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Advent
DEVOTIONAL

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, BOYERTOWN

Welcome to the new liturgical year, and to Advent 2025!



The devotional that follows is a congregational offering.
All of these submissions have been impacted
by our membership. Listen for the voice of God
in the words you read. Hear the influence of our worship,
witness, learning, service, and support ministries
on this invitation to Advent.

Every Advent prepares us not to receive the baby Jesus,
but reminds us to keep watch
for the second coming of our Lord and Savior.
So, light a candle, find a quiet space,
review each day's Scripture passage,
and read and pray along with the devotion.
Prepare your hearts to receive Jesus, once and again.



Advent is not only a season of waiting, but also a season of returning. While we anticipate the coming of Christ – both His birth in Bethlehem and His promised return – the words of James call us to turn our hearts back to God.

James confronts his readers with a hard truth; their inner conflicts, and selfish desires, and disagreements stem from hearts pulled away from God's purpose. James' words in verse 4 are challenging but healing. Advent is a time for honest examination – to ask ourselves, "What competes with my devotion to Christ? What distractions or desires are keeping my heart distant from him?"

James does not leave us in despair. He gives us a promise that God's grace is greater than our wandering. He is not waiting to condemn us, but to welcome us home. The invitation is simple but profound, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

In Advent, we prepare not just our homes and churches for Christmas – we prepare our hearts. This preparation is not about perfection, but humility. James reminds us that the way back to God begins with submission. As we light our homes and candles waiting for Christ, we remember that God's nearness is not a distant hope, but that it is a present promise.

Dear Lord, as I wait for your coming, help me draw near to you. Cleanse my heart from pride, division, and distractions. Give me the grace to humble myself, and to seek Your presence as a priority. Thank you for drawing near to me through Jesus, the One you sent to bring peace to a restless world. Amen.

Camryn Friz

What is faith? The writer of Hebrews reminds us that it is, “Being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”. Living with this kind of confidence and conviction pleases God. Abel, Noah, and Enoch were men of great faith. They trusted, obeyed, and sought God. It pleased God and they were accepted by Him.

Depending on God, pleases God. Depending on God is an act of faith and love. God enjoys being the center of our lives and our heart’s desire. If the privilege of loving and worshipping our God isn’t enough, know that God delights in blessing those who follow Him.

Where do we look for Him? I see Him in all his awesome creation; everything from apples to zebras, including you and me. I hear Him in prayer. Like Abel, we give “first fruits” to God when we turn to Him when making important (and not so important) decisions or responding to difficult situations, rather than relying solely on our own knowledge or emotions. We first offer it up to God. Like Noah, we have faith that God’s hand is at work, even though it may not be what we want or can see. We pray, first in thanksgiving for all our blessings, and then in acceptance of His will. We pray for the wisdom to see and hear God’s will, the willingness to accept it, and the courage to do it. And, like Enoch, we trust God. We have faith that (one way or another) our prayers will be answered. And in this way, faith is its own reward.

Abel, Noah, and Enoch had faith in God even though they couldn’t see it up ahead. They had the confident assurance that what they were hoping for was waiting for them. All three pleased God because of their faith, and they didn’t even know Jesus! If they could have faith in God, despite their extreme circumstances, we certainly can trust God’s promises delivered in His Son, Jesus Christ. Have faith = please God.

Almighty Father, we give thanks for your wondrous creation and the gift of faith. We pray that we may see your will in our lives, trust it, and have the strength to do it. Through your Holy Spirit, may we have faith in your Word. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Lori Shoemaker

That was some mustard seed of faith that Noah had!

No, he didn't tell the mountain or the mulberry tree to move, but he did build an ark as God commanded. His faith, his trust in God, led him to build a huge ark in the middle of dry land with no storm clouds in sight. His faith in things not yet seen allowed him to *immediately* get to the work that God asked him to do. I think of Mary, too, and her faith in things not yet seen and how she *immediately* began praising and exalting God when she learned that she, a young, unmarried Nazarene, would bear the Christ child.

A big difference is that Noah was given pretty explicit directions, while Mary was given the company of the also-pregnant Elizabeth. A bigger difference is that the ark was used to save a few to reestablish humanity while the Christ child came to save and reconcile all in a new covenant that washed away all prior covenants.

The similarity? Faith – trust in God – allowing God's children to work miracles. As children of God, we are called to have the mustard seed faith that can do the unimaginable. What is unimaginable in our world? Does unity seem unimaginable? Does reconciliation seem unimaginable? We may not be called like Noah and Mary to play a role in God's global transformation, but we are called to transform the world in which we live – with family, neighbors, colleagues, strangers. We have faith – trust in God – that Jesus offered the ultimate covenant of grace and reconciliation that frees us to fulfill the commandment to Love God and Love All People. This enables us to indeed move the immovable, build the unbuildable, and bear the seemingly unbearable. Thank you, Jesus!

Dear God, our Creator, we give thanks for ancestors in the faith who demonstrated the power of trusting in you and centering you in their lives. May our faith be like theirs, may our trust be as bold, and may our witness result in the reconciliation of your people to you. In the coming Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Jennifer Schlegel

Imagine the biggest event that will ever happen. This is HUGE and something you absolutely do not want to miss. There will be no public service announcement or written invitations giving the “Where” and “When” details.

This event is the second coming of Christ. I don’t know the time nor the place; no one knows except God.

Live your life getting prepared and staying prepared. How? Live your life with faith and trust like Noah did knowing you are going to be part of this event God has told us is coming. Accept God’s love and let others know about your loving and saving God. Don’t let them or yourself be left behind because either of you are caught unaware.

If you’ve ever flown in a plane, you’ve probably heard flight personnel tell you that in the event of an emergency put your oxygen mask on first before assisting others. Similarly, I’m asking you to put your faith on first and testify to others. Both things will save you but one saves you forever.

Dear God, you sent Jesus for us once and you promised he would come again. Please help us live prepared and eagerly awaiting that day to come. Help us to have confidence to share the news about you with others so that they too can be ready when time comes. Amen.

Michele Eidle

Romans 10: v13 “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

In his letter to the Romans, Paul continues to share his message of the gospel which is God’s salvation for all people who believe. This passage assures us that faith comes from what is heard and comes through the word of Christ which is proclaimed by those disciples who come after him.

In our small group class on Luther’s Trump Cards we were reminded God always goes first, always initiates and comes to us. We are justified by our faith and not by our works. Jesus’ death and resurrection shows us his love and grace that frees us from our sins if we believe. This message was a turning point for Martin Luther and for each of us who believe. It provides a chance for each of us as his disciples to join in the work going forward not to earn God’s love - that is already offered - but giving meaning and purpose to proclaiming the good news of Christ in word and deed.

Gracious Lord, we ask that you guide us to remember to trust in the love you provide us and continue to make our faith in you a strong presence each and every day of our lives. Amen.

Bev Blake

Why is it hard sometimes to completely trust God even though God has entrusted us with all of his creation?

God loves all of his creation (including mice, snakes, dandelions, and sinners) and through his creation provides for us. He tells us every living creature is given into our hands and he has entrusted us with everything (Genesis 9:2-3).

I grew up spending a lot of time outdoors and was taught to be respectful, not just to my elders but also to the environment. It was my responsibility to respect and take care of the things around me. This is before I ever knew the full meaning of stewardship. We should be honored to have God have such faith in us.

As a descendent of Adam and Noah we have been commissioned to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 9:1 & 7). We are to fill the Earth with the image of God (Genesis 9:6). I believe this is better understood as the characteristics of God: kindness, patience, forgiveness, and love. People are to be valued rather than used. By doing this we bring glory to God in the stewardship of creation.

So, when situations seem confusing, perplexing, or perhaps hopeless, continue to trust the One who loves us and has entrusted much to us. Trust like our forefathers did, so much so, that initially on coinage then on every dollar bill is printed, "In God We Trust," our nation's motto.

Heavenly Father, help us to be mindful of all that you have entrusted to us. You make it clear that not only is humanity important to you but so is all life on earth. Lay it on our heart to be better stewards of all that we have, including our use of water, detergents, pesticides, and energy, and for us to respect and value one another. Raise up generations in your image and place our trust completely in you. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Scott Scheiry

Some refer to this time as the final stage of the Tribulation or the Second coming of Christ. Today, this message is for all of us. But back then, I believe it was especially for the Jews and believers.

It's to remind us that we will need to be on the lookout for fake Messiah's and lying preachers. They will be everywhere! They'll have credentials and they'll do dazzling performances, but don't let them pull the wool over your eyes. This is Satan, trying to woo us away from God and the truth of His Word. We've been given fair warning. The Word tells us not to run after them, wherever they are, because they're lying.

When the Son of man arrives, we won't be able to miss it! And we won't have to go to Him because He'll be coming to us like swift lightning before us.

Don't join the crowds, chasing after what's not real. Following these hard times: "The sun will fade, The moon will cloud over, The stars will fall from the sky, and the cosmic powers will tremble". When the Son of man comes, He'll FILL the sky and we won't be able to miss him!

There will be those who are unready (non-believers) all over the world. There will be crying out as we watch him come, blazing out of heaven. He'll send His angels with a trumpet blast, collecting His chosen from all sides of the Earth.

Just as the buds form and green begins to emerge on the fig tree, so it will be with the believers. They'll know he's at the door. Don't take this lightly. Prepare NOW! This life as we know it continues until these things take place. This is true. Are you prepared and ready?

No one knows the exact day or hour, not even heaven's angels, or the Son, himself. Only the Father knows! Don't wait, don't put it off, don't hesitate, get prepared! He is coming back! Are you ready and watching?

Dear Lord, we come before you, claiming the promise that heaven and earth will pass away, but your Words will never pass away. We trust in your unchanging and eternal truth, and pray that your Words will guide us through every season of our lives until we come in to our eternal home with You. Amen.

Ros Moatz

The book of Isaiah in the Old Testament focuses on the prophet's visions concerning Judah and Jerusalem. This passage follows his warnings of judgement against them, where he foretells weeping and mourning. However, luckily, the prophesy then shifts to "A Promise of Restoration."

In reading this passage, I was most struck by the vivid sensory imagery of nature evoked by Isaiah. He describes the Lord providing shade, a "canopy of cloud" during the day and "smoke and flaming fire at night." In addition, the passage begins with a reference to the glorious "branch of the Lord" and the future fruitfulness of the land. This struck me as a hopeful message that we can find shelter and peace in our relationship with the Lord. I personally feel most relaxed and at peace on a crisp evening gathered around a crackling campfire, with the smell of smoke and softened voices of friends and family sharing stories and memories.

I think for many people, it is easiest to connect to God and access this peace and comfort in the context of nature. When sun rays peak through the clouds in streaks of yellow, it is reminiscent of many depictions of heaven. When people young and old gather by an evening fire, it often leads to deeper connection and conversation. When we built a fire at the most recent youth retreat and gathered with our youngest members to discuss anxiety and loss, they were at their most focused, calm and engaged. There was a reverence present when gathered in fellowship around the fire that felt different than the rest of the trip. Most of us would benefit in our relationship with God if we took more time to disconnect from the glow of our omnipresent screens and instead connect with the warm and inviting light of nature, where we can find relief from overstimulation, and rest and reset in the presence of the branch of the Lord.

Dear Lord, we often allow the busyness and noise of day-to-day life to crowd out Your voice, with near constant notifications, emails, texts, traffic, activities, and tasks. You offer shelter from the harsh elements of this humanly world, and have provided a bounty of natural beauty in which to slow down and rest with You. Please help us to commune with the natural world that You have created and spend time reconnecting with You. We ask this in Your name, Amen.

Chelsea Hersperger

Psalm 72 is a prayer to a gracious and generous God who loves to give good things to His children. This is a request for the king to embody the characteristics of holiness -- justice, righteousness, sound judgment, prosperity, compassion for the needy, might in the face of opposition and oppression, endurance. And under such a king, these characteristics are not only for the royal one, but extend to all his subjects. Psalm 72 concludes with praise to God who alone can grant such gifts.

How amazing is it that God not only sent the King of Kings, the One who is all of this and more, to show us how to live and love, but One with whom we can have a relationship?! A relationship that is characterized by love and grace and mercy bestowed on us abundantly! Our King is not One who reigns only from on high, but humbled Himself and took on human form to come live among us.

Gracious and loving God, we your children come to you in 2025 asking for the same things your children requested thousands of years before us and throughout the ages. Grant our leaders wisdom, justice, righteousness. Grant your people the fruit of compassionate leaders, and may we all be a reflection of your holiness and lovingkindness, in this Advent season and throughout the year.

We thank you that this Psalm written before Jesus took His first human steps on this earth points us to the One King who fulfills the Scripture. We thank you that we live, not as those who wonder if you will grant our request, but as those who know you have already done so, in the gift of your Son.

In the name of your only son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, Let it be so.

Amanda Ehst

Preparing the Way

When we think about Advent, we often picture lights, candles, and quiet waiting. John the Baptist gives us a different image, someone out in the wilderness, calling out for people to get ready because something big is coming.

When the priests and Levites asked John who he was, he was quick to answer “I’m not the messiah.” Instead, he told them that he was “the voice of one calling in the wilderness, make straight the way for the lord.”

John clearly knew his role. He was not the light, he was there to help people see it. In our lives, the world around us tells us to make ourselves stand out. John reminds us that sometimes our greatest purpose is to point others toward Jesus.

Advent is all about clearing space, quieting our hearts, and getting ready for Jesus to come close again. It’s so easy to get caught up in the rush of the season, but John invites us to stop for a moment and remember, the savior is already near. We’re not just waiting for Christmas morning, we’re preparing for Jesus to meet us here and now.

Today, let’s take John’s words to heart. Let’s slow down a little, listen a little more, and make room for the one who brings light into our darkness.

Heavenly Father, as we move through this Advent season, help us to prepare the way for you in our hearts and in our lives. Teach us to be humble like John, to point others toward your light, and to remember that you are already here with us.

In the middle of all the hustle and noise, help us to pause and notice your presence. Fill us with peace, hope, and joy as we wait for you. Amen.

Jason Friz

The Bible tells the mission of John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus by calling people to repent. The people were baptized by John in the Jordan River. John's message was a warning that the judgment of God was near and true repentance indicated a change in beliefs and actions. He also predicted the one to come after him that would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. The promise of baptism with the Holy Spirit reveals a new time of God's presence and power for believers.

Thoughts of present day baptisms bring forth the promises made by parents at the time of a child being baptized and the magnitude of the importance of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. The twelve verses of Matthew 3 helps us to focus on preparing our hearts for the presence of God and thinking about searching into our lives.

Heavenly Father, make Advent a blessing to us. Fill us with gladness as Jesus is welcomed. Help us to repent as we prepare for the coming of Jesus. Let the Advent season of preparation lead us into deeper worship and stronger faith. Amen.

Betty Long

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he is "checking in" on their faith after he is forced to flee the city. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they are called to live a life that is pleasing to God. He encourages them to live a quiet and peaceful life, engage in honest work, and honor God through their actions and feelings towards others.

Paul's words are a reminder to us, as well, to strive to live a holy life. God calls us to live a life that is a reflection of Him, so much so that He gave us his Son, Jesus Christ, to serve as an example for us. But let's be honest - we all fall short in this area. How are we to live a life that is pleasing to God when we live in the world of the flesh? This is where the challenge often lies.

One phrase stuck out to me as I read this passage: "more and more". It is actually used twice in this reading. The first time is in verse 1: "Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more." The second time is in verse 10: "Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more". Why would Paul use this phrase repeatedly?

I believe Paul is encouraging us to keep stretching in our faith. The world of the flesh will continue to try to distract us from living a holy life. It is very easy to be misdirected by worldly things that take our eyes off God and living to His glory. But Paul is encouraging us to reach for God "more and more", to ask for His help and guidance on living a life that reflects God's love.

In doing so, we can be a witness for others, sharing the message of God's enduring love and forgiveness. May we all remember this during the busy season of Advent. Amidst all the "hustle and bustle", there is one true God who has given us the ultimate gift of his son, Jesus Christ, who died for the forgiveness of our sins and gives us everlasting life through Him.

Dear Heavenly Father, we ask for your help and guidance in living a life that is pleasing to you. We often fall short, but please know that we are listening to you. Help us to be a witness to your love and forgiveness, and in doing so, may we draw others near to you. Amen.

Angie Berkosky

In Isaiah 41, God tells Israel that when God turns the wilderness into an oasis, *all* will consider and understand God's power and holiness. All will experience the miracle of salvation. The question remains: ***do we see and understand?***

Jehovah, The Holy One of Israel, speaks to his people who are captive in Babylon, assuring them that he intends to bless them. *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"*. Though Israel is surrounded by enemies who are angry and aggressive, Jehovah will strengthen and protect them. *"I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD; your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel"*. ***God wants these reminders of his presence and care to eliminate their fear.***

God then zooms out of the present situation to tell his people that *this is what he always does*. *"When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water"*. ***God responds to needs.*** The figure here is thirst; when people seek water, God himself answers and blesses them. He does not provide a trickle, but a fountain; ***he oversupplies our needs.*** He responds this way *"that they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it"*. God's provision leads all people to consider *just how this came to pass*—and they end up praising him.

Do you know that marginalization, abject poverty, and deep socioeconomic despair are circumstances in which we see and understand the gospel? Americans have a curious relationship with need. ***We know that we have needs, but we hate the experience of being in need and like to pretend that we are self-sufficient.*** This passage challenges us because it shows God's preference for acting and showing his glory through our needs. It is only when we are reaching out in desperation that God promises his response of grace and abundance. Instead of seeking to feel comfortable and at ease, ***we must learn to embrace need as a vehicle for God's grace.***

This Advent, challenge your conventional expectations. Watch, see, consider, and understand that the power of the gospel and the miracle of salvation are found where we least expect it.

Almighty God, we praise you and ask you to help us understand your words and recognize that your presence eliminates our fears. You know our needs and teach us to trust in you so that your grace is sufficient. Help us to be better learners and discern your plans for us so that we may join more fruitfully in the work of your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Brian Moatz

In this passage, God promises Abraham that he will have a biological son as his heir and through this son, Abraham will have more descendants than the stars in the sky. And verse 6 states, "Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness." Because Abram believed what God told him, Abram was righteous.

After this event, the Bible recounts several incidents in which Abraham sinned. He was not perfect. He lied several times, and in another circumstance, Abram tried to bring about God's promise in his own human way, (having a baby with Hagar, his slave) which caused unending problems in the world, that still affect us today.

But Abraham was righteous because he believed what God said and he obeyed. And so it is with us today. When we believe what God says and we act on it, we are considered righteous in God's eyes. God speaks to us through His Scripture.

When God says to us, "Listen to MY SON", (Luke 9:35, Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7), if we do so and obey, we are counted as righteous.

Have you ever read through one of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, and jotted down everything that Jesus said we are to do? During this holiday season, this might be a great gift to Christ and to yourself. Who doesn't want to be considered righteous?

My Father, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in YOUR WORD". Amen.

Martha Bentley

Dangerous curve ahead. Caution, bridge freezes before roadway. Swim at your own risk. How often have you ignored warning signs?

While cruising along the turnpike, it's easy to exceed the posted speed limit. Thoughts of arriving at your destination fill your head with excitement, as you hurriedly drive for miles and miles. Scanning the surroundings and using your GPS to alert you of a police vehicle, you continue to ignore the speed signs, thinking only of your own desire to reach your destination as quickly as you can. Then like the scoffers in this passage who didn't think God would return because nothing had changed, suddenly, out of nowhere, flashing lights appear behind you.

In this passage, Peter reminds us that God will bring judgment upon this world in his perfect timing. The scoffers deliberately ignore past divine judgement, the flood, and believe God's return is absent rather than delayed for the sake of his people. But the delay is due to God's patience and his desire for all to come to repentance. Those who scoff at the idea of Jesus' return are committed to "following their own sinful desires" (verse 3) without any worry about future consequences.

Peter tells us that the Day of the Lord, the "day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly", will "come like a thief". People won't know when it's coming – just like the police officer suddenly appearing behind you. But He will come for them to face God and be judged by him. God's commitment to punish those who do evil is an expression of his goodness, much like a courtroom judge who punishes criminals.

As with a rebellious child, the parent still loves the child. This is how God feels toward those who are living in rebellion against him. He doesn't want any of them to perish, but longs to see all of them come to repentance.

Heavenly Father, help us grow stronger each day in our love for you. May we always turn to you and put you first, and not succumb to sinful ways. Thank you, Lord for your patience with us. In your son's name we pray. Amen.

Mel Roth

The book of Ruth tells the story of heartbreak for Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi. The pair found comfort in each other and God, especially as they faced loss and change in their lives. Through Naomi's connection, the widow Ruth found a new husband in Boaz and the two had a son. Their child, Obed, became the ancestor of David and later, Jesus!

What luck! But is it really luck when you have faith in the power of God?? As Paul states in Romans 8:28, "we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good." Through relationships and trust, Ruth found Boaz, which was just one of many steps in the preparation for the coming of the promised Messiah.

Heavenly Father, through difficult times, help us to trust in You. As we prepare for the arrival of Jesus, strengthen our relationships and guide us to contribute to the good that happens through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jen Friz

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible titles this section of Luke as “the Proclamation of John the Baptist” and what an important proclamation it was! These verses begin with an important call back to words of Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and the flesh shall see the salvation of God’ (Verses 4-6).

You would think this seems like a good message right? If you think like me you may need to stop, grab a hymnal and sing Hymn 255: There’s a Voice in the Wilderness, because that’s surely stuck in your head right now (that’s definitely what I just did), but John has a much different response to his crowd that comes to be baptized by him, one that isn’t so joyful. He calls them all a brood of vipers and to bear fruits worthy of repentance; to not just rest upon their ancestors. This is a somewhat angry response to the crowd, in my opinion. The people who are there seem to take that to heart or at least think about it enough to want to know how they could change. The crowd then asks John, “What then shall we do?” He goes on to give a few examples of how to share with their neighbors in need. John tells them to share what they have, both food and clothing, with those who are in need.

The passage also points out that tax collectors and soldiers came to be baptized as well. He gave those groups advice on how to be honest and truthful since they have a reputation for not being so. Starting at verse 15 we see why the NRSV titles this section of verses, “the Proclamation of John the Baptist.” People were wondering if John was the Messiah and he tells them all, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” And with this John proclaims the good news to the people. The good news that Jesus is coming again! Joy to the World!

Let us pray. Lord let us prepare a highway for you as we eagerly anticipate your arrival this advent season. Help us to care for those in need as John told those seeking baptism to do all those years ago. Lord come again, we await your arrival. Amen.

Amy Moyer

This passage opens with John the Baptist imprisoned by Herod Antipas. John had publicly criticized Herod Antipas's sinful marriage with his own sister-in-law.

While in prison John the Baptist heard about all the things Jesus was doing but developed doubt as to whether Jesus was the expected Messiah.

John dispatched his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the expected Messiah.

Jesus's response was, "tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind sees, the lame walk, the lepers cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and Good News is preached to the poor." These works were foretold by Isaiah in the Old Testament. It also indicates the Messiah's ministry would focus on mercy rather than judgement.

Jesus then turned to the crowd asking, "What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see?" John was not one who followed neither the social norms of his day nor did he choose an easy lifestyle. He lived a life of self-denial in the wilderness which made him stand out against the status-quo society of his time.

John was a prophet, as well as the person who was chosen to identify the Messiah. He was the messenger who Malachi had spoken about in the Old Testament.

John did fulfill his duty as a prophet and a messenger. He could not complete the spiritual experience that future generations would have. John's death prevented him knowing and seeing Christ finishing His work on the cross.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending John the Baptist to prepare for the Messiah's coming. It also reminds us that we must prepare for His arrival. We must prepare our hearts and minds for this event. Amen.

Jerry Krause

Advent is a season of waiting and preparation—looking back to Jesus' first coming at Christmas and forward to His return. In this passage, the apostles continue Jesus' mission by bringing healing, hope, and light to those in need. That mirrors what Advent calls us to do: to prepare our hearts for Christ's presence and to share His love with others.

Just as the apostles' works showed that God was near and active among His people, Advent reminds us that God still comes close to us today—through faith, through community, and through acts of compassion. The story also points to the power of hope: people believed healing was possible simply by being near God's messengers. During Advent, we're invited to have that same kind of hope and expectation, trusting that Christ's light can reach even the darkest places.

This passage shows us what happens when God's presence breaks into the world—bringing healing, faith, and new life.

Loving God, thank You for the light and healing You bring into our lives through Jesus. As we wait and prepare during this Advent season, fill our hearts with faith and hope like those who sought Your healing long ago. Help us to share Your love with others and to be signs of Your presence in the world. Come, Lord Jesus, and make us instruments of Your peace and compassion. Amen.

Shannon Omlor

In Jude verse 17-25 Jude warns people that there will be “scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires” and that they are the people who will try to divide people based on their beliefs, but they do not have the Spirit of Jesus Christ inside them when they make these decisions. I think this is very evident in the world today. There are many people who are trying to divide people by using the word of God in the wrong way, not realizing that Jesus would not want us divided, but to live together in peace and harmony. If you build yourself up with Jesus’ love, he will be there to grant you eternal life.

Dear God, please allow everyone to follow your word and your Son to the fullest truth and to not just follow the Bible but to follow Jesus Christ and what he would want. Amen.

Myles Omlor

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.” This verse is from a familiar psalm and hymn that captures the hearts of so many as it reflects our longing for God to deliver us from oppression, hunger, or grief. It is a psalm that many go to when feeling discouraged or anxious, as the psalmist felt ~ quite possibly King David when he was exiled from Jerusalem. Psalm 42 is a lament about feeling distant from God during a time of hardship and mockery, oppressed by the enemy. Like the psalmist, we may ask, “How long, oh Lord, how long? My soul is downcast within me.” But as we continue to read, our good and faithful Lord restores the psalmist’s hope that the living God is not just in Jerusalem but here within his heart and soul. And so, the psalmist declares, “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

Father God, we look forward to the celebration of your birth when you entered our world to teach and preach the Good News of saving grace through Jesus Christ. During these challenging times, we anticipate your Second Coming to bring renewal to everything. Come, Lord Jesus, Come! In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Jean Machamer

Did you ever have a good idea? The kind of idea that you thought everyone would support? You even began to make plans for it. And, then, a person you trust said it's a good idea, but another person should do it. Did you try to persuade your friend; or did you rail against them? Or because you trust this person, you decided to take their advice?

Well, obviously King David had time on his hands. Israel was at peace. David looked around and decided that since he had a palace to live in, David would build the Lord a house of cedar. God would no longer have to reside in a tent. Nathan, Samuel's successor, thought it was a good idea – at first.

That night, God spoke to Nathan, telling him to tell David not to build this house, that one of his descendants will build it. Good idea, different person. The Lord will guide this descendant as he has guided David and Israel will prosper. David's lineage will continue forever. Nathan delivered this message to David.

Did David scream and shout that **he** wanted to build this house – a toddler's temper tantrum? No, he went and sat before the Lord in his tabernacle, spoke his thoughts and praised and thanked God. How often when we have had our plans thwarted do we take time to share our thoughts with God? How often do we thank and praise him for keeping us from our great plans?

Dear Lord, how often have I hurt you by forcing some "good idea" instead of waiting for your instructions? Forgive my impulsiveness and following David's example, lead me into your mercy and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Cathy Krause

Who Will You Call?

Our psalmist Asaph is in a dark place—consuming the bread of tears and drinking tears by the bowlful, according to verse 5. Are there tears in your advent season? As I write this, a dear friend is saying goodbye to her dying daughter—this week many of my tears have been for and with these friends. Broken bodies, broken relationships, missing loved ones, uncertain times personally and communally—all of these may bring tears, like Asaph’s, by the bowlful.

Asaph’s tears are directly linked to Israel’s exile. After generations of disobedience to God’s covenant, Israel is in the middle of God’s judgment, far from home, among strangers. Taking a step back, our tears are linked to the same source as Asaph’s—because of the brokenness of this world, we live as foreigners and strangers, longing for our heavenly home. Jesus confirmed that in this world we will have trouble. Jesus himself wept.

So, who shall we call in tearful times? Who did Asaph call?

- Asaph called the Shepherd of Israel (verse 1), begging God to lead his people out of this dark place. Asaph recognized his role as sheep, fully dependent on the superior knowledge and tender compassion of another.
- Asaph called, “You who sit enthroned between the cherubim (verse 1).” If God is on the throne, who is Asaph (and who are we)? Supplicants, humbly hoping the one in power will hear our need and choose to allocate resources to meet that need.
- Asaph called the LORD God Almighty—also translated the LORD God of Hosts (verse 4 and verse 19). This name for God combines the name God shared with Moses at the burning bush—YHWH, I AM—with a powerful claim of God’s power and sovereignty over all of Heaven’s forces.

What is Asaph’s request? Save us, restore us, make your face shine on us. In times of sorrow, it may feel as if God cannot see us—and we struggle to see God. Repeatedly, Asaph begs God to shine his face on his people. Asaph longs for God’s wise, powerful attention. In our tears, may we, too, be shepherded by the One who is enthroned and able.

Father who made us and sees our hearts, we call to you out of the emotions of today. Shepherd us, please. With Asaph we pray, “Restore us, LORD God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved.”

Bethany Calderwood

The Advent season is a time of waiting and preparation—a time to listen to the messages that matter most. Yet in this passage from John, we find that when the divine word reaches human ears, it often meets hesitation, distortion, and doubt:

"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony." (John 3:31–32, NIV)

The one who speaks from heaven—the very Son of God—declares what is true. The grief lies in how poorly we listen. *"They did not listen to him"*—a refrain heard throughout the Gospels.

John the Baptist's final words about Jesus set the stage. Jesus is the perfect witness, the one who brings God's reign to earth. His message is not an opinion or suggestion; it is a testimony of eternal life. But the world, shaped by its own expectations and desires, failed to recognize what God was truly doing. They did not listen.

This should challenge us during Advent: Do we recognize the voice of Jesus in this season? Or are we so caught up in the noise and hurry that we miss the One who is already here?

Jesus' coming ushered in a new way of life—one centered not on a complex set of rules, but on something simple and demanding: **love**.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (John 13:34, NIV)

And this love is not selective. The world often responds to differences with fear, hatred, and violence. But Christ calls us to a better way—to see difference not as a threat, but as a call to deeper love. In a season marked by division, may we listen well, love boldly, and reflect the heart of the One who came to dwell among us.

Let us pray, Lord, open our ears this Advent so that we may truly listen to the witness of your Son above the noise and demands of the season. Give us the faith and courage to love all with the self-giving spirit of the new covenant command. Help us to pause and find sacred rest in this present moment before we celebrate your coming. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tom Engle

This passage describes how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother Mary was a virgin and became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit while engaged to be married to Joseph. Joseph was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace Mary publicly and decided to break the engagement quietly.

Before he could do so, an angel of the Lord came to him in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, stating that, "The virgin will conceive a child, she will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means God is with us."

Joseph did exactly what the angel of the Lord told him to do. Can you imagine having a dream with an angel and trusting God so completely, without another thought, you obey and do exactly what you were told to do in a dream? That is FAITH and OBEDIENCE beyond words. I think Joseph is often overlooked in the birth of Christ. The focus is usually on the Virgin Mary. But Joseph set his embarrassment aside and trusted the Lord and the angel who was a messenger for the Lord. He named the baby Jesus. Joseph shows his commitment to his wife, his son and his God by doing this.

Dear Gracious and Loving God, words cannot express how grateful we are to know how much you love us – you prove your Love over and over again. Reading this passage reminds me how much. You created your Son to be born on this earth with a plan for him to become our Savior, our Immanuel, comforting us to know you are with us. Help us to trust you as Joseph did and know you always want what's best for us. We pray all this in your son's precious name, Jesus. Amen.

Bonnie Moatz

This passage starts out with the beauty of Mary's pronouncement that her soul magnifies the Lord, and her spirit rejoices in God. It continues with an acknowledgment of how God has looked on her with favor, echoing Gabriel's words to her. But then notice the turn it takes. God doesn't just look with favor on *her*, but rather on her *lowliness*. God, according to Mary, notices her – her station and her struggle –and, more even than that, takes her side. All generations will call her blessed because God, the Mighty One of Israel, has done great things for her and, we will soon discover, for all who are like Mary – poor, lowly, of little account in the world, and who trust God for their redemption.

And what is it that God is doing for Mary and all the lowly of the world? Scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful, lifting up the lowly, giving those who are hungry plenty to eat and sending the rich away with nothing.

Mary's song reverberates with notes of justice and reversal and judgment. The prophets have sung the same: that God cares for all people but has a special interest in the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable. The Lord, Hannah sings, "raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor" (1 Sam. 2:8).

What are we to do with these songs, these words of hope and threat, promise and judgement? The temptation is to reconcile them with an acknowledgment that we also are poor, at least in spirit. That we have need, particularly for mercy and forgiveness. That we are lowly, especially when compared with God. And all of that is true. Yet just for now, let's imagine what it would be like for those with so very little – power, wealth, privilege, hope – to hear Mary the mother of our Lord sing this rebel song of justice and hope and to know that they, too, are blessed, favored, and folded into God's promise to change the world.

Dear God, let us never forget that you love all your children but care particularly for those who are poor. Open our eyes to see the vulnerable around us and the hearts to stand with them in faith, hope, action, and trust. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Pastor Bob Machamer

Foolish! Paul has just called these Galatians foolish! There were a group of Galatians who were saying that in order for Gentiles to become followers of Christ, they had to first follow Jewish law. Paul let them have it. Neither the Galatians, nor we, are justified through works of the law. Justification through works means we are doomed to fail. We simply cannot not sin. We are foolish to believe otherwise.

We are instead justified by faith in Christ Jesus. We are reconciled with God through our faith. Paul reminds the Galatians (and us) that we are children of Abraham, who, because of his faith, God blessed and made the parent (with Sarah) of many nations. Abraham was righteous and blessed; he lived by faith. We who live by faith are blessed, too. Each of us is blessed. Each of us has our own unique faith story. How does yours read? What is the next chapter of your faith story? What is the next verse? As this advent season comes to a close, consider gifting your faith story to someone. And write the next verse while you're at it.

Almighty and merciful God, we thank you for the many blessings you have gifted us. Help us to avoid foolish pursuits and false teachings. Guide us instead to grow our faith in the way, the truth, and the life that is Christ Jesus. May our lives of faith be blessings to many and may all the glory be yours alone as we await the second coming of our Lord in whose name we pray. Amen.

Jennifer Schlegel



Sunday Worship at 9:30 am

Holden Evening Prayer Service

Wednesday, December 3, 10, 17

7:00 pm

Soup Supper at 6:00 pm

Blue Christmas

Thursday, December 18

7:00 pm

Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 24

3:00 pm & 8:00 pm

Christmas Day

Thursday, December 25

10:30 am

Community Meal 11:30 am – 1:00 pm

Lessons & Carols

Sunday, December 28

9:30 am



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