear and division, what might it look like to embody that hope—individually and as a church community—during Advent and beyond? John's ministry begins in the wilderness—a place of both danger and divine encounter. What "wilderness" spaces in your own life have helped you hear God's voice more clearly? How might discomfort or uncertainty open us to a renewed sense of purpose?
2. The devotional describes purpose as "being in tune with the world around you and God's voice in it." How have you discerned your purpose—personally or collectively as a community of faith? What practices help you stay attuned to God's call, especially when the world feels noisy or uncertain?
3. John's call to repentance isn't about guilt but about turning back toward God's purpose. How might repentance—personally or systemically—help make room for healing, justice, or renewal in today's world? What might "making straight a path for God" look like in your life or your community?
4. From Abraham's covenant in Genesis 12 to Isaiah's vision of peace and John's announcement of Christ's coming, we see a through-line of faithfulness. How does remembering the larger story of God's covenant help you understand your place in that story? How might your faith contribute to blessing "all nations" as Abraham's did?
5. The devotional points to Psalm 85's image of "righteousness and peace kissing each other" as the heartbeat of John's message. How do you understand God's refining grace—one that purifies and restores rather than punishes? Where might you see that kind of redemptive grace at work in the world today?
6. As Advent moves toward Christmas, what do you sense Jesus calling you to this season? What inner or outer "paths" need clearing so that joy, peace, and purpose can take root more fully in your life—and in the life of your community?

Advent Week 4 Group Discussion Questions

1. The shepherds' story begins in the quiet, unremarkable rhythm of their night work—until heaven breaks in. Where in your own life do you experience “ordinary holiness”—moments when the divine shows up in the midst of daily life? How can we cultivate an awareness of God's presence in what feels mundane or routine?
2. Micah's prophecy reminds us that from Bethlehem, small and overlooked, comes the ruler who will bring peace. What does this say about how God values and uses the overlooked places and people of the world? How might our church or community live more intentionally into that upside-down kingdom vision?
3. John's gospel proclaims that “the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” Where do you see light breaking through darkness—personally, communally, or globally? What helps you hold on to hope when the world feels dim?
4. Both the angels and Paul emphasize that this message of peace and joy is for everyone. How might this inclusive good news challenge or expand our understanding of who belongs in God's story? In what ways can we make our faith communities reflect that radical welcome?
5. The shepherds did not stay in the field—they went “with haste” to see what God had done. When you sense God stirring something new in your life, what helps you respond with that same openness and joy? What might it look like for you to “go with haste” toward the holy this season?
6. After encountering Christ, the shepherds return glorifying and praising God, sharing what they have seen and heard. How might you carry the good news of God's love and peace into your daily interactions—your family, workplace, or community? What would it mean to be a modern-day messenger of “great joy for all people”?

NEXT STEPS



Socials

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