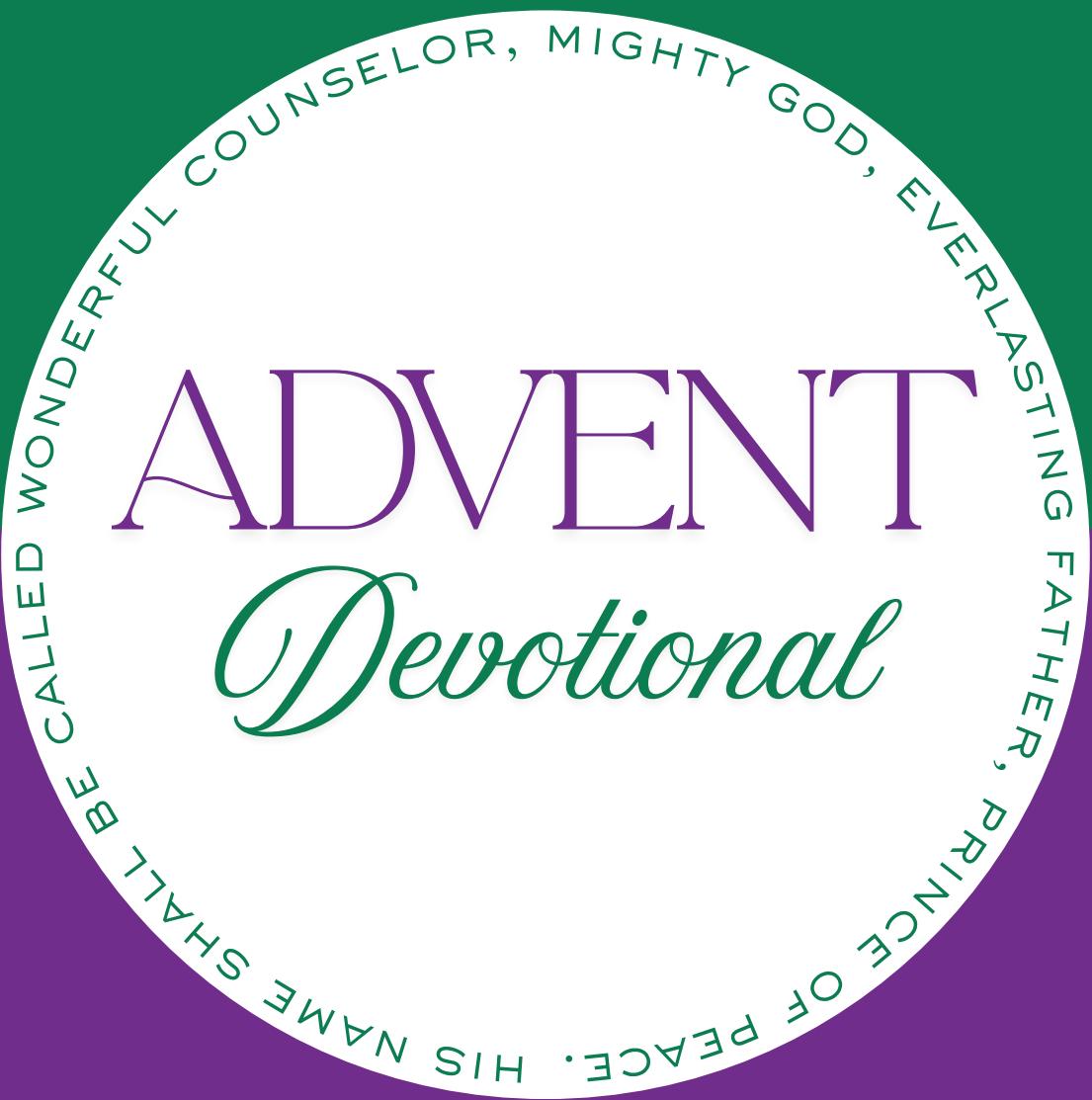




CANYON CREEK
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



Longing | Hope | Preparation | Joy

How to Use this Devotional

ADVENT

This devotional is designed to lead you through the season of Advent. The word 'advent' means the arrival of something, or someone, important. In the Christian tradition Advent refers to the season leading up to Christmas. It begins four Sundays before Christmas and runs through Christmas Eve. For good measure, we've included a devotional for Christmas Day too, so this booklet will span Monday, December 1st through Thursday, December 25th.

SUNDAYS

You'll notice there are no devotionals provided on the Sundays. You can think of the devotional for those days as simply: worship with God's people. We hope this emphasizes the importance of Sunday worship. We walk through Advent not only individually, but as a community. (And the open Sundays also give you a little margin if you miss a day during the week.)

THEMES

Each week has a different theme. The first week focuses on the theme of **Longing**. What do we wish were true? The second week focuses on the theme of **Hope**. What are we looking forward to? The third week focuses on the theme of **Preparation**. How are we getting ready? And the final week focuses on the theme of **Joy**. What are we celebrating?

SCRIPTURE READING

Each devotional's Scripture reading is listed at the top right. The actual text is not printed in this booklet, so you will need to read it on your own before proceeding. We recommend using a physical Bible if you have one. Consider reading the passage out loud as well.

DEVOTIONAL

Each devotional has several parts. The largest is a reflection to read and consider. It will invite you into the world of the text's original author and audience, as well as its relation to Christ and our world today. Next you'll find two questions to help you reflect personally. Then a prayer prompt to guide your conversation with God. Finally, there is a quick activity to make a truth come alive.

AUTHORS

We are thankful for all the authors who contributed to this Advent Devotional. They are: Emmeline Chen, Matt Dombroski, Tori Dombroski, Karie Edwards, Meghan Ford, Doug Hughes, Ben Rohrs, Tricia Rohrs, Holly Timmons, and Kevin Timmons. Special thank-you also to Michelle Kiriakos for her administrative support. If you see any of them, thank them for their hard work!

CONCLUSION

We pray that the Lord uses this devotional to stir up your awareness of Christ's abiding presence. As the Advent hymn, O Little Town of Bethlehem, says: "O holy Child of Bethlehem / descend to us, we pray / cast out our sin and enter in / be born in us today." May God bless you!

Week 1

Longing



“As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.”

PSALM 42:1

DAY 1 | MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

The Very Good Creation

GENESIS 1:1, 26-31

REFLECTION

A story about how the universe began is nothing new. Many of the world's religions, cultures, and societies have stories about how things all started. Most of the time, creation is the product of conflict or chance.

The Christian story is different, however. It teaches that God created all things very good. Creation is intentional, not accidental. And it is beautiful, not collateral damage.

The creation story also demonstrates God's orderliness. He creates realms and rulers: sun and moon to rule the day and the night; fish to rule the sea and birds to rule the sky; livestock and creeping things to rule the dry land.

And finally, He created us—humanity. Rulers of the fish and birds, every living thing that moves, plants, trees, and fruit. And all of this was arranged neatly under God's authority as ruler of heaven and earth.

And God's judgment of this setup is that it is very good. Not just good—very good. There's a sense of completion, satisfaction, and perfection. Things could have proceeded nicely from here for the rest of eternity.

Of course, we know that is not what ends up happening. But let's not get ahead of ourselves just yet. It was once perfectly harmonious in this world, and that has implications for us today.

It means that creation is inherently good. It means that being human is inherently good. It means sin and humanity are not synonyms. It is actually profoundly inhuman to sin, because God created humanity sin-free. We may not currently live in that sinless world God once created, but deep in our hearts we long to live there—because we know that it was very good.

ASK

- 1| How does the fact that God created everything very good impact how you view the world, or yourself, today?
- 2| What part of God's creation makes you sit in awe and wonder of him?

PRAY

Pray a prayer of adoration that gives God glory for how he created everything: Men and women in his image, and the world very good at the start.

DO

As you go about your day, take stock of some part of creation you encounter, and imagine how it's a glimmer of the very good creation from the beginning.

DAY 2 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

The Fall

REFLECTION

The tragedy of the Fall is heightened as we realize how much sin has separated us from the beginning that God intended for humanity—to live at peace with each other and the world, and most of all, to walk and talk with God each day without barriers or fear, sharing in God's happiness and love for all eternity.

Alas, God's very good creation was marred almost from the start of humanity's story. The Fall began as temptation does in our own lives—with the serpent's crafty lies replacing God's truth.

First, the serpent encouraged Eve to doubt God's good plans, asking if God had said something that He hadn't. Then Eve replied with a twist of God's instructions, adding a restriction that God hadn't mentioned to Adam.

The serpent then tempted Eve with the possibility of being like God. And after Eve ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—the only tree God had told Adam not to eat from—she gave some to Adam. He, too, disobeyed God and ate the fruit.

Genesis 3 ends with God sending Adam and Eve out of the garden of Eden, never to return.

The Fall reflects the inability of our human hearts to follow God and share in His perfect holiness. We strive, but we fall short, again and again. We hurt other people as we put our own needs first. We seek comfort, authority,

certainty, love—all things that only God can provide.

The Fall reminds us that we cannot be in God's presence on our own. We are sinful, prideful people trying to approach the one true Almighty God, the Lord of creation, maker of heaven and earth.

And the Fall finally brings us to our knees in gratitude that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross—His shed blood on our behalf—covers our sins, makes us white as snow, and allows us to return to what God intended: a life reunited with God and the prospect of sharing in God's happiness and love for all eternity.

ASK

1| How do you see Satan twisting God's truth in society today?

2| In what ways are you tempted to doubt God's goodness in your life?

PRAY

Confess that you sometimes doubt God's guidance in your life, and ask God to help you follow Him wholeheartedly.

DO

Find a pebble, and either carry it with you or put it where you will see it today. Whenever you touch or look at it, remember God's great love for you and His steadfast promises for your life.

GENESIS 3:1-7

DAY 3 | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

The Curse

GENESIS 3:16-19

REFLECTION

The breadth and depth of these curses are overwhelming. They span family dysfunction, exhaustion from work, and even death itself. How familiar these struggles are to us. How many libraries could be filled with volumes on the challenges of bringing children into the world and raising them to thrive? How much ink has been spilled over the conflicts between husbands and wives? How many terabytes now store articles, seminars, and podcasts on coping with work stress?

For many people, the most overwhelming concern is the meaning, fear, and avoidance of death – so much so that the writer of Hebrews says people can be subject to “lifelong slavery” through fear of it (Heb. 2:15).

Beyond these human dynamics, even the ground itself is cursed. The New Testament expands on this, saying that “the creation was subjected to futility,” that it is in “bondage to corruption,” and that it “has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now” (Rom. 8:20–23).

If there were no God – if we merely evolved through time and random chance – none of this would trouble us. It would simply be the state of our existence. There would be no meaning, no sense of what is good, no longing for something better, no faint taste of an Eden that has been lost. But “God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). As a result, even though His image within us has been marred and distorted by sin, we still share these longings – no matter how hard we may try to ignore them, suppress

them, or distract ourselves with endless pursuits and entertainments.

The entire Bible tells a unified story of how the curses in Genesis are being unwound through God’s eternal plan of restoration. A pivotal moment in this plan is God coming to earth and becoming fully human in the person of Jesus Christ, the promised Savior. The plan will one day culminate in a fully restored creation where sin, death, and corruption are eradicated – the curses blotted out and our deepest longings fulfilled.

So, take heart this Advent season, and let the third verse of “Joy to the World” resonate within you:

No more let sins and sorrows grow / Nor thorns infest the ground / He comes to make His blessings flow / Far as the curse is found

ASK

1| What do you think is the most pressing, immediate problem the world faces?

2| If you could experience healing in one dimension of your life, what would it be?

PRAY

Pray a prayer of lament for the brokenness surrounding you. Then thank God for his unfolding plan of redemption.

DO

Find and sing all of the verses to “Joy to the World,” focusing specifically on verse three.

DAY 4 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

A King Like the Nations

1 SAMUEL 8:4-9

REFLECTION

Israel wanted a king—or maybe it's better to say, Israel wanted a different king. They wanted a king like all the other nations had. They wanted a human king. But the fact of the matter was that Israel already had a king: the Lord God Himself.

This makes the prophet Samuel furious. The elders of Israel weren't simply asking for a human ruler; they were insulting their current King—the Lord. Even though they made this request of Samuel, God tells him that it's not Samuel they are rejecting, but Him. By asking for a king like the nations, they were rejecting the Lord as their true King.

In the United States, we have a strange relationship with kings. Our nation's founding is based on rejecting a king's right to rule us. In some sense, it feels unnatural for us to bow our knees to any earthly king.

And yet, we still do. We just do it in more subtle and sophisticated ways. Celebrities, social media influencers, pundits, politicians, and even Christian leaders can become the kings (and queens) we bow before in our hearts. We praise them. We follow them. We do what they say.

Inevitably, though, these figures let us down. Their success runs out, or they fail morally. And what do we do? We simply coronate a new royal to follow—until they disappoint us.

We may not physically bow before an earthly king, but deep down, we still long for our own version of a king like the nations—someone to rule over us, often in place of the true King, God Himself.

Miraculously and graciously, God fulfilled that desire by giving us His Son, Jesus Christ. In one sense, He is a king like the nations, because He became fully human. But of course, He is unlike any other king, because He is God Himself—ruling and reigning in perfect righteousness. Let earth receive her King!

ASK

1 | Over the course of your life which mere humans have you ascribed near royal status to?

2 | Deep down in your heart, why do you desire a king-like figure to rule and reign over you?

PRAY

Confess that you often ascribe royal status to mere humans. Give God praise for being the only true king.

DO

At least once today, when you feel the urge to check the news or social media, pause—and don't. Instead, open your Bible and read about Jesus.

DAY 5 | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

Saul's Rejection

REFLECTION

Through the prophet Samuel, God gave King Saul explicit instructions for Israel's battle against the Amalekites. God had a specific plan and wanted Saul to carry it out completely. But Saul only partially obeyed. He spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, along with many of the animals, even though God had commanded that everything be destroyed. Saul's disobedience led God to reject him as king.

Saul's failure was rooted in arrogance. He clearly heard God's instructions but chose to ignore them, deciding instead to do what seemed best to him. He thought he knew better than God. He likely believed he had good reasons for modifying God's command. In doing so, he elevated his own reasoning above God's perfect righteousness.

It didn't matter that Saul had obeyed some of God's commands. God had not given him permission to pick and choose. It didn't matter what Saul's motives were. God didn't ask Saul to act according to his own judgment—He called Saul to trust His leadership fully.

In the same way, God does not call us to selective obedience. He does not ask us to rely on our own reasoning or partial faithfulness. Our entire lives are meant to be under His control. He calls us to follow Him completely and to submit wholeheartedly to Him.

Like Saul, we struggle to do this. We can be arrogant and stubborn, following our own way. We lose sight of God's holiness. Sometimes it feels easier to do things our way. Sometimes we convince ourselves that our reasoning is

sound. Our excuses for sin are endless—and none of them justify disobedience.

God rejected Saul as king because of his disobedience and sin. We, too, fall short of perfect obedience. We are born sinful like Saul. Yet unlike Saul, we are not rejected, because God's story does not end with rejection—it ends with redemption.

One day, God sent a new King. This King is perfect, holy, and without sin—and He takes away our sin. Instead of rejecting us, as we deserve, God redeems us through Jesus. All we must do is confess our sins, accept His forgiveness, and seek His guidance.

During Advent, we wait for the birth of our Redeemer—the perfect King who saves us from sin and from rejection. We long for the One who leads, restores, and redeems us.

ASK

1| In what areas of your life does your arrogance cause you to follow your own way?

2| How do you feel knowing that in Christ your sin will never cause God to reject you?

PRAY

Confess the ways you reject God's ways. Thank God for not rejecting you in those times.

DO

Listen to a worship song that reminds you to follow God. Repeat the lyrics to yourself today.

1 SAMUEL 15:10-16, 24-29

DAY 6 | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

David's Failure

REFLECTION

Nathan tells King David a parable about a rich man who takes a poor man's only lamb to feed a traveler. David becomes angry at the actions of the rich man. But then Nathan rebukes him, revealing that David himself is the man in the story.

David had failed as a King, breaking several of God's commandments. He broke the tenth by coveting his neighbor's wife. He broke the seventh by committing adultery. And he broke the sixth by committing murder. Here, near the end of his life, David is called to account for these sins.

His punishment is that the sword will never depart from his house. He will live with ongoing conflict and grief within his own family. David should have known through the Lord's word that his actions were sinful, but like us, he tried to justify them. Sometimes it's easy to rationalize our choices—because someone else has wronged us, or because we believe we deserve something that might lead us into sin. Yet anytime we place something or someone ahead of the Lord, we create an idol and open ourselves to temptation.

Nathan was wise and tactful in his approach. By using a parable, he led David to condemn a fictional man's injustice before realizing it mirrored his own. Sometimes our sin runs so deep that we fail to recognize in ourselves the very faults we condemn in others.

Nathan's courage and faithfulness in confronting David serve as a powerful example. It took great bravery, skill, and discernment to speak truth to a fallen king, but God used that moment to bring David to repentance and renewal. We need others in our lives to be like Nathan for us. And at other times we may need to be like Nathan for someone else.

This story also shows us that we want a king who does not do anything wrong in the first place. We long for a king who is better than David. We long for Christ the King.

ASK

1| Are you condemning others in your life for sins that you might also commit?

2| Who do you trust in your life to help keep you accountable?

PRAY

Ask for God's forgiveness for the sins you might condemn when you see others commit them. Give thanks for the friends in your life that help to keep you accountable.

DO

Take a moment today to give thanks to a good friend who helps keeps you accountable. Thank them for the love and support they give to you. Thank them for their honesty and encouragement in your life.

Week 2

Hope



“For all the promises of God find their Yes in Jesus Christ. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.”

2 CORINTHIANS 1:19-20

DAY 8 | MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

Edenic Covenant

GENESIS 3:14-15

REFLECTION

When sin entered the world in Genesis 3, darkness fell over everything God had made good. Adam and Eve's disobedience broke their fellowship with God, and sorrow entered the story. Yet even in the midst of judgment, God whispered a promise—a seed of hope.

God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

This is the first glimpse of the gospel—often called the Protoevangelium, the first prophecy of a Redeemer. It is the first promise of Christmas. One day, a child born of a woman would crush evil once and for all. The serpent would strike, but the Savior would triumph.

Imagine how heavy Eve's heart must have been as she heard this promise—knowing she was the mother of all living, yet her choices had brought death into the world. How she must have longed for redemption.

Generations later, another woman, Mary, heard an angel's voice announce that she would bear a Son. “He will be great,” the angel said, “and will be called the Son of the Most High.”

In Mary's womb, the long-awaited promise began to take shape. The seed of the woman had come at last. Where Eve's “yes” to

temptation brought sin, Mary's “yes” to God brought salvation and hope. Through both, we see the same faithful God writing redemption into every page of His story.

As we wait in Advent, we remember that God's plan of salvation began long before a manger or a star. The promise made in Eden was fulfilled in Bethlehem—and one day it will be completed when Christ comes again.

May we, like Mary, respond with faith and wonder: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”

ASK

1| How does seeing God's promise remind you that He is always working to bring redemption, even in moments of failure or sorrow?

2| Like Mary, where might God be inviting you to trust Him and say “yes” this Advent season?

PRAY

Thank God that in his love and grace he pursues us in the midst of our mistakes. Ask for help showing ourselves and others the same love and grace.

DO

Reflect on a past mistake and how God used it for good to shape you. Share this story of personal redemption to encourage someone who is struggling this Advent season.

DAY 9 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

Noahic Covenant

GENESIS 8:1, 9:7-17

REFLECTION

The wickedness of humanity had filled the earth, greatly grieving God. He sent a great flood to cover the earth, blotting out all life because it had become corrupt and full of violence.

Yet in the midst of God's grief and regret, He found one man, Noah, who was righteous and blameless—a man who "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9).

So God chose to save Noah and his family, along with two of every type of living creature on earth. "God remembered Noah" and all who were with him. They alone survived the great flood, exiting the ark after God caused the waters to recede and ushered them out.

God blessed Noah and his family, calling for them to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1). He then established a covenant with them and every living creature, promising to never again send a flood to destroy life on earth.

As a sign of this covenant, God set his bow in the cloud, like a warrior laying down his weapons—his bow and arrow—after a war. Each time the rainbow appeared, God said He would remember His covenant between Himself, Noah's descendants, and all living creatures on earth. No matter how much evil might take place on earth, God promised to never again choose to destroy all life.

Instead, He would save humanity through a new rescue plan by sending His only Son, Jesus, to earth—to be destroyed on our behalf so that we might have fresh starts, emerging from the darkness of our sins to be found blameless and righteous because of Jesus' sacrifice and to walk with God.

The rainbow is a sign of God's promise, His new covenant—with the bow turned to face heaven. To overcome the evil of humanity, God aimed the arrow at His own Son so that we might live.

ASK

1| Why do you think God made a covenant with Noah and all living creatures after the flood?

2| How does it make you feel to realize that God set the rainbow to aim His arrow at heaven instead of the earth?

PRAY

Thank God for offering us a rescue plan from our sins through Jesus' sacrifice, taking the punishment that we deserve.

DO

Draw a rainbow and place it on your refrigerator to remind you of God's promise to extend mercy to humanity.

DAY 10 | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

Abrahamic Covenant

GENESIS 12:1-3

REFLECTION

When God called Abram to leave his home and family, He didn't give him a detailed plan—only a promise: "I will bless you ... and you will be a blessing. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

This moment in Genesis marks the beginning of the covenant of grace—God's pledge to redeem His people and restore blessing to a broken world. Abraham's hope wasn't rooted in his circumstances or achievements, but in God's unwavering faithfulness to His word. That same covenant promise now extends to us through Christ, the true offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:16).

Throughout Scripture, God shows that His blessing is both personal and generational. He blesses families and communities so that His grace might reach the nations. Every act of obedience, every moment of trust, becomes part of His larger story of redemption. The covenant hope we inherit is not just that God saves individuals, but that He weaves His mercy through generations, turning ordinary lives into conduits of His blessing.

We can see this in the quiet, often unseen ways God works in our own family histories—protecting, providing, and calling people to Himself. The same God who called Abraham out of Ur still calls His people today to walk by faith into the unknown, trusting that His promises are sure. Even when we see the

effects of sin and brokenness ripple through generations (Ex. 34:7), His steadfast love outlasts every shadow. In Christ, the curse is broken, and hope is reborn.

God's covenant hope invites us to trust that He is at work in the long story of our lives—redeeming what is broken, blessing what seems barren, and fulfilling His promise to bless "all families of the earth" through His Son.

ASK

1| How does understanding God's covenant with Abraham deepen your confidence that His promises still hold true today—even across generations?

2| Where do you feel hope or gratitude as you think about the ways God has quietly shown His faithfulness in your family or community?

PRAY

Thank God for his covenant promises and ask him to give you a heart that trusts in his faithfulness.

DO

Reach out to someone in your family—an older relative or a younger one—and share a story of how you've seen God's hand in your family line

DAY 11 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

Davidic Covenant

REFLECTION

Before King David's tragic failure, he reached heights no leader in Israel had ever reached before him. The twelve tribes were all united under his rule. He expanded the boundaries of the promised land to nearly where God had set them in the first place. He recaptured Jerusalem and made it the capital city. He even brought the ark of the covenant—where God's most holy presence dwelled—back to Jerusalem.

At this point, David realizes that he, as king, dwells in a majestic house of cedar, while the ark of the covenant—God Himself—dwells in a simple tent. That just doesn't sit right with David. So he resolves to build God a proper house—a temple.

But before David can pitch this idea, God surprises him. He says, "You don't need to build Me a house, David. Instead, I will build you a house." Not a physical structure, but a royal dynasty: the house of David.

Just like that, God makes a covenant with David and promises that through his line and his throne, God will always rule His people. Yes, there would be human kings in Israel. But they would be different from the kings of other nations, because they were to be submitted to God's ultimate rule—serving not themselves, but God and His people. And one of those kings would stand above the rest.

Years later, that King was born in the line of David, in the town of David, with the rights to the throne of David—Jesus Christ. He is the perfect King, and His reign and rule will never end.

2 SAMUEL 7:1-2, 8-16

ASK

1| Why do we sometimes prefer to serve others rather than be served by them?

2| How do you think David felt when God turned down his offer to build a temple and countered with a promise of a royal dynasty?

PRAY

Confess that you sometimes forget God must serve you before you can ever serve him. Thank him for providing a perfect king in Jesus.

DO

Write something down that God has done for you that you cannot do back for him.

DAY 12 | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12

For to Us a Child Is Born

ISAIAH 9:2-7

REFLECTION

Isaiah was writing to the people of Judah in a time of complete uncertainty. They were under the rule of King Ahaz, who was extremely wicked and was seeking favor and an alliance with the Assyrians out of fear. How will God react to this? The people of God know that they have strayed—strayed far. They look exactly like the nations that God said He would strike down. What will He do to them? Why would He treat them any differently?

He will treat them differently because God is different. His covenantal love for the people He has chosen will never run out, no matter how far they stray. He has promised that He will bring about the true leader from David's line—one who won't fail or end as all others have. The kingdom had split into two, with neither truly following the one true God. But this Messiah will bring peace that will not end.

Can you imagine hearing that? In a land ravaged by countless, endless wars, God has promised to bring peace—so complete that they will use their enemies' boots and garments for fuel, because they will no longer have any enemies. He will break the yoke the enemy has placed on them.

In our current context, we still have one of the same enemies they did: sin. But Jesus promised that we could trade our yoke for His. This is our hope! We don't have to live under the burden of sin anymore because Christ has

promised He won't just break the old yoke—He will give us His yoke, one that is easy and light. We can be a part of the work in His glorious kingdom, which will never end.

In the land of darkness, we will see light! He will give us peace and victory even though we don't deserve it and have strayed in our own lives. Through Jesus' work on the cross, we can be His people.

ASK

1| What does this passage make you think about God's character?

2| Reflect on a time in your life when you felt there was little or no hope. How did God bring you through that? If currently experiencing that - imagine giving Jesus your burdens - actually placing them in His scarred hands.

PRAY

Thank God for the hope he has given you.

DO

Light a candle in a dark room as you pray.

DAY 13 | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

The New Covenant

REFLECTION

This passage is the only one in the Old Testament that explicitly discusses the new covenant God will make with His people. This covenant will be written “on their hearts.” Israel had been circumcised in body, but not in heart – and the new covenant will remedy that. It promises that all God’s people will know the Lord, from the least to the greatest, and that He will forgive their sins.

The new covenant represents a new start – a new birth. Sins will be remembered no more, and nothing can break this covenant because it is written on the heart. It is more than a physical agreement; it is an eternal connection with our loving Father. When we turn our lives to God, He, through His Holy Spirit, binds us to Himself and creates within us a desire to obey Him.

This passage also raises an interpretive question: what does it mean that “they shall all know me”? Does this apply only to ethnic Israel, or to a redefined Israel that includes both Jews and Gentiles? Jesus’ ministry makes the answer clear – the new covenant is for everyone. It extends to all who believe in Him, both Jew and Gentile alike.

The new covenant differs from the old in that it cannot be broken. Israel and Judah broke the old covenant, but the new covenant – sealed by Jesus’ grace and the forgiveness of sins – is unbreakable. It promises a unique, personal

relationship with God. This covenant is alive for us today. When we turn to Him, we experience new birth and enter into a personal, eternal, loving relationship with God. And once we do, nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus.

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

ASK

1| What hope did the promise of the new covenant hold for Jeremiah and Israel at that time? What hope do you have today in the new covenant?

2| How does it make you feel to be sealed by Christ and to have a personal relationship with God for eternity?

PRAY

Give praise to the Lord for bringing his new covenant and for establishing a loving relationship with you. Our Lord loves you and can never be separated from his people. Praise the Lord!

DO

Open your heart today to observe the Holy Spirit working in your life or those around you. Even if it seems like something small, make note of it and write it down.

Week 3

Preparation



“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

—

MATTHEW 24:44

DAY 15 | MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

Sing of the Love of the Lord

PSALM 89:1-4, 34-37

REFLECTION

The Psalms are God's sanctioned songbook for His people. They are words that God not only gives us permission to sing – He instructs us to sing them. And they cover all sorts of subjects, emotions, and circumstances.

God instructs us to sing because singing is powerful. It can help us express more fully what we are feeling inside. It can even move our hearts to feel something we weren't feeling before – maybe even the exact opposite. Imagine the power of singing "It Is Well with My Soul" at a loved one's funeral.

Psalm 89 invites us to sing of the steadfast love of the Lord. Why? First, because it is true that the Lord's love is steadfast. But second, because sometimes it does not feel like the Lord's love is steadfast. Singing of it reminds us of what is real.

This psalm was not written by King David, but it frequently refers to the covenant that God made with David. It says that God swore to David that He would establish an eternal royal dynasty. The psalm also emphasizes that God does not violate His covenants. If He has made a promise, it is a sure thing.

Why would the people of God need a psalm like this? Because there were many eras when it felt like David's royal line would be snuffed out. There was much turmoil in Israel after David's reign, and it would have been easy to

lose hope. But by singing a psalm like this, the people of God were prepared for God's covenant with David to be fulfilled. You could easily imagine that those who did not regularly sing psalms like Psalm 89 might have missed it when Jesus arrived on the scene. They were not prepared.

But those who had been singing this psalm were ready. They knew God's steadfast love meant He would keep His promises. They knew that one day the Messiah, the true King of Israel, would come.

ASK

1| Why do you think singing helps us to remember things?

2| What is your favorite song we sing at church and why?

PRAY

Ask God to reassure you that he will keep the promises he has made.

DO

Play one of your favorite Advent songs today and sing along, noting how it helps you prepare for the arrival of Jesus.

DAY 16 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

The Lord's Chosen Servant

ISAIAH 42:1-9

REFLECTION

Isaiah looks forward more than seven centuries with a prophecy about Jesus that is astonishingly sweeping in scope. It begins with an intimate picture of the loving relationship between the Father and the Son, then proceeds to summarize the Son's mission: "He will bring forth justice to the nations."

This justice extends far beyond the way we commonly use the word in our courts—justice as punishment meted out for wrongs committed. It goes further, to restore the damage caused by wrongdoing. It unwinds the distortions and brokenness of our world. It encompasses the ultimate re-creation of the world as God intended it to be, where sin, sorrow, and tears are no more. This is reaffirmed in verse 9, which points toward the final vision of Revelation 21:5: "Behold, I am making all things new."

Verses 2–4 go on to describe three character traits of the Son. First, He is not pretentious or self-promoting—He is humble and lowly. Second, He is gentle with people who are hurt and struggling—the "bruised reeds" and "faintly burning wicks." These two traits often converge when Jesus heals people and then instructs them to "tell no one." Matthew 12:15–21 recounts one such episode and then says, "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah," quoting the first four verses of this very passage.

The third trait is Jesus' steadfast resolve to accomplish His mission. He knew He would suffer physical torture and an agonizing death on a cross. But He also understood the far greater spiritual horror of bearing our sins and

being momentarily forsaken by His Father—and yet He was not deterred.

The remaining verses of this passage proclaim God's majesty and sovereignty over creation and history. They expand on the Father's relationship with His Son and the purpose of the Son's mission. Of particular significance, the Father offers the Son as a new covenant for all nations—to bring spiritual light, healing, and release from captivity. God reaffirms His glory and declares that "new things" are coming.

With astonishing breadth and clarity, then, Isaiah looked forward to Christ's mission and character. Let us now look back to celebrate these things, especially as Christmas approaches. Even more, let us confidently look forward to "justice for the nations" and the "new things" that will someday "spring forth".

ASK

1| Which of Jesus' character traits described in this passage most amazes or inspires you?

2| How do you see yourself as "a broken reed" or a "faintly burning wick"?

PRAY

Thank God for Jesus' humility, gentleness, and resolve to accomplish his mission. Give praise to him for commissioning his Servant to come to earth and give him as a covenant for us.

DO

Help a hurting person this week, but don't tell anyone about it.

DAY 17 | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

The Son of Man

DANIEL 7:9-14

REFLECTION

Daniel has a vision of two important figures: the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man. But right before this, he sees four beasts. They represent earthly kings ruling earthly kingdoms.

Then the Ancient of Days appears. He sits on a throne of fire. His clothing and hair are white as snow. Thousands upon thousands serve Him. He is the sort of figure before whom you would tremble. He calls court into session and gives a judgment. One of the beasts will be killed, and the others will lose their kingdoms.

Then the Son of Man appears. He comes with the clouds and is presented before the Ancient of Days. At this point, that sounds like a frightening position to be in. But not for the Son of Man. Unlike the beasts, He is not destroyed or stripped of dominion. Just the opposite. He is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom. All peoples, all nations, and speakers of every language serve Him. His reign will last forever, and His kingdom will never be destroyed.

It was likely very clear to Daniel's readers that the Ancient of Days was God Himself. But who was this Son of Man figure?

In the Gospels, "the Son of Man" was one of Jesus' favorite names to use for Himself. But those familiar with Daniel's prophecy probably thought He was out of His mind. This poor,

homeless, itinerant rabbi thinks He's the Son of Man who will be given all authority in heaven and on earth by God Himself? Impossible.

Of course, that's exactly what happened. As John saw in his vision in Revelation 1, the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man are one — because the Father and the Son are one. Jesus is God Himself. His kingdom is at hand. His kingdom is still coming. His kingdom is eternal.

Are you ready for it?

ASK

1| How does Daniel's vision clarify the identity and authority of Jesus?

2| How have earthly authorities let you down and how does knowing Jesus is the eternal Son of Man bring peace to your heart?

PRAY

Pray a prayer of adoration that gives Jesus glory for being our eternal king, worthy of all glory and honor above all others.

DO

The next time you pray, actually pray on your knees, bowing before Christ as your king.

DAY 18 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

LUKE 1:26-38

REFLECTION

It would do us all some good to put ourselves in Mary's shoes. Imagine receiving the news she did from the angel Gabriel. To call it surprising would be an understatement!

When Gabriel tells Mary that she will be the mother of the "Son of the Most High," she asks a completely reasonable question: "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary was a young, unmarried teenager. Having a baby would already have been impossible for her. Having a baby who was God's Son was clearly supernatural. The news must have been shocking, and it's easy to see why she didn't understand it right away. Who could?

Gabriel answers Mary's question with assurance. And in response, Mary chooses to trust God and His plans—for her and for the world. She identifies herself as a "servant of the Lord," ready to play her part. She believes in what God can do for her and through her. Even knowing the cost and difficulty ahead, Mary willingly submits to God's will.

Mary trusts that God can make the impossible happen. She trusts because she believes in God's power to bring about this miracle. All she needs to hear is Gabriel's simple yet profound explanation: "Nothing will be impossible with God." And she believes it.

Do we believe that "nothing is impossible with God" as Mary did? Do we trust Him with our lives, even when we don't understand His plans? Let's be honest—this can be difficult in the midst of our struggles in a broken world.

But the more we place our trust in God and His plans—even when they make no sense—the more His power can work in and through us. When we step out in faith along the path He lays before us we begin to live with true purpose. We will never be Mary, but we can live with her kind of faith.

We are part of Mary's miraculous story. Her baby came to save us and change our world forever. That is what we celebrate during Advent. We can trust God because He has done the impossible—and He has done it for us. Jesus proves it. We can trust Him with anything. Mary did.

ASK

- 1| Have you gotten surprising or shocking news that tested your faith? How did you respond?
- 2| How does it impact you to know that "nothing is impossible" with God?

PRAY

Thank God that nothing is impossible with him. Ask him to help you trust his power and his plans.

DO

With your family or some friends, read this story aloud. Have everyone act out Mary's expression when she first heard God's plan. Then act out Mary's expression when she accepted it.

DAY 19 | FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

Mary's Magnificat

LUKE 1:46-55

REFLECTION

The Virgin Mary has received news from the angel Gabriel that she has been chosen by God to give birth to His Son, Jesus, who has come to save the world. Overwhelmed by this news, Mary travels to see her older relative Elizabeth, who is also miraculously pregnant with John the Baptist.

The two share a divine moment filled with praise and glory, rejoicing in God's faithfulness and the fulfillment of His promises. These two women play a significant role in God's plan of salvation.

Then Mary composes a poetic song of praise and worship called The Magnificat. In it she says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." She is proclaiming how great and faithful God is—and how wonderful it is that He has chosen her for this special purpose in His plan of salvation through the divine birth of Jesus.

Mary continues, "for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed, for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name." She emphasizes God's love for the humble and lowly in society. It reveals His justice and the reversal of the world's values—He exalts the humble and poor and opposes the proud and powerful. Mary recognizes that God can do powerful things she could never do on her own.

Mary is a beautiful example of obedience and how God uses His people in ordinary circumstances to accomplish extraordinary works. She was young and engaged to be married, and her pregnancy was not acceptable to society. Yet she looked beyond her circumstances and obeyed God's will. Her story reminds us to stay alert for opportunities to serve God wholeheartedly and without reservation.

ASK

1| Why do you think that God uses everyday people to do His work?

2| Reflect on a time where God prompted you to do His will, but you felt uncomfortable or ill equipped?

PRAY

Thank the Lord for empowering you to do great things through Him and his provision, remembering His magnificence, love, and power, especially when you do not feel worthy or capable of His call.

DO

Spend Quiet Time with the Lord today. Listen to His call on your life and connect with someone who God has put on your heart.

DAY 20 | SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

Joseph's Dream

MATTHEW 1:18-25

REFLECTION

Joseph's engagement to Mary did not go according to plan. Even though they were betrothed – which was legally binding in their day – Mary was found to be pregnant before they had ever consummated their marriage.

Because Joseph knew what had to happen for a woman to become pregnant, and because he knew that had not happened between him and Mary, he concluded what everybody would: Mary must have been unfaithful to him.

But Joseph was a good man, and he did not want Mary to be publicly shamed. So he decided that he would quietly divorce her and move on with his life.

Later that night, however, while Joseph was sleeping, an angel visited him in a dream. The angel told him that he should not divorce Mary. He should still marry her – because she had not been unfaithful.

The baby she had conceived was from the Holy Spirit. She was going to give birth to a son who would be the most incredible person to ever walk this earth. Joseph should name Him Jesus, because He would save God's people from their sins. This would fulfill Isaiah's prophecy about a virgin conceiving a son – a passage Joseph was likely familiar with. What an honor it must have been to play a role in its fulfillment!

Joseph woke up from this dream and believed what the angel had told him. So he did exactly what the angel said.

Many people have a difficult time believing that the virgin birth of Jesus could possibly be true. But nobody had more reason to doubt it than Joseph. If even he could be persuaded that it really happened – anyone can be.

ASK

1| How is Joseph an example of handling our doubts well?

2| Where in your life do you need God's help to believe He is capable of what seems impossible?

PRAY

Confess to God the parts of the Christian faith that are difficult for you to believe. Ask him to give you the faith to believe.

DO

Take a step of faith today. Do something you're not sure what the outcome will be, so that you must depend on God.

Week 4

Joy



“You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

—

PSALM 16:11

DAY 22 | MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

The Shepherds

LUKE 2:1-20

REFLECTION

Luke tells the story of Jesus' birth in the city of David—Bethlehem. Not only was Bethlehem foretold in the Old Testament, it was also the ancestral home of Joseph, placing him in King David's lineage. It took immense faith for Mary and Joseph to stay together and see God's plan through to fulfillment. They were likely frightened about their future. Both put their reputations at risk. But they trusted the angel's message was true—Mary was carrying the long-awaited Messiah.

A key lesson from Mary and Joseph's story in Luke is that following God's will does not guarantee an easy journey. A very pregnant Mary had to make the seventy-mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and when she went into labor, there was no room for them at the inn. Despite their hardship, their obedience played a key role in fulfilling Old Testament prophecy and God's ultimate plan for the world.

Many Jews at the time expected their Messiah-King to be born in royal surroundings. A dirty manger stood in stark contrast. Yet given Jesus' life and ministry of humility and service, the manger provided a fitting beginning for the Savior who would rescue the world from sin.

Why did God choose to reveal the Messiah's birth to a handful of shepherds watching their flocks? They were terrified—not only by the supernatural appearance of the angel, but because they were the least likely people to receive such glorious news. This kind of

announcement seemed suited for nobility, not shepherds. Yet God's choice was intentional.

The angel's description of Jesus is rich with meaning: He is a Savior, who will atone for the sins of the world. He is the Christ, the Anointed One who delivers His people. And He is Lord, fully divine. But perhaps most striking of all, the angel said this good news was "for all the people" — unto you a Savior is born. In that moment, the shepherds understood: Jesus was born for them. Despite being outsiders in society, they were the first recipients of this astonishing gift of grace.

That same gift is available to us today. No matter what social standing we hold, we are all invited to receive the most amazing gift ever given: Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

ASK

1| When have you put your faith in God and been forced into some discomfort?

2| If you were one of the shepherds how would you respond to the angel's news?

PRAY

Thank God for the gift of Jesus Christ and his forgiveness of your sins. Pray that others will accept this great gift too.

DO

Observe a nativity scene today. Pay close attention to Jesus' humble surroundings.

DAY 23 | TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23

The Preeminence of Christ

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

REFLECTION

At the heart of the Christmas story is the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ—the invisible God Almighty made visible in the form of a little baby born in Bethlehem.

Today's Advent passage consists of six verses attesting to the preeminence, or supremacy, of Christ. Written as part of his letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul establishes that Jesus is fully God; Lord over all creation; the leader of all Christians, living and dead; and the ultimate peacemaker, who is holding all things together and reconciling us to God by the blood of His cross.

Take a moment, and let that sink in. Jesus, who is Lord over all—the King of Kings—willingly stepped down from heaven to be born as God incarnate, a mere baby who would grow up to suffer an early, undeserved, painful death on a cross to save people who continually reject Him.

Too often, we fail to recognize the magnitude of the amazing gift that we have received from God. We take Jesus for granted and treat Him like a vending machine—we make our requests and then forget about Him.

Most religions ask people to sacrifice for their gods and idols, to continually strive to be “good enough” either in this life or the next. But in Christianity, God came near to us. He bridged the gap by sacrificing His Son out of

His great love for us. Through the blood of the cross, Christ has made peace, reconciling us with God. And as the “firstborn from the dead”—that is, the first to conquer death—Jesus is leading believers to also rise from the dead so that we can spend eternity with God.

This is Good News—the resurrected King is resurrecting each of us! Thanks be to God for His indescribable Gift!

ASK

1| How do you sometimes take Jesus for granted?

2| What parts of your life are “dead” and need resurrecting by Jesus, the resurrected King?

PRAY

Confess that you have too often failed to recognize the magnitude of God's gift in sacrificing His Son on your behalf. Ask Jesus to work His resurrecting power in your life.

DO

Listen to “Resurrecting” by Elevation Worship. Meditate on the lyrics, and rejoice that “the resurrecting King” is resurrecting each of us this Advent season!

DAY 24 | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

The Word and The Light

JOHN 1:1-5, 9-14

REFLECTION

The first three words in the Bible are the same three words that begin John's Gospel: "In the beginning..." That is intentional. John wants you to have Genesis 1 – and the power of God's Word in creation – in your mind. And what were the first words spoken by God in Genesis? "Let there be light." John also wants light to be on your mind.

Why "Word"? Because Jesus is the Word. Which means that in the beginning Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. All things were made through Him and for Him.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The all-powerful creative agent from the very beginning became a human – like us.

Sometimes the Bible, the Word of God, can be difficult to understand and apply. But if Jesus is the Word, then whenever we are unsure what a passage of Scripture means, we can look to Christ. Scripture finds its ultimate meaning and fulfillment in Him.

John also says that Jesus is the light. Why light? Because the world is a dark place sometimes. It's full of evil, deception, and despair. And if we are honest, that same darkness can be found within us too.

But light is good. Light gives hope. Light reveals what is true. And even the tiniest light pierces the darkness. There is nothing darkness can do

to stop a light from shining – it is powerless. That's what all the Christmas lights shining during the darkest part of the year are meant to remind us: that God became like us in Jesus, and a small light began to shine in the darkness. And one day, that small light will be a great light – and darkness will be completely overcome.

ASK

1| How does John's connection to Genesis 1 deepen your understanding of who Jesus is as both the eternal Word and the true Light?

2| Where do you feel the weight of darkness in your own life – and how does knowing Jesus is the light who cannot be overcome bring comfort or renewed hope today?

PRAY

Pray for God to more fully reveal himself to you through Jesus Christ. Ask him to shine light in some specific dark places within you and in our world.

DO

Go look at some Christmas lights tonight and meditate on Jesus as the light shining in the darkness.

DAY 25 | THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

Simeon and Anna

LUKE 2:25-38

REFLECTION

Joy to the World – the Lord Is Come!

We first have to recall that the Lord had been silent. There had been no revelations from God for over 400 years – from the end of the prophets' writings in the Old Testament until the birth of Jesus. The Lord had promised a Redeemer, but nothing seemed to be happening. We can all understand the struggle of wondering if or when God will make good on His promises – and how hard it can be to find joy in the waiting.

God had told Simeon that he would see the Promised One before he died. As he neared the end of his life, that promise was finally fulfilled when he saw Jesus. Imagine the joy Simeon must have felt! The same was true for Anna. Her life may not have gone as she had once hoped, but she believed and clung to the joy of her salvation. And she was able to see that salvation manifested in the world through Jesus Christ, the Son. They both knew and experienced the Light of the World shining upon them – in His perfect timing.

Our joy is in Christ. Even when life is disappointing or when what we've waited for seems to take too long, we can trust that He will make all things right – because He is writing the story. One of my children often says, when we're reading a story or watching a movie at its climax, "Everything will turn out good, because it always does." What a blessed

generation we are! We know the whole story – the beginning, the fall, the redemption, and the new creation. Our joy began when Emmanuel came the first time, and it will be made complete when He comes again.

Merry Christmas!

ASK

1| Why do you think God revealed these truths (not specifically to Simeon and Anna but in general)?

2| How does this joy we have in Christ change our perspective on this life?

PRAY

Praise god in your prayers for His coming to us and His plan to redeem the world and His people.

DO

Listen to "Joy to the world (Joyful joyful)" by Phil Wickham.



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