



## Christmas 2019

What a gift! Yes, I am talking about Jesus in a manger! Jesus is the name above all names! But, I am also talking about the gift of this Advent Devotional, written by your own brothers and sisters in Christ at Trinity Wellsprings Church.

Advent means “coming”, and the Advent season is a time of preparation for celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. We light candles in Advent as a sign of the coming light of Christ into the world. This year, I believe your journey to the manger will be made richer knowing you are being accompanied by such a “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1) who have penned some remarkable insights on the various names of Jesus as we journey together to the life-changing and history-altering event at Bethlehem.

Let me encourage you in two directions:

1. Before you read the devotional words, be sure you read the daily text of Scripture. That is where life change really occurs. The Word of God always trumps human words.
2. Meditate on the name of Jesus for that particular day. Sit quietly with that name. What does that name mean to you? How is Jesus present to you as recognize his various names? Jesus is like a precious diamond that must be examined from various angles to truly appreciate his beauty, his majesty, and his love.

Bethlehem! A manger! The incarnation! God is good.

I pray that Jesus may be born into your heart anew this Advent season.



**Rev. Dr. Jason Carter**

**Sunday, December 1**

**Alpha and Omega**

**Revelation 1:8; 21:1-7**

*“In the beginning, God...”* Think about it. The Bible is primarily the story of the redemptive plans and purposes of God. Not you. Not your plans. Not your purposes. God occupies the center of the story.

*In the end*, God will be all in all (1 Corinthians. 15:28). God in Christ was the beginning of history. God in Christ is the goal and purpose for everything that was made. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last letter.

So how strange to think that “in the middle”, we think life is all about us: our purposes, our goals, our aspirations, our hopes, our desires, and our ambitions. That’s a crazy amount of dissonance with the truth of God in Christ being the Alpha and the Omega. It means we aren’t really living in light of God’s Majestic Creation nor in the light of his Coming Again. We forget both the beginning and the end of the Larger Story God is telling! Yet these are precisely the truths that help us make sense of life “in the middle”.

As C.S. Lewis once said, “Human history is the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.” The good news is that Jesus as the Alpha and Omega grounds our existence in our own creation (we have a Creator!) and in the God who “makes all things new” (we have a Living Hope!).

Christmas is about God’s (gentle yet challenging) invitation to connect our lives most meaningfully and most joyfully to Christ from creation to the consummation. God is telling a majestic story. True life, true joy, true meaning, and true satisfaction are all found in this Alpha-to-Omega story where Christ occupies the center.

Is Jesus your Alpha and Omega?

-Rev. Dr. Jason Carter

**Monday, December 2**

**First Born over All Creation**

**Colossians 1:15-20**

In his letter to the church in Colossae, Paul harkens all the way back to Creation in the book of Genesis. All things are created “through him and for him” (vs. 16). Paul implicitly tells us that Jesus was there when God created the heavens and the earth, and all things in it (vs. 15-17). Jesus was an active participant in Creation; all of God’s awesomeness and majesty resides with Him (vs. 19). He is supreme (firstborn) over ALL things (even death!) from the original creation to the present time until the close of the age.

Through his blood and sacrifice, salvation is freely given. Since “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” in Jesus (vs. 19), our forgiveness from God and our reconciliation to God is perfectly enacted, granting us peace with the God of the Universe through the cross. Our personal relationship with God is freely granted to all by His sacrifice. What a concept! I am allowed to participate in God’s work of creation and redemption by the firstborn’s sacrifice on the cross, and God’s likeness is revealed to me through Christ’s work, sacrifice, and ever-lasting resurrection!

Whenever a skeptic says, “I don’t believe in God because I can’t see him”, what better response than to reply, “Look around and you’ll see Him, and His Son, the Firstborn over all creation”.

-David and Jenny Norman

Tuesday, December 3

Lamb of God

### John 1:29-37

I want to take you back to the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac. God called Abraham to take Isaac, the child of the promise, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering to the Lord (Genesis 22).

Remember the exchange between Abraham and Isaac as they climbed Mt. Moriah? Isaac, loaded down with wood, turns to his father and asks the critical question: “Father, we have the fire and we have the wood, *but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*” Abraham answers, “*God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering my son.*”

That conversation between Abraham and Isaac is what the Bible is all about—it is the central element of Christianity and central to the story of Christmas. It is the message of how God deals with the stain of sin in our lives.

Down through the years, the children of Israel offered sacrifices to atone for, or cover over, their sins. Each year, sacrifices performed on the Day of Atonement temporarily dealt with the stain of sin. Year after year after year the sacrifices went on.

Years pass. Yet Isaac’s question, “*Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*” and Abraham’s response, “*God Himself will provide the lamb*” are still on people’s minds and hearts.

One day, a baby is born in Bethlehem, and later John the Baptist proclaims, “*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world*” (John 1:29).

Do you hear what John was saying? The One we’ve been waiting for all these years, the final, the complete, the absolute provision that Abraham had foretold—THE Sacrificial Lamb—He’s here! He’s the ONE! This Christmas, worship the Lamb of God, who takes away our sins once and for all time.

-Rev. Tom Mayo

Wednesday, December 4

Good Shepherd

**John 10:11-16**

*"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."*

I grew up on a farm in central Pennsylvania with a herd of 40 or so sheep.

I was fascinated to watch my dad direct our border collie as she herded the sheep. My dad just whistled softly or made a slight hand signal and the dog would move the sheep to the new pasture.

Sheep shearing was a noisy time with the clippers buzzing and the sheep bleating. I was always amazed that the wool came off in one piece. The sheep were surprised to survive the ordeal.

When I visited the shepherd's field in Bethlehem, it was a very different scene.

Each shepherd had only about a dozen sheep. I marveled as the sheep followed closely behind the shepherd as they moved to the next grassy spot. They knew the sound of his voice. He didn't need the help of a dog.

At night, the shepherd gathered them into one of the stone caves scattered over the hills. Each sheep walked between his legs, as he inspected them for cuts, bruises, or other problems. The sheep slept in the safety of the stonewalls as the shepherd slept across the opening. No harm would come to his sheep.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, watches over us even more closely. He knows when we are hurting, physically, spiritually, or emotionally. He stays close to us to protect us. Do you know the sound of our Shepherd's voice?

-Becky Cavallucci

Thursday, December 5

Advocate

## 1 John 2:1

The advocate Jesus Christ is God's grace personified.

His death on the cross was for all our past, present, and future sins. We are human, and, unlike Jesus who never sinned, we stumble and fall at times. Yet, Jesus stands between you and God, like a lawyer does for his client. Jesus stands as the advocate between the law of God and our repentant hearts. He is our representative that prays to the Father on our behalf, as He is face to face with God. Under the law, we deserve death, but because of Jesus, and His death on the cross, we will never be found guilty. We are righteous because He is righteous.

In Scripture, the Holy Spirit is *also* called our Advocate (John 14:26). As sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, Jesus gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit to be our counselor, advocate, and helper within us. The Holy Spirit *also* fills us with his grace when we acknowledge and repent of our sin, which re-establishes our oneness with the Father.

As children of God, as we are given grace upon grace, we ourselves become more like Christ, and are able to extend this grace to those around us. He gives us grace we don't deserve, so that we can give grace to others. We can be a reflection of Christ to the world.

Is there a person in your life to whom you need to extend more grace?

-Erika Masterson

Friday, December 6

Friend of Sinners

### Luke 5:27-32

Our daughter, Harper, loves competitive swimming. She practices diving off the block with her body shaped like a dart. She works hard to practice good form. She swims fast, focusing on one goal, winning the race. In swimming, she is learning the various things that she must do if she wants to win.

While learning to work hard and do what it takes to get better at a sport are all great lessons to learn, they are examples of worldly achievements. As Christians, it can be hard to get this idea out of our heads and hearts. Our salvation in Jesus Christ is not based on what we do, but what Jesus has already done. Jesus uses Levi to teach us this.

In Luke 5:27-32, Jesus saw Levi sitting at a tax collector's booth and told him to follow Him. Levi immediately left everything to follow Jesus. Then, Jesus dined with more tax collectors, surprising the self-righteous Pharisees. The Pharisees didn't think Jesus should be hanging out with such sinners: "*Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*" (vs. 30) To which Jesus replied, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" (vs. 31-32)

This lesson is so full of hope! Jesus does not only call the "worthy" or the "perfect" to do His work. In fact, sometimes Jesus calls the most unlikely of candidates, like Levi, to remind us that He calls His children based on His overflowing grace, not our works. Once called, our job is to follow Him, knowing that He will equip us for the journey.

Remember, the race has already been won by Jesus.

-Heather Warrington

**Saturday, December 7**

**Name Above All Names**

**Philippians 2:1-11**

The Lord Jesus is the Name above all Names, worthy of all praise, reigning in glory, exalted to the highest place, yet God sent his son to meet us where we are. The Father sent Jesus to join us in the trenches as we fight through the busyness of our days. He sent His Son to show us how to love the way He does and to advocate for us in our weakest times.

I recently read an article about a seemingly scandalous moment that occurred when, during a state visit, Michelle Obama hugged the Queen of England. Royal protocol would never allow for such an interaction. The English monarchy has been one of the most powerful families in history, and the queen of England is one of the most exalted rulers in our world. Even today, Queen Elizabeth is considered untouchable, even sacred. However, the Queen's response to this sudden gesture was to reciprocate the embrace, apparently out of fondness and respect for the First Lady.

The same can be said about how we are loved by the Lord. God isn't a distant entity that draws back from our approach. He shares in our joy. He rejoices when we draw near to Him. He carries us through our sorrow. He teaches us how to love those around us because of the love we experience in Him.

We are called to imitate the humility and love found in Jesus, embracing those around us just as Jesus, the Name above all Names, has embraced us.

-Sarah Oberbeck

Sunday, December 8

Great High Priest

### Hebrews 4:14-16

The Levitical priesthood was established by God to represent the people before God. This was a temporary role, foreshadowing the ultimate, permanent priesthood of Jesus who obtained a priesthood far superior to the old order. Jesus' role, unlike that of a Levitical priest, is to intercede and mediate for believers, providing the only route to the presence of God. Because he offers the perfect sacrifice for sin, he provides believers with reconciliation, communion, and relationship with his Father.

Foundational to Jesus' role of high priest is his own suffering, giving him deep sympathy for ours. Picture his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the brutal scourging and mocking of his enemies, and his pain on the cross. He was tempted with sin and treated with contempt and disdain. He owned no earthy dwelling place. His perfect righteousness in the face of sorrow qualifies him to be a bridge between us and God.

A wise son, training to go into his father's business, learns all aspects of the company. He learns to make the products, manage people, and interpret financial charts and graphs. Likewise, Jesus over thirty-three years trained under his father's guardianship as he ministered, healed, fed, counseled, and taught people. Jesus, now at the Father's right hand, administers priestly duties out of constant communication with his Father. Jesus' knowledge of God's ways and of our needs makes him the ideal priest to represent us.

As Christ-followers, God has conferred on us the priesthood of believers. He desires that we serve as his royal priest-representatives to others on earth. We are a chosen people, belonging to God, declaring the praises of him who called us out of darkness into the light. Through the Holy Spirit, we are granted the power, counsel, wisdom, and enablement to serve and be a blessing wherever he sends us. As we are in constant communion with him, we learn to be Christlike ambassadors of our Great High Priest.

-Marge Bloom

Monday, December 9

Wonderful Counselor

### Isaiah 9:6

Today's reading from Isaiah instantly evokes the tune of an elaborate movement from Handel's *Messiah*. If you are a choir geek, you are already humming along. (If not, jump to the 40-minute mark of this YouTube video: <https://youtu.be/71NCzuDNUcg>.)

During a three-week time-frame in 1741, George Frideric Handel composed the epic 2½ hour *Messiah* to accompany a scriptural text compiled by Charles Jennens. Movements from the work have become widely performed Christmas and Easter favorites, especially the *Hallelujah Chorus* (at the 1:51 mark). But what is it about this prophecy from Isaiah 9:6 that continues to inspire us today?

This one verse encompasses all the hope of God's people throughout time:

- A child is born, a son is given, to us;
- One who takes on kingly responsibility to govern and rule, along with the great burden to be punished for all sin;
- The names given to this one speak to the omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence of God, but also illustrate His desire for deep relational connection with His people.

Let's focus now on just one of those names: Wonderful Counselor. In the context of Jesus Christ, what does "wonderful" mean to you? Awe-inspiring, incomprehensible, surprising, unique, unconventional, superior, and perfect are all descriptors that come to mind.

And not only is he "Wonderful", but he is also "Counselor," a person of authority, a wise and intelligent guide, one that listens, knows us, understands us, and never fails to advise us perfectly. He is the only One we can fully trust. This Wonderful Counselor is Jesus, the Messiah. Now cue the *Hallelujah Chorus*!

-Amanda Sands

Tuesday, December 10

Prince of Peace

### Isaiah 9:6

Peace is often defined as tranquility, freedom from disturbance, or an era in which there is no war. If our lives and hearts need anything in our world today, especially during this crazy busy, hustle-bustle time of year, it is peace. Thankfully, the word “peace” occurs frequently in scripture (361 times in the ESV). Our God is a God of peace; our Savior is the Prince of Peace.

In the Old Testament, a peace offering “was a voluntary sacrifice given to God in three specific instances. First, a peace offering could be given as a freewill offering, meaning that the worshiper was giving the peace offering as a way to say thank you for God’s unsought generosity. It was basically just a way to praise God for His goodness. The second way a peace offering could be given was alongside a fulfilled vow...The third purpose of a peace offering was to give thanksgiving for God’s deliverance in an hour of dire need.” ([gotquestions.org/peace-offering.html](http://gotquestions.org/peace-offering.html))

What does it mean, then, to call Jesus the *Prince* of Peace (in Hebrew: Sar-Shālôm)? A prince is born into his future place. He has authority, he governs, and is respected among his people. Yet Jesus as the Prince of Peace left heaven and arrived on earth as a helpless baby in the lowliest of places. This Jesus, humble and unpretentious, is our Prince of Peace.

He came helpless to bring us peace when we are helpless.

He came humble to the lowliest place to reach us when we are at our lowest.

He offers peace to our troubled souls.

Let go of your helplessness, your sadness, and your worry this season and allow Jesus, our Prince of Peace, to rule your heart with His perfect peace.

-Christine Randall

Wednesday, December 11

King

### Zechariah 9:9

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

When you were a child and read about a king in a storybook, what came to mind? Was it a strong man dressed in a beautiful cloak, adorned with a golden crown filled with dazzling jewels? Perhaps you imagined the king mounted on a powerful steed. The king's skill and poise would be unmatched, exhibited in his prowess at commanding his majestic horse. Just imagine the way the proud stallion would strut his legs so as to make all who witnessed the spectacle bow down in awe!

But our King, the King of the Jews, cuts a very different figure. As our King made his entrance into Jerusalem, calling to mind the prophecy of Zechariah, he came humbly, on a donkey. The true Son of God, worthy of the title King of all kings, did not give himself to displays of finery or enjoy an excess of opulence like a typical king. In fact, days after his entrance on a donkey, our King would be the one to lay down his life for his own subjects. He came not to be served, but to serve. He came to bring peace to us, to ensure God's blessing on us, and to deliver us from sin and death. He is a mighty, majestic, and worthy King indeed, but unlike any king that came before him or has been enthroned on the earth since.

May you be reminded today that we live for a mighty King who is worthy of our praise!

-Esther Elmer

Thursday, December 12

Righteous Branch

### Jeremiah 23:5-6

Jeremiah 23:5-6 begins with the rebuke of Israel's godless leaders, followed by the promise of a "righteous descendant" from David's line. This person will rule justly and his name will be the "The Lord is Our Righteousness". Jeremiah often refers to the leaders of God's people as "the shepherds of my sheep". A shepherd provides three things for his sheep: Protection, Guidance, and Nourishment.

In Jeremiah 23:5, a "Righteous Descendant" is promised to Israel which is the long-awaited Messiah (the Christ). One of the names of the Messiah will be "The Lord is Our Righteousness." In the New Testament, the apostle Paul declares that a person becomes righteous through "faith in Christ" (Phil. 3:9). Two very important things happen at salvation:

1. We do not get what we deserve (punishment for our sin)
2. We get what we do not deserve (blessings of knowing Christ/forgiveness of sin)

While ministering in Japan we were surprised to learn that the Japanese word for "righteousness" is actually a compound character much like we have compound words in English. In other words, it is two words put together to form a new word with a different meaning.



The two words composing the Japanese *kanji* for righteousness are "sheep" and "me". The word is written with the character for *sheep* on top and with the character *me* on the bottom. It is interesting that the sheep, the sacrificial animal of the Old Testament, is placed over the character for "me" which procures the meaning of "righteousness".

When was the last time you thanked the Lord in prayer for saving you, making you righteous in His sight, and forgiving your sin?

-Del Palmer

**Friday, December 13**

**The Holy One**

**Mark 1:21-28**

The Psalms talk about how the heavens declare the glory of God. The New Testament tells us of the righteous who quickly recognized and worshiped Jesus, such as the Magi, Simeon, and Anna.

One story that has always struck me is how even evil recognized the holiness of Jesus. One day when Jesus was preaching in the synagogue, a man possessed by an evil spirit stood up and called out to Jesus, saying "I know who you are -- the Holy One of God." This evil spirit identified Jesus for who he truly is, the Holy One of God, the Holy One of Israel. This spirit asked if Jesus had come to destroy them, knowing that the Messiah's coming meant the destruction of evil and the salvation of humankind.

As this Christmas season approaches, let us recognize Christ's holiness and how blameless and pure the Holy One is who sacrificed Himself so that we may have salvation. Let us be transformed by God as we seek holiness in ourselves and our lives.

-Marie Ecker

Saturday, December 14

The Word

John 1:1-4

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.”*

-John 1:1

The ability to speak in comprehensible sentences is one of the most complex feats of human existence and one of the least understood. We have an astonishing facility for language that can't be explained by learning. Even very young children seem to understand the rules of complicated sentence constructions long before they've been exposed to a sufficient number of words. Apparently -- according to some theoretical linguists -- we are born with a “universal grammar,” a predisposition for language, already encoded into our brains. We could say that in the beginning, in *our* beginning, are words.

Suddenly it makes sense that John would describe Jesus as being, in the beginning, the Word. John uses the term “word,” *logos*, not as a metaphor or a rhetorical image, but as a statement of reality. Just as a universal grammar of words exists even before the birth of a child, so the divine Word existed before the birth of the world. *Logos*, of course, means more than the spoken word: *logos* is the logic, the reason, the rationale by which God gives order to the universe, but John seems to intend us to understand that the two meanings are linked. Jesus is, in every sense, the Word.

The coming of Jesus completes the circle: Jesus was the divine Word; the Word became a word-less baby; the baby became a boy whose words rang in the synagogue; the boy became a man who preached the word of God, and the man became the Savior who ascended back to heaven and once again reigns as the Word with God.

This Christmas, may we use our words to worship *the* Word. The beginning and source of all our words.

-Meisje Connor

Sunday, December 15

The Door

### John 10:7-10

How often do we really pay attention to doors? I only notice doors on one or two occasions: when I cannot find a door to a building, or if I find a door locked. When we can't find a door to an office located in a building where we are inevitably running late for an appointment, it brings a certain amount of anxiety. Once the door is found, the anxiety fades.

But the locked door, that's a whole different story. We yank on the door, nearly dislocating part of our arm. We reflexively pull on it again. Then we begin the rapid search for the sign that tells us the times of the business or a note to tell us why they aren't open at a time when they should be. Doors provide entry, but what's on the other side of the door is often an unknown. We often naively stroll right on in. Sometimes going to places we ought not to go. How do we know if we should enter at all?

With God there are no such mysteries. Jesus is the door, Jesus is the gate, Jesus is the shepherd and we are His sheep. By coming to earth as a baby to live in human form and be sacrificed on the cross to reconcile us with God, we are given the greatest gift of all; a door to Kingdom of God, a precious door to Him. His door is always open to us. We are even given a glimpse of what lies on the other side. It would be nice if all doors worked that way.

-Scott Jordan

**Monday, December 16 The Way, the Truth, and the Life**  
**John 14:5-14**

I get the wonderful opportunity to teach a Kindergarten Sunday school class. Have you ever had the opportunity to see a child's eyes light up when they finally understand that Jesus is the way to Heaven? Well, every week I get to tell my students about Jesus, and how he is the only way to Heaven.

In Sunday School, the children learn stories about a myriad of characters from the Bible. They learn about how each of the saints honored God or how other persons dishonored God. But when I tell them about Jesus – that if they trust in Jesus, that they can go to Heaven and be with God – I see their eyes light up with pure joy and childlike happiness.

In John 14:6, Jesus states, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me." The knowledge of God, the truth of God, and the life of God travels the same narrow route – only through Jesus. The only way to God is through Jesus.

The gift of Jesus also opens up for us a realm of unspeakable joy and unimaginable worship because Jesus grants us access to heaven through him, if we truly know and trust Him in faith. Jesus said that we must become like little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 18:3). The eyes of my Sunday school children light up with this truth. Do yours?

-Sierra Connor

**Tuesday, December 17**

**The Light of the World**

**John 8:12**

Have you ever found yourself completely immersed in darkness? Pitch black all around, seeing nothing in front or behind you, not knowing where to walk or move, what to touch or feel. Can you imagine that same complete darkness in your soul, in your life? As a believer in Jesus Christ, we do not have to imagine such a reality! In John 8:12, Jesus declares, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

When Jesus opened His eyes for the first time on earth, He also gave us the ability to see. Jesus lived an exemplary life. Throughout His life, He taught us how to love and serve others, how to live a life pleasing to the one God, our Father and Creator. Through Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection on earth, He defeated the darkness of sin and death forever. We, as disciples of Christ, no longer have to dwell in the darkness and despair of our sin but have the ability to repent and rejoice in God's incredible grace.

When we follow Jesus, the true light of the world, our paths will be made straight and we will not fall into the darkness of sin. He will light our paths to life everlasting. Have you allowed Christ to shine His light into your life?

-Ryan Schumacher

Wednesday, December 18

Son of Man

### Luke 19:1-10

It can be startling to find a co-worker in the same aisle at the grocery; you expect to see them in the copy room but not next to the eggnog. The face might be familiar but we don't recognize them at first in the context.

Jesus provoked far greater astonishment. "Is this not Joseph's son?" the crowds wondered. To add to their perplexity, Jesus referred to himself time and again as the *Son of Man*, even while revealing his divine authority to forgive sins.

*Son of Man* alludes to humankind in the Psalms. Eventually, however, the title would become imbued with prophetic power in Ezekiel's ministry and apocalyptic potential in Daniel's visions. Such use sparked an expectation for divine intervention in history.

Yet imagine what it must have been like to find God in the humble form of a carpenter from Nazareth! What would you make of a man who referred to himself as the *Son of Man* while foretelling the day he would judge all mankind? Still more shocking was his tendency to use the title when predicting his own demise on the cross: "the *Son of Man* must suffer many things..."

Luke describes the quintessential scene for us to witness the surprising arrival of God in the most unexpected places. A weaselly tax collector mounts a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of the miracle-working Rabbi and ends up hosting him for dinner. The Pharisaical outrage over a holy teacher dining with defiled sinners revealed Jesus' purpose all along: "the *Son of Man* has come to save that which is lost!"

What a glorious surprise that God the Son should become the *Son of Man* to save us!

-Michael Elmer

Thursday, December 19

Son of God

**Matthew 3:13-17; Romans 1:1-4**

In Matthew's Gospel, we read that God was well pleased with his Son. He opened up the Heavens and proclaimed, "This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). God was speaking to John the Baptist, and to Jesus his Son, and to the people present, to convince them and remove all doubt that the Beloved is Jesus. Jesus is God's beloved Son.

Luke informs us that Jesus was actually praying when this pronouncement of the Father's love was spoken over and into his life. All the times the Father spoke from heaven, by which the Father bore witness to Christ, were pronounced while Jesus was praying, or quickly after (Luke 9:29, 35; John 12:28).

*"My beloved Son"* - This is the title which God himself gave to Jesus. It denotes the nearness of his relation to God, and the love of God for him (Hebrews 1:2). The title implies that Jesus was equal with God (Hebrews 1:5-8; John 10:29-33; John 19:7). The term "Son" is expressive of love of the nearness of his relation to God, and of his dignity and equality with God.

Scripture not only represents Christ's Resurrection as a divine act but also as the act of Christ's own power (John 10:18; 5:21-22; 2:19-21). In His earthly life, Jesus asserted that His relationship to both physical death and to resurrection was entirely unique. "I have power," said He, "to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again"; and yet, even in this tremendous instance of self-assertion, He remains the obedient Son, for He goes on to say, "This commandment I have received of My Father" (Ellicott's Commentary).

The Father lavished a unique and bold "belovedness" upon the Son. And this love defined Jesus' earthly life as a Son. This Christmas season, can you open your heart up to participate in this great love (2 Peter 1:4)?

-Chris Taylor

Friday, December 20

Resurrection and Life

### John 11:25

Have you ever restored something? Maybe torn clothing or furniture or an old car or even a house? As you see something broken or weathered-looking being restored, you see the time and effort that goes into the restoration project.

I purchased a motorcycle and thought how cool would it be to take something beat-up and bring it back to life. I started the process by taking the bike apart so I could remove the rust, the dirt, and the broken pieces and began cleaning it up. Using abrasive materials, I realized a common theme in restoration. Whether it be sand paper, a wire brush, or chemicals to clean or remove paint, we use these harsh chemicals or objects to get rid of the junk and remove what's not wanted. Jesus says to Martha, "*I am the resurrection and the life*". Jesus is saying that he is in the restoration business.

When something is dead, Jesus steps in and He brings new life; Jesus restores. God shows Ezekiel a similar image with the valley of dry, dead bones. Ezekiel actually sees these bones coming together, ligaments forming, and flesh being put on the bones. God breathes into things that were once dead and worthless and gives them new life.

So do things get rusted, beat up, old, pushed to the side? Yes that happens but it doesn't have to stay that way. All that's needed is someone to come along and look at that item and see its true value. Someone who can look past the dirt and rust and see that it is still useful. If someone puts forth a genuine effort of restoring an object and finish the process, the result is often something more beautiful than the original. Because in the process of restoration, there is beauty.

-Randy Gerry

## Matthew 12:15-21

On that starlit night when the angel announced to the shepherds “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord,” who would have thought that our Heavenly Father would be sending a humble Servant? When we think of the name of Jesus, we think of Savior, King, Counselor, Emmanuel, Lord, and all the names that describe greatness and significance. However, our Lord God sent a servant: “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased” (Matthew 12:18).

Jesus describes himself as a servant during his time on earth.

- “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38).
- “...I am among you as the one who serves” (Luke 22:27).
- Jesus practiced servant-hood by washing the feet of the apostles, an act reserved for the lowest of servants (John 13).
- In Philippians 2, Paul calls on the Christians to follow the example of Jesus’ humility, selflessness, and sacrificial service. Paul’s teaching reminds us to put others above ourselves as Jesus did while here on earth.

Proverbs 3:27 teaches “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.” In this time of Advent, we continue to follow Jesus’s example of humility and service. Let us care for those less fortunate, love those not easy to love, show the joy of our faith, and pray for peace. Magnify Jesus by serving others until we hear those welcoming words, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23).

-Bo and Sheila Blutworth

Sunday, December 22

Judge

### Acts 10:34-43

Depending on where you are in your life and how you handle pain will color your thoughts about this text. Good news or bad?

We like to believe that decisions made in U.S. courts are determined by the wisdom of the Constitution and guided by fair-minded judges and juries of our peers. Unfortunately, this is often wishful thinking. Unsettling research into the psychology of courtroom decisions has shown that our personal backgrounds, unconscious biases about race, gender, and appearance, and even the time of day play an important role in the outcomes of trials. If you have ever been to court, you know you are sworn to tell the truth but if you've already committed a crime (lied, cheated, stolen), what is holding your hand up going to prove? The only person telling the truth would be the one that is already innocent. As a teenager, I was put through a terrible injustice by the Florida court system and I now know nothing has changed in almost 40 years. What joy this text brings to my hurting heart.

God shows no partiality. Everybody, in every nation, everywhere will be judged by God no matter good or bad, rich or poor, old or young. Everyone has the same standing. Jesus is not Lord just of those who believe in him, nor Lord of just of the living, but he is Lord of all, judge of both the living and the dead, Lord not just of the world but of the universe. The Jesus Peter talks about is not just the hope we Christians subscribe to, but the hope of all people. As the one anointed by God and vindicated by resurrection, Jesus, according to Karl Barth, is "the judge judged in our place." Peter's assumptions needed adjusting and we can see that throughout the entirety of this text. We all develop habits on how we think we are to be, act, respond...every now and then we need adjusting to remember it is God who acts, God who surprises. How else do we explain a baby in a manger?! The peace and justice the world desperately seeks is always at best provisional and partial. But God is Lord of ALL! "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." -Rev. Juliann Whipple

Monday, December 23

King of Kings

### Revelation 19:16

What's in a name? The highest office titles of this world differ according to territory and culture. They range from Chairman, Chancellor, Czar, and Emperor, to King, Premiere, President, Prime Minister, or Supreme Leader. The story of nations is often the story of people groups insisting that their leaders are in some way supreme, or unmatched. In our time, national leaders still fight for prestige.

A hundred years before the birth of Christ, Parthian King Mithridates II appropriated the title "King of Kings" to himself. When Roman General Sulla conferred with Mithridates on the Euphrates River, he blundered by not referring to the King as "king of kings". Sulla went on to become a Roman dictator, but the two superpowers remained at odds during most of the New Testament era.

John's vision on Patmos is richly encumbered with Hebraic symbols and cross references which reach across the centuries. Christ's title as King of Kings harkens back to Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar, who in a moment of divine clarity proclaims Daniel's God to be "God of gods and Lord of kings" (Daniel 2:47) and "King of heaven" (Daniel 4:37). Revelation 19:16 reminds us that Christ "wears the title on His robe and on his thigh". His robe is a symbol of His authority, and His thigh a symbol of His power.

Mithridates II and the Parthian nation are gone. Nebuchadnezzar is gone. The Roman Emperors are all gone. Their empires and their kingdoms ultimately faded away. Only one King will remain forever... *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...* (Philippians 2:9-10) Let us worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

-Rev. Steve Schantz

Tuesday, December 24

Emmanuel

**Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-24**

When storms of sorrow toss my soul;  
When waves of care around me roll;  
When comforts sink, when joys shall flee;  
When hopeless griefs shall gape for me,  
One word the tempest's rage shall quell—  
That word, Thy name, Immanuel.

-Charles Spurgeon

We live in the most connected society in history. Yet many of us feel more disconnected and lonelier than ever. The more we use texting and social media as our mode of communication, the less presence and with-ness we experience in our relationships.

Yet we sing a favorite Advent hymn, *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*.

Immanuel **לְאֱוֹנָמֶֿע** is a Hebrew word meaning “God with us”. The very name Emmanuel, God with us, expresses the miracle of the incarnation, that God “*became flesh and made his dwelling among us*” (John 1:14). In the Old Testament, God’s presence with his people Israel was manifest in the tabernacle, cloud, or pillar of fire. Yet, this glory was far surpassed by the personal presence of the Son of God.

This same Jesus, the miracle maker, who walked on water, healed the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, and offered living water revealing Himself as Redeemer, Bread of Life, Prince of Peace, Lamb of God made himself available and present *with* the unseen, unvalued, outcast, desperate, destitute, and sinful.

Hebrews 4:15-16 says, “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*”

Friends, Jesus is with us as we sing *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. He is with us in our greatest joys and also in our deepest struggles. Emmanuel. God with us. We are NEVER alone.

-Lisa Carter

Wednesday, December 25

Savior, Christ the Lord

### Luke 2:1-14

When I think of our Lord and Savior laying in a tiny little box it makes me giggle on the inside. Just think about that for a second. See the picture in your mind. The most important, revered, caring, devoted, humble (all the best adjectives that mean AMAZING) person we will ever have the privilege of knowing was just lying in a little box in a barn. Not wrapped in the finest silk, but most likely the closest rags that were nearby. Not surrounded by doting nurses, instead admired by his mother, father, and a few stable animals. I can hardly imagine what was going through Mary and Joseph's minds. And, do you think those cows and donkeys knew just how lucky they were to be sharing air space with the Messiah? I am guessing not!

On this 25th day of December, I am reminded of many memories. Some fill me with joy as soon as they begin to dance around in my mind. Others flood my heart with a pain that creeps in slowly and overstays its welcome. But, because of that little baby, in that little box, in that little town I am sure of one thing: God loves us all. It's because God gave us this Indescribable Gift that we are able to be saved, worship, trust, and one day be reunited with our loved ones who have gone home before us.

Big things come in small packages. I am sure this phrase was coined 2,019 years ago when the most glorious little baby was laid in a little box in a little stable in that little town of Bethlehem.

Thank you, O God, for the "little" things.

-Amber Saxon



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