



Advent Devotional Series

INTRODUCTION

Many people invest substantial time and resources in tracing their family history, eagerly piecing together the puzzle of their genealogy. There are entire companies like Ancestry.com, 23andMe, and MyHeritage, dedicated to helping individuals uncover the names and stories of their distant relatives. Do you have royalty in your bloodline? Were your ancestors on wanted posters in the wild west? Did your family come from a country on the other side of the world? There is an aura of intrigue around your genealogy. However, what this usually becomes is just a list of unfamiliar names that are difficult to pronounce.

There is some truth to this in Jesus' genealogy as well. There are certainly a lot of unfamiliar names that are difficult to pronounce. However, there is more to this list of names than meets the eye. Jesus' genealogy is featured twice in the New Testament, in Matthew 1 and Luke 3, indicating its intended significance to the Gospel writers. They wanted you to understand the stories that led to the birth of God's Son. Jesus' genealogy is not just a list of names you can't pronounce, Jesus' genealogy reveals God's faithfulness as He works through the complexities, challenges, and moments of beauty in human life across generations.

Through the real-life stories of people who experienced both pain and celebration, you'll discover that you are part of a lineage redeemed by Jesus Christ. You have been grafted into an enduring family tree that will never wither or fade. You are a vital part of the church and God's family.

Join this exciting journey during Advent as we explore the stories of Jesus' ancestors and all the dysfunction that Jesus' family experienced. Read through these devotions and find hope that Jesus can redeem your past and your dysfunction and use it to bring glory to His saving work. Let's journey together towards Christmas and the birth of the Christ child. God's blessings on your time spent in God's Word and during the Advent season.

Pastor Adam

PS – A big thank you to all of the St. Peter's people who wrote these devotions. Your words will resonate throughout God's church this Advent season and beyond.



December 1



Adam and Eve: First Image Bearers

Author: Trevor Ernst

“So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.” Genesis 3:23

I’m guessing you’ve heard of some type of invasive species before. There are countless varieties of plants and animals that were not originally from our local area that have wreaked havoc on our ecosystems. For example, the emerald ash borer, a green beetle from northeastern Asia, feeds on ash trees across America. So far, these bugs have killed tens of millions of ash trees, and the number continues to rise daily. Several weeds are also invasive. Many of us (unfortunately including me) have spent hours depleting our energy levels in an attempt to get rid of these notorious abominations of a plant. But regardless of whatever desperate measures we take, they never seem to go away!

But more important than my now apparent annoyance with weeds are the repercussions that come with our verse for today. Sin, much like an invasive species, was not part of the perfect world God created. Sin changed the world for the worse. Adam and Eve, the very ones created in the sacred image of God, were now separated from Him because of their sin. Similar to how an invasive species can spread like crazy, sin easily spreads from one person to the next. What started as a temptation from the crafty serpent led to Eve’s sin, which then led to Adam’s sin. Adam and Eve received a curse for their sin, part of which included making the ground produce thorns and thistles. Sin not only is like a weed, but it is the direct reason we have weeds!

Even though Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, they were not banished from the love of God. It is because of our sin that we are in need of forgiveness, in need of redemption, in need of a Savior. And it is out of God’s love, mercy, and grace that we can receive forgiveness through our Savior. We know that we will face trials and tribulations while we are still on this sinful Earth. It is inevitable. But thanks to Christ, who humbly came down from heaven to a lowly manger, we can have hope. Through Christ, the image of God was fully restored in human form, without sin. And unlike most invasive species without an attainable cure, our separation from God because of sin has a definite fix. His name is Jesus.

Dear God, thank you for creating us in Your image. Thank you for caring so deeply for us, even when we continue to sin. Help us to flee from our sin and turn to You in our times of trouble. Thank you for giving us Your Son as the ultimate sacrifice so that we can be united with You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



December 2



The First Kids: A Child in Adam's Image

Author: John McGinty

Adam knew his wife intimately, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain.

"I have had a male child with the Lord's help." Then she also gave birth to his brother Abel.

Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Genesis 4:1-2, 8

The first children of Adam and Eve were born as children of God, created in God's own image...but also created in the image of their parents, Adam and Eve, with the imprinted original sin. Adam and Eve's children also carried the burden of the actions of their parents.

It did not take long for the wages of sin and death to be demonstrated. In the very first two children born, the original sin of Adam and Eve resulted in the sin of Cain murdering his brother, Abel.

It took just 8 verses for Abel to be born and to die, which highlights the awful outcome of original sin. The need for a Savior, Jesus, started at the very beginning in Genesis with the sin of Adam and Eve against God by eating the forbidden fruit; and then the very next generation's first-born son, Cain, murders his brother, Abel.

A Third Kid – Seth

Adam knew his wife intimately again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth for she said: "God has given me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." Genesis 4:25

Adam was 130 years old when he fathered a child in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. Genesis 5:3

Scripture says Seth was made in the image of his father Adam. This is not a cute comment talking about Seth's physical features and that Seth looked like Adam. No, this is a devastating comment because this image that was passed down was the image of original sin. Original sin was passed on from the first generation of Adam and Eve to the second generation of Cain, Abel, and now onto Seth. Original sin continues to be passed down today.

The first generation was in need of a Savior, Jesus. The second generation was in need of a Savior, Jesus. The original sin will be with us in every generation and will continue to point us to our need for our Savior, Jesus. Come Lord Jesus.

Heavenly Father, we know that we are infected with the same original sin that Adam and Eve brought into the world. Forgive us and redeem us through Your Son who we wait for this Advent season. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



December 3



Abraham: The Father of Many

Author: Sylvia Sasse

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Genesis 15:1-5

For the past couple of months, there has been a telescope in my living room. My mom bought it with some work points, and the whole family was so excited to use it for the super moon coming up. We assembled it when the package came, and we let it sit in the living room until the very night we'd been waiting for. Of course, when we took it out to the driveway, it didn't work. Fiddling with the two separate lenses while squinting through them was frustrating, and even when the moon was finally centered in the lens, it sure wasn't in focus. Within thirty minutes my whole family had given up and was back inside getting ready to go to bed.

It's easy to fixate on the things that go wrong in our lives. My family chose to get upset over a cheap telescope rather than take the time to look up at the clear night sky and appreciate how beautiful the moon was. This is the same type of thing that happened to Abraham. Abraham was focused more on the fact that he didn't have an heir while he was literally being visited by the Lord.

When we look up at the night sky, there are so many stars that we don't see, much like the multitude of blessings we tend to look past. We have to remind ourselves that there's more to life than just our point of view. We're part of a bigger picture. Abraham's lineage represented by all the stars in the sky includes anyone that is a part of God's family. Each believer fulfills God's promise to Abraham.

The stars serve not only as a metaphor for the family we will have in heaven, but as a comforting reminder of the support we have in our faith now. Count the hairs on your head. Count each needle on a pine tree. Tell me the number of cells that make up your body. The same God that has made this world so beautifully complex wants us to be a part of His family. He wants to be closer to us and to know us personally. The next time you look up at the stars, remember that you are part of something bigger than your frustrations, worries, and fixations. You have a seat at family dinner in heaven.

Heavenly Father, You are the keeper of all promises. When I am frustrated, worried, or even questioning Your plan, guide me into Your heart where I find the peace that passes understanding. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



Isaac: A Substitute

Author: Ryan Lienhoop

“Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you...” So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.” Genesis 22:2, 14

Have you ever built a Lego set? How about a puzzle? As a kid I loved Legos and puzzles. Whenever my birthday came around every year, Legos were the number one thing on my list. My favorite part was following the instructions and seeing the final result (Of course I enjoyed playing with them as well!). However, whenever building Legos, the most essential thing is the instructions. I still remember one time, after Christmas, I had been given this totally awesome Lego Ninjago set. When I was putting it together, disaster struck. I was missing a piece! I urgently started searching everywhere because I knew the set couldn't be perfect unless I found that missing piece. Up until that point, I had followed the directions thoroughly. Feeling hopeless, I gave up knowing my masterpiece was never going to be completed. Before I stood up, a gray sliver caught the corner of my eye. Lying right under the front of my instructions was the missing piece. It was only then I finished my Lego set. Not having the piece was unexpected, but as I was about to give up on my prized possession, I found the piece.

In Genesis, I am positive Isaac never lost a Lego piece. However, he would in fact unknowingly be the sacrifice to God. Earlier in the passage, God had spoken to Abraham and tested him. The test was to see how deep Abraham's trust in God was. So Abraham and Isaac set off to the point where God told them they needed to be. Abraham gathered the necessary wood for the procedure and laid them upon his son. Just like my experience, Isaac quickly noticed an important piece was missing in the equation. He spoke up to his father, and Abraham replied that God would provide. As bizarre as it was, Isaac and Abraham continued their trek until they laid eyes upon their destination. Abraham built the offering and bound his son to it. Abraham took a knife, ready to slay his son. Just then, God stopped Abraham and gave them the missing piece, a ram. We see this same plot elsewhere in the Bible like when God is telling Jesus what He must do. Jesus did just as His Father asked and carried His own deathbed for us. Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice, saving us from sin, death, and the devil.

No matter what instructions you might have in life, you will always hit roadblocks. Even in the Bible, it tells us this. So, whenever you might be missing a piece of your life, just remember that Jesus is that missing piece, and He sacrificed Himself to save us. How amazing is that! God will always provide for you, even when you might least expect it. You won't ever need to worry about losing a Lego or puzzle piece again.

Dear God, thank you for all that You have done for us. Thank you for sending the ultimate sacrifice, Your Son, to save us. Thank you for all of the missing pieces that You give us throughout life. Please remind us to never give up, even when life seems hard or confusing. In Your holy and precious name, we pray. Amen.



December 5



Jacob: God Still Used Him

Author: Drew Cordrey

“But Esau ran to meet [Jacob] and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.”
Genesis 32:4

Sibling rivalry can run deep. Did you know that Cleopatra, who is largely remembered for her brains and her beauty, allegedly had a hand in each of her siblings' deaths because they were a threat to the throne? Did you know that brands Adidas and Puma were born out of a feud between two brothers, Adolf and Rudolf Dassler. Perhaps the newest sibling rivalry comes out of England's monarch with Prince William and Prince Harry feuding after Harry's exit from the royal family. From Cain and Abel to the modern day, sibling rivalry can run deep.

The story of Jacob and Esau is a great reminder of how destructive sibling rivalry can be. Jacob's deceit and cunning manipulation of their father's blessing caused a deep rift between the brothers. It serves as a huge warning about the consequences of jealousy and dishonesty within a family as these emotions can bring bitterness and resentment, leading to dysfunctional families and broken ones.

Sibling rivalry can separate brothers and sisters, driving wedges that seem insane. It brings an environment where love and unity are overshadowed by jealousy and competition. In the case of Jacob and Esau, their rivalry left wounds that festered for years and drove them apart.

However, the story of Jacob and Esau also offers a message of hope and redemption. Despite the deception and enmity, the brothers eventually reconciled. Esau forgives Jacob, a testament to the transformative power of forgiveness. Jacob's act of deceit may have been the beginning of their separation, but his willingness to face his past and seek reconciliation was the start of their reunion.

This reconciliation between Jacob and Esau shows us that, in the eyes of God, forgiveness is always possible. Jesus' lineage was filled with sinners, just like you and me. (Just look at Jacob). But Jesus' lineage is also filled with forgiven sinners. Again, just like you and me. We find comfort in the fact that through Christ's sacrifice we can be reconciled to our Heavenly Father. The lessons from Jacob and Esau teach us that even in the most broken of family relationships, forgiveness can lead to healing, redemption, and reconciliation, ultimately reflecting the grace and love of God in our own lives.

Dear God, You chose to have Your Son come from people like Jacob. You have also chosen a person like me to be Your child. Thank you for your forgiveness. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



December 6



Judah: The Lion

Author: Paul Leopold

"You are a lion's cub, Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his."
Genesis 49:9-10

Many of you have probably watched the Wizard of Oz. I remember watching it for the first time when I was just a little kid. I'll be honest, the Wicked Witch of the West and those flying monkeys really frightened me. I'd like to think I am made of pretty stout stuff now, but the thought of them still gives me the willies. While the Tin Man was probably my favorite character in the movie (he could blow steam out of his head), the Cowardly Lion also captivated my attention. You might recall, he was on the journey to seek courage from the Wizard. Unlike most lions, he was scared of just about everything, even sheep!

In today's reading, we learn about the blessing that Jacob gave to his son, Judah. You see, Jacob was getting very old, and he knew that his remaining time was short. Before he passed, it was important for him to impart blessings upon his sons. His blessings are also prophetic in nature. Jacob compares Judah to a lion, someone who will be revered for his strength and feared by his enemies. This is a pretty powerful blessing. Jacob goes on to prophesy that the "scepter will not depart from Judah."

In the time of the Judges of Israel, Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel. Unfortunately, Saul was not obedient to God, and Samuel chose David from the tribe of Judah to replace him. This choice seems unlikely because David was much younger and smaller than Saul. God wasn't concerned about that though – he was looking at David's heart. When the giant Goliath taunted Israel's army, only David had the courage to stand against him. He told Goliath "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty." David's courage was rooted in his trust in God. Jacob's prophecy that the scepter would not depart Judah and that "the obedience of the nations shall be his" was fulfilled in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, a descendant of David. He shall reign forever and ever.

Going back to the Wizard of Oz, the Cowardly Lion found his courage from within. If we try to follow that recipe for success, we are sure to falter. Sometimes life can seem overwhelming, but if we rely on ourselves for strength, we won't finish our journey well. In our moments of struggle, we must put our trust in the "Lion of Judah." It is He that gives us the courage to face an uncertain world. Jesus is not a false ruler like the Wizard of Oz. He is our King of Kings, our Lord of Lords, the Light of the World, and God with us, Immanuel.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You so very much for sending me Your son Jesus so that I may someday have eternal life in heaven with You. This Advent season, help me to remember that in dark and trying times, I should look to the Lion of Judah, Jesus, for comfort and strength. If others around me are hurting, please give me the heart to help them and the wisdom to know what to do. It is in Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



December 7



Tamar: Dysfunction in a Family

Author: Nicole Cronauer

“Judah recognized them and said, “She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not sleep with her again.” Genesis 38:26

Family dysfunction is a thing I’m sure to which we can all relate. Whether it’s yearly drama on who is hosting which holiday or siblings who can’t stand to be in the same room together, we all experience this on some level. Jesus’ ancestors are not immune to this either. Genesis chapter 38 looks at a cultural custom called levirate marriage. If a woman’s husband died and she had no male heirs, her brother-in-law was supposed to help her produce an heir to inherit her deceased husband’s estate.

We see this play out in the life of Tamar. Judah had three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er was the oldest of Judah’s three sons and Judah picked Tamar to be his wife. Er was wicked and killed by God before he had a male heir. His brother, Onan, was supposed to produce a male offspring for Er with Tamar. Onan was selfish and decided to take the pleasure of the act of producing offspring, but would not complete the act with Tamar. He knew that a male produced would not be considered his offspring, but would belong to his brother, Er. Onan was greedy and wanted his brother’s larger inheritance to be split between himself and his younger brother Shelah. This angered God, and Onan was killed as well.

Judah, fearing the death of his last son, sent Tamar to live with her family and promised that he would give Shelah to her once he was older. Many years passed but Shelah had not been given to Tamar to produce an heir. Tamar gets word that Judah would be in the area, dressed in a veil to disguise her appearance, and sat at the entrance to the city. Judah did not recognize her and thought she was a prostitute. He offered her a young goat for her services and gave her his signet (a seal with his personal sign), his chord, and his staff as his promise of later payment. After the act, his friend couldn’t find Tamar to give her the goat. Judah didn’t want to be embarrassed by his actions and did not pursue the matter further.

Judah found out later that Tamar was pregnant. He demanded she be punished for her immorality. Once she showed him his signet, chord, and staff as evidence that she is pregnant by him, he confessed his guilt in the verse above. Tamar later gives birth to twins, Perez and Zerah, which parallels the birth of Esau and Jacob. The descendants of Perez include two of the more well-known people in Scripture, King David and Jesus. God is able to use the messiness of Tamar’s story as well as so many others, to still produce something amazing in the gift of his Son. We see this later in Jesus’ lineage with Rahab and with David as well. God is able to utilize the messes in our own families as well to show his power and grace.

Dear God, thank you for using the mess in Tamar’s life to bring forth your Son. Help us to see how you can use the mess in our own families to be a witness to others and bring us closer to you. Amen.



December 8



Nahshon: The First Offering

Author: Jon Spagnuolo

“For the Lord had said to Moses, ‘Each day one leader is to bring his offering for the dedication of the altar.’ The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nahshon son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah.”
Numbers 7:11-12

This time of year, as Christians around the world celebrate the birth of our Lord, we often conjure up images of mangers and magi. The gospel of John, however, describes the incarnation very differently. John simply says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). But what does it mean that Jesus is the Word made flesh? Our Messiah is the physical embodiment of the story of God’s people and promises, and therefore to truly know Him, we must seek Him in the Holy Scriptures.

In Exodus we are first introduced to a man named Nahshon, Jesus’ earthly ancestor, who was, at the time of the Exodus, the leader of the tribe of Judah as well as the brother-in-law of Aaron. So he was a man in the line of David who had a tie to the priesthood... interesting! In our verse for today we find that, despite Judah being the fourth son of Jacob, his tribe, and specifically Nahshon, is given the great honor of being the first to bring an offering to God’s newly completed Tabernacle. In the end, our Lord and Savior too brought a sacrificial offering before the altar of God, not just for His tribe, but for all people!

Ancient Jewish tradition tells a story about Nahshon and why they believe he was so honored. When God’s people came to the shores of the Red Sea, they despaired “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?” (Exodus 14:11). But it is taught that while Moses was occupied by holding his staff aloft, Nahshon, prince of Judah, was the first into the water leading the Israelites to safety. In this tradition, however, the waters did not immediately begin to part! Was Nahshon discouraged? By no means! God had promised the deliverance of His people! So Nahshon, full of faith, continued walking until the waters of the sea were up to his very nostrils and only THEN did the sea part. It was the great faith of Nahshon, they believe, that ultimately caused the waters to give way.

This specific story is not included in the Scriptures, but we can see the truth behind its message clearly in the Gospels. Jesus’ own miracles were often prompted by the faith of those whom He encountered. “Your faith has saved you” (Luke 7:50) has always been just as true for God’s people in the past as it is today. In the end, the only sacrifice which God has ever desired is the one of our hearts.

Dear God, in this season, we thank and praise you for the sacrifice that your Son, Jesus, made by stepping down into this world to lead us to salvation. Help us to have faith like His ancestor, Nahshon, to walk the paths you have laid before us and be secure in the promise of your certain deliverance, even when we cannot always see where it leads. Amen.



December 9



Rahab: A Scarlet Thread

Author: Hannah Mielke

“Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father’s household.” Joshua 2:18

Red has never been one of my favorite colors as I’ve always been one who has enjoyed more neutral colors. Now don’t get me wrong, I’ve gone through my fair share of interesting colors choices. For instance, when I was in elementary school, I adored the color neon green. My bedroom was neon green, and my winter coat was also neon green. People needed to put their sunglasses on when they would see me because my clothes were so bright!

However, even though I was never overly interested in the color red, the story of Rahab and its connection to the cross have me seeing things in a new way.

Rahab hid spies in her home that Joshua had sent into Jericho, and she lied to the king of Jericho when he asked her where the spies were. This put her life and her family’s lives at risk, with no incentive for her. She had done it because she heard of how faithful the Lord had been to the Israelites.

Before the spies left, they made a promise to Rahab that if she hung a red scarlet thread outside her house, then her family would be protected when the spies came back to take over the city. She didn’t know if she would be saved, but she had been given a promise. There were two things that protected her: the red scarlet thread and the faithfulness of the Father. The birth of Jesus is a promise for us, that He is the one who would save us and give us eternal life. Therefore, we are also protected by two things: the red blood He poured out on the cross and the faithfulness of the Father.

Let the color red serve as a reminder of the promise that comes with the birth of Jesus. Let us rejoice in His birth because of the salvation that it brings us.

Heavenly Father, let our hearts look to You and hold tight to the promise that red brings us. Let us be reminded of Your Son’s humble birth and ultimate sacrifice. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.



December 10



Ruth, Boaz: The Guardian Redeemer

Author: Jacob Phillips

“The women said to Naomi: ‘Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.’” Ruth 4:14-15

I am one of those irritating people who have yet to experience a great, personal tragedy. I've had family, friends, and acquaintances go through the ringer, so I've experienced some amount of tangential grief, yes, but nothing yet firsthand... at least not yet. I know it's probably bound to happen at some point though, so how can I prepare? What can I do now? I am an engineer and therefore possess a keen love of problem-solving, but too often I find myself looking for answers in the world, not the Word. That needs to change, so, to the Old Testament I go.

As recorded in the book of Ruth, a woman named Naomi lived in the land of Judah with her husband and two sons. Famine struck the land, so they relocated from Bethlehem to Moab to survive. Then, tragedy struck, and Naomi's husband died. Some ten years later, tragedy struck again, and both her sons died, leaving Naomi a widower to care for her sons' wives, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi was understandably angry with God, even saying in Ruth 1:20-21: “...the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

These kinds of tragedies are not unique to Old Testament times. They are not even unique to New Testament times. We all know that things like this happen every day in our sinful, broken world – sometimes, unfortunately, directly to us or close to us. As painful as it is, it's unavoidable. We can probably even relate to Naomi in her raw, emotional outpouring – even asking God, “Why? Why did You let this happen?” But by the grace of God acting through a man named Boaz, Naomi and Ruth were saved from a life of toil, misery, and ridicule. Boaz purchased Naomi's estate and became the guardian-redeemer before marrying Ruth and fathering a child – a child from whose lineage would come King David and, eventually, Jesus.

We too have a guardian-redeemer ready to intervene and wrap His loving arms around us. Jesus knows that pain will wrack our lives, but He's with us every step of the way. Just as Boaz bought Naomi's estate and saved her family, Jesus bought us through His sacrifice on the cross. Boaz paid with gold, but Jesus paid with blood – a priceless, perfect cost. I've certainly observed that it can sometimes be hard to see God in times of pain, but I know I can trust, believe, and pray. He's there and always will be. He saves us when we are lost. That's how I can prepare for the inevitable, by trusting in the Lord to always see me through. Through Jesus, problems are solved.

Dear Lord, thank you for being our guardian-redeemer. Please help us to look to You, especially in dark times. Please help us to trust in Your divine plans for the good of Your people and Your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



December 11



David: An Eternal King

Author: Jake Cronauer

“Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” 2 Samuel 7:16

Have you ever had someone make a big, exciting promise to you? Maybe it was the promise of going to a friend’s house as a kid, the promise of a promotion at work, or the promise of a family member to take care of you through a serious ailment. When people made these promises, they typically made them with every intent of keeping them. However, that didn’t always happen. Sometimes our friend wasn’t available and we couldn’t hang out. Sometimes the economy takes a turn and the company can’t guarantee that promotion. Sometimes the family member who promises to care for you through an ailment has a challenge of their own and is unable to give the care they promised. When promises aren’t kept, we are left feeling hurt or even betrayed.

In 2 Samuel 7, God sends the prophet Nathan to make a huge promise to Israel’s King David. In God’s message to David, He promises that He would bring the promised Messiah through the descendants of King David. God chooses David to lead Israel and to be a forefather of His Son, Jesus. This was quite a big promise to make!

Later kings of Israel would slowly ruin the kingdom that David had built. After Solomon, Israel would be divided, and Israel and Judah would be taken into exile. Even after the return of the people from exile, they were not truly free. Foreign powers including Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome ruled over them. This promise of a kingdom that would endure forever started to look like one of those promises not kept.

During Roman rule, Joseph, a descendant of David, would travel to Bethlehem with Mary, his betrothed. While in Bethlehem, she gave birth to this promised Messiah, Jesus. As Jesus grew up and began his ministry, some questioned if He was the promised Messiah. Even John the Baptist asked Jesus, “are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Others only focused on whether or not Jesus would overthrow Rome and restore David’s dynasty. Their vision of a kingdom that would last forever was an earthly one, which was never what God had in mind.

Jesus fulfilled this promise by dying for our sins on the cross and rising again. By doing this, He overthrew the kingdom of sin, death, and Satan and invites us to be part of His eternal kingdom through faith given by the Holy Spirit in our baptism. He promises us that on the Last Day, our bodies will be restored, and we will live forever with Him. This kingdom will never end. This is the most fantastic promise that has ever been kept.

Lord God, thank you for keeping your promise and sending Your Son Jesus to be our king forever. Thank you for giving us the promise of eternal life with You in Your kingdom through the faith You have blessed us with. Help us to remember and trust this promise each and every day. In your name we pray, Amen.



December 12



Urriah's Wife: Bathsheba

Author: Nancy Conner

"One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him and he slept with her." 2 Samuel 11:2-4

This is a familiar passage to all of us and has a scandalous theme. We can tell it is going to get "messy" and indeed it does. Who is at fault? David, the King, (who knows better, but lust takes over) or Bathsheba, (who is naked and bathing on the roof – seductress or prey?). We could list the positives and negatives of both David and Bathsheba in this scenario and have a great discussion, but does it really matter?

Let's think about our own lives and some of the messiness we experience much more frequently than we would like to admit. Do you have any skeletons in your closet that you want to remain there? Have you made some poor decisions that have caused yourself or others pain? Do you open your mouth and make comments that could have been left unsaid? Do you make excuses for behaviors that are "a result of the influence of others?" We all have room for improvement, just as David and Bathsheba did.

David acknowledged his sin and grieved for his actions: "I have sinned against the LORD." –and God forgave him (2 Samuel 12:13). Bathsheba didn't run away from any of this but faced what was before her. She was a strong and courageous lady in a difficult circumstance. Scripture doesn't say a lot about her faith in God, but it appears she had an openness/fairness to God's will. Later Solomon was born to David and Bathsheba. He became King of Israel and God used him in incredible ways. Although a sinful act started this whole "story," God forgave and indeed blessed David and Bathsheba.

What can we learn from David and Bathsheba? Don't run away from the messiness in your life, the skeletons in your closet, your poor decisions, your "unkind" mouth, etc. Instead, talk to God, acknowledge your messiness/sins, ask the Holy Spirit to shape your behaviors and convict you, and then ACT! We have choices when confronted with sin, so honor God by making the right decision. Know that you are a dearly loved child of God and you are forgiven. The amazing fact out of this passage is that God chose to have His perfect Son come out of this messiness of sin. What an amazing God! He can use all of us to serve His will and He will.

Heavenly Father, Thank you for your gift of your only Son. Thank you for your grace and mercy that I experience daily. Holy Spirit, guide me to make Godly choices each day and show my love for others through my words and actions. Guide me to do Your will. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.



December 13



Solomon: Give Me Wisdom

Author: Gretchen Newell

“Give your servant a discerning heart.” 1 Kings 3:9

“God gave Solomon wisdom and very short insight and a breadth of understanding as measureless as sand on the seashore.” 1 Kings 4:29

If you could ask God for anything, would you ask for wisdom? King Solomon did, and God blessed him with it. Solomon was known far and wide for his wisdom. 1 Kings 4 says, “Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.”

Recent events in my life left me in need of wisdom. My youngest son lost his job, and I had a medical condition that could have required risky surgery. Those ordinary cares of life had left me discouraged and disheartened. I didn’t realize it, but I needed some encouragement, so God provided. One day, the mailman brought me a note from a friend – a little note of wisdom and encouragement. It was full of all kinds of kind words. But two sentences really jumped off the page and into my heart: “I have seen miracles in my life. I have even been one.” What wise words from my friend! What a timely reminder from God that He was yet in control.

Like Solomon, I need wisdom to trust God, to see a friend’s note as a word of wisdom from God, to see miracles in daily life, and to even be a miracle in someone else’s life.

God used my friend to teach me, to encourage me, and to remind me of God’s care. And God’s care is found in the true wisdom found in the life of Jesus. I love the everyday mini-miracles of life because of Him!

In Advent, we prepare our hearts for the miracle of Jesus’ birth. In Advent we ask for wisdom to appreciate that miracle and to see the miracles all around us. (By the way, my son did get another job and I didn’t have to have surgery.)

Father, thank You for sending our Christmas gift of Jesus – our true wisdom. Jesus, thank you for being our friend and guide. Holy Spirit, You give wisdom and we need it! We need wisdom in daily life. Help us to trust You, to see You working, to see the miracles, and to be a miracle. God bless us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.



December 14



Abijah: A Passionate Speech

Author: Kelsey Spagnuolo

“God is with us; He is our leader...” 2 Chronicles 13:12a

A little historical background... Abijah ruled in Jerusalem as the king of Judah during a time when the Promised Land was divided between two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. God’s people were in the midst of a civil war. Scripture describes Abijah as wicked because he was not wholly devoted to God. Others have described his life as one of failure despite having moments of significant faith. The scene where Abijah cries out to the LORD with his famous line of “God is with us; He is our leader” occurs as he faces a battle with overwhelming odds. His army is outnumbered 2 to 1, and he is surrounded by his enemy. He is certainly in the middle of a crisis, and God saves him and gives him victory.

How often have we been called failures? How often have we cried out to God in the midst of a crisis knowing that the odds are against us and there is nothing we can do but trust in the God who saves? God often uses those moments to draw us close to Himself. The silver lining of our dark moments is that they present an opportunity to lean into who God truly is and discover that we are not alone, regardless of our circumstances. When we fail, God is still right there whispering, “Turn around. I Am right here. I Am with you. Come back to Me.” We cannot outrun God.

When we experience victory, it may be easier to understand that it is God who gave it to us. Those moments of victory could be the feeling of being on fire for God, of feeling close to Him, of being ready to give anything, of being able to praise Him for all the days of our lives and into eternity. It is a glorious experience to be on top of the mountain with God.

The challenge may very well be in the mundane, in letting God lead us as we get up each day and head to work or take care of our household. As we wash the dishes, say hi to the neighbors, pick flowers, feed the dog, do the laundry, let our toddler dress himself and then help him turn his socks around, do we realize that God is with us in all of those moments too? It can be easy to forget that He specifically came to earth to share those seemingly insignificant moments with us and lead us through them.

Abijah’s words “God is with us; He is our leader” remind us of a core truth – Our God indeed is with us, always. He is with us when we experience moments of immense darkness. He is with us when we are on top of the mountain. He is with us in the mundane moments of everyday life. Seek Him in every moment.

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who sees us and is with us always. Thank you for loving us and sending Jesus, our Immanuel, to experience all of life with us. Please help us to seek You and see You in every moment. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



December 15



Jehoshaphat/Jehoram: Father and Son

Author: Nick Eddy

“When Jehoram established himself firmly over his father’s kingdom, he put all his brothers to the sword... He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Nevertheless, because of the covenant the LORD had made with David, the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David. He had promised to maintain a lamp for him and his descendants forever.” 2 Chronicles 21:4-7

Have you done anything recently in your own life that would be disappointing in the eyes of the Lord? I know for me it is a daily battle to put God before my own earthly goals, wants, and ambitions. When I lose that battle, it often comes with the unwanted consequences that sin brings. Shame and fear can begin to take hold in our minds as we realize the error of our ways. We hope that we have not disappointed God too terribly.

When Jehoram inherited the throne from his father, Jehoshaphat, he killed all six of his brothers, likely to destroy any threat to his own reign as king. Jehoram had put his own earthly desires and ambitions ahead of God’s. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Still, God promised to preserve David’s lineage.

God knew that eventually from David’s line there would be a ruler who would put aside all of His own earthly ambitions and put those of His people first. He knew eventually Jesus would come to pay the ultimate price for all of our own sins by dying on the cross. God knew the world could be an evil place and that we would disappoint Him, but he still sent his Son to take on all of our shame and fear. What an incredible burden God has lifted from us!

As we struggle daily with our own earthly battles against sin, we can rest in the peace Jesus has given us by forgiving all of our sins. He took on all of our shame and fear, and promises to guide us through our daily battles with sin, death, and the devil. God has already given us a peace that even the attainment of our own earthly goals and ambitions cannot provide.

Dear God, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins. Be with us this season and help us to focus on You and Your will, rather than our own. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.



December 16



Ahaz: The Virgin Promise

Author: Adam Spagnuolo

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14

If you are like me, during the Christmas season, it's easy to get caught up in the festivities and forget about the true meaning behind this special time of year. In the midst of our traditions and celebrations, let us take a moment to reflect on the story of Ahaz and how it connects to Jesus's birth.

In 2 Chronicles 28:21-25, we read about Ahaz, King of Judah. He faced endless challenges and made many unwise decisions. Ahaz's reign was marked by turmoil and disobedience to God. He sought ungodly guidance and engaged in idol worship, leading his people away from God. But even in the darkest moments of Ahaz's reign, God did not abandon His people. In Isaiah 7:10-14, we find a remarkable prophecy.

The Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah, telling Ahaz that a virgin would give birth to a son, and He would be called Immanuel, which means "God with us." This prophecy pointed to the hope that would come through the birth of Jesus Christ. In Ahaz's time, there was fear, uncertainty, and a lack of faith. But God's promise of Immanuel served as a reminder that God had a plan to redeem His people. The birth of Jesus fulfilled this prophecy as He came into the world as Immanuel, God in human form, to save us from our sins.

As we celebrate Christmas, let us remember the story of Ahaz and the prophecy of Immanuel. It reminds us that even in our darkest moments, God is with us, offering hope and redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ. Just as God remained faithful to His people in Ahaz's time, He continues to be faithful to us today. May this Christmas be a time of renewed faith and hope in Immanuel, and may we share this message of hope with those around us.

God, please give us signs this Christmas season that remind us of the gift of your Son and the hope we have in Immanuel! Amen.



December 17



Hezekiah: Miraculous Healing

Author: Connor Forbes

“Go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord. 2 Kings 20:5

I can still remember the first time Adalena, my daughter, got sick. She was 6 months old when we were visiting my wife Emmi’s family in New York City for Thanksgiving. As the weekend came and our departure back to our vicarage church in Georgia neared, I developed a fever and Adalena developed a stuffy nose. Our first night of her having a stuffy nose was fine, but the second was horrible! She was so congested it seemed like she could barely breathe. Nursing was a challenge as she constantly stopped and gasped for air. I remember being up with her in the middle of the night, holding her in the bathroom with the shower on as hot as it could go, turning it into a faux sauna to try and ease her congestion.

I remember sitting in that bathroom/sauna feeling so tired and so bad for my sweet baby daughter that I just started crying. Through my tears, I cried out to God. I prayed that He would take this sickness away from Adalena. I remembered stories like ours today: the story of Hezekiah weeping before God and God miraculously healing him. I sang songs about how God is able and He can, but even if He doesn’t heal her, our hope is in Him alone. I prayed and hoped for a miracle. Perhaps you’ve found yourself in my shoes before: faced with some sickness or some medical diagnosis that you weren’t quite expecting. Perhaps your sickness even takes its form in stress or some other mental affliction. Maybe you’re feeling the weight of balancing your budget. Perhaps your family is “sick” with conflict, or your family experienced the loss of a loved one, and now Christmas is going to be celebrated a bit differently this year. Maybe you all, like me, boldly prayed and hoped for a miracle like Hezekiah’s miraculous healing.

The sweet comfort that we have this Christmas season is that God has heard our cries. He sees how broken and sick we are. Jesus Christ came because we’re sick with our own sin, and our sin causes all the brokenness we see before us. Yet Jesus gives us healing on the cross. Jesus puts all our sin, sickness, and brokenness in the empty tomb that He left behind in victory on Easter Sunday. Now, we as Christians have a hope unlike any other. We hope for the day where Christ welcomes us into paradise. He will wipe away every tear, He will fix all our brokenness, cure every sickness, and we will all be perfectly healed. I pray you never lose sight of that hope. While Adalena wasn’t healed immediately, she did get better and started sleeping and breathing normally again. Whatever you’re encountering this day, week, month, or even year, Jesus sees your sickness and hears your crying. I’m not sure what God’s plan is, but you will be healed. Keep hoping for that healing.

Gracious Father, we give You thanks for the gift of Your Son Jesus Christ, and that by His death and resurrection, He saved us from our sin. We ask by His victory, that You would heal us of all our brokenness. Help us to trust in Your timing, for You are working all things for good. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.



December 18



Manasseh: Repentant and Forgiveness

Author: Emily Spagnuolo

"In his distress [Manasseh] sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God." 2 Chronicles 33:12-13

There are two types of people in this world. There are people who respond to their notifications right away and filter through their emails daily, deleting promotional ads and unnecessary mailings. Then there are the others, like me. I'm that girl. If you took a screenshot of my phone today, you would see the little red notification of 197 unread text messages and embarrassingly, that is no exaggeration. To my defense, some of the messages can be read without officially being opened due to the short nature of the message, and some are included in long threads of group messages, so I am not totally ignoring everyone in my life! But there are a good number of messages that have needed a response that when originally received, I told myself "I'll respond to that later." Nonetheless, two weeks came and went without "later" ever happening. Eventually there comes a point in time, when the shame is too great to ever respond, and I have surpassed the point of no return for any chance to regain my usefulness and reclaim my dignity with who once tried reaching me.

As sinners, we let down those around us and fall short of our own expectations on a daily basis. We damage relationships with hurtful words or actions that seem beyond repair at times. The hurt is too great, the shame is too painful to face. Much like the story of Manasseh, our sin creates messiness in our lives and the lives of those around us. But in his darkest moment, Manasseh, who was characterized by evil and rebellion against God, repented of his wickedness. Wickedness that created more pain than any ignored text or email. Wickedness that included idolatry and the sacrificing of his own son. Manasseh's life reminds us of the depth of God's grace and forgiveness, even when we feel beyond deserving. God heard Manasseh's prayer and restored him to the kingdom, and He continues to offer the same redemption to us today. He hears our cries for mercy. The hope that comes in the form of a baby in a manger led to God's ultimate gift of grace by His sacrifice on the cross, offered to all who seek it. May we remember during this season of Advent, that we are never too late and never too far to receive His gift of forgiveness.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for continuously granting us your mercy and forgiveness. Help us to remember your grace can transform even the most wayward hearts and may we extend the same grace and forgiveness to each other as we await the birth of Christ Jesus. In your name we pray, Amen.



December 19



Josiah: The Last Good King

Author: Ashlynn Waddle

“Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfill the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the LORD. Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.” 2 Kings 23:24-25

I am someone that gets distracted very easily. Whether it's in a conversation, while doing work, or even just completing a simple task, my brain wanders off or I see something that pulls my attention. Maybe you can relate! I know that when I have a big assignment due, I have to put my phone on “do not disturb” and go into a quiet space to finish it. And even then, I find myself reaching for my phone to check for new notifications, switching tabs to look up the crazy thoughts I just had, or even zoning out due to boredom. While yes, I could blame this on having a short attention span (which might be part of my problem) I also know that this is a result of lack of devotion. Devotion is in everything we do, it's a part of our everyday life. While I am unfortunately not devoted to getting my homework done in a timely manner, I am devoted to my friendships, Target, watching new episodes of my favorite shows, and most importantly continuous growth in my faith.

Josiah, also known as “The Devoted King,” turned to God with his whole heart. He gave up everything out of his devotion to completing the Lord's work. We read in 2 Kings 23:24 how Josiah removed all “distractions” from the people. He did this by destroying sacrificial altars, places of worship, and even took it as far as digging up idol worshipers and grinding their bones. Seems like he was pretty serious about this. But just like me putting my phone on “do not disturb” and still proceeding to check it, the simple removal of distractions is not enough. Josiah ended up being killed for his works, and the people continued to worship false gods and disrespect our Lord. What did the people lack? Devotion. The devotion to change has to be present in your life.

While I can admit that I am not currently where I want to be in my faith life, I know that the only way to get to where God calls us is through devotion. This is known as having faith, persevering through the hard times, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, and knowing (as the great Christian band MercyMe sings) there are better days coming. This Christmas season, focus on where in your life devotion to Christ could be added to help better your faith walk with Him. How could we shape our lives to better reflect the heart of Josiah and show gratitude to God during this time of year. The holidays are full of distractions with the shiny lights and gifts galore, but remember what this season stands for.

Dear Lord, friend of sinners, thank You for blessing us with Your Son. We ask You today for devotion in all aspects of our lives. To help us set our sights fully on You this Advent Season. And know that You are our reason for being here. We love You Lord, Amen.



December 20



Jeconiah: A Seat at the King's Table

Author: Rick Powell

"In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Awel-Marduk became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. He did this on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month. He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived." 2 Kings 25:27-30

Jehoiachin was the king when God's people were brought into Babylon, where Jeconiah was imprisoned but later released. The release of King Jehoiachin from prison was a comforting sign to the whole of the captive Jewish people that Yaweh would one day put an end to their suffering and their exile. They needed to acknowledge that their sins had driven them away from the face of Yaweh. But this sign showed that He would again bless them if they would return to Him.

When Jehoiachin was released from prison, he had been there for 37 years. Let no one say that they shall never see good again because they have seen little but evil for so long. The most miserable don't know what turn God may yet give to their affairs. When Jehoiachin was in prison, he probably had little to no hope of being released. Then after all those difficult years, he was not only released but allowed to have a seat at the king's table. That's quite the turn of events!

Even in this world, our Savior brings a release from bondage to a distressed Christian who seeks Him, bestowing foretastes of the pleasures which are at His right hand forevermore. The captivity of sin alone can hurt us; Jesus alone can free us from that captivity and restore us, just like He did King Jehoiachin.

Most holy, merciful, and gracious Father. Thank You for delivering us from captivity of the evil one by offering your Son, Jesus Christ, as our sacrifice. Help me to remember where You have taken me from and show me Your providence in my life. Remind me of Your calling in my life. Guard my heart to never look backwards but to look forward to everlasting life with You. I seek Your guidance and affirm my faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen!



December 21



Zerubbabel: Rebuilding God's Temple

Author: Chad Kelly

"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" Haggai 1:4

This year at Concordia University Texas, we had a Flag Football intramural tournament. After hours of recruiting and finding the team that would lead me to victory, it dawned on me that Concordia Texas is a very small school. This means that every single team (except mine) had college athletes playing on their team (who, unlike me, knew how to play football). After realizing that there was no chance of us winning, we had a team meeting and decided that something needed to change. This led to our team's name becoming "Just For Funzies." The team agreed that our purpose was now to simply have fun. We ended up losing our first game... what a shocker. Throughout the game, even though I knew our purpose was to have fun, I couldn't help but have this desire to have the highlight reel worthy interception or to catch the game winning touchdown pass. I forgot my purpose; I completely ignored that my team had joined the intramural tournament Just For Funzies.

In Haggai, the people of Judah had a purpose too. God calls the people of Judah to rebuild the temple of God since King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the original temple. God's people of course don't do what God had asked of them. In verse 4 God says, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" The people of Judah are living lavishly, and God doesn't even have a temple. They are more worried about being successful and having the nicest house rather than rebuilding the temple like God called them to. They missed their purpose... They were too busy having the best highlight reel instead of doing what God called them to do. God calls the people of Judah out and tells them how they have been putting their worth and value in everything except the one thing that can fill them, which is the Lord. The people of Judah then feared God and realized what they had been doing wrong, which led them to start rebuilding the temple of the Lord.

How often does your purpose drift from what God has for you? My purpose always seems to drift way off. I encourage you to take a step back from everything going on in life (maybe call a timeout) and evaluate where in your life your purpose keeps going off track. Jesus's purpose never changed, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). This was Jesus' purpose, to serve others and give His life for many. When you see your purpose start to drift, like the people of Judah, we can learn from Jesus to lower ourselves to see how God can use us as a humble servant.

Dear Lord, thank You for giving me a purpose. My purpose will drift off, but when it does, call me out and lead me to lower myself and be a humble servant. Amen.



December 22



Joseph: Jesus' Father

Author: Janice Sabotin

"An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said..." Matthew 1:20, 2:13, 2:19, 2:22

Wow! Four dreams are listed in Matthew 1 & 2!! I have had many dreams in my life. Joyful ones, nightmares, confusing, crazy, realistic ones, but never has an angel spoke to me in my dreams. What was that like? Can you imagine the struggle Joseph had trying to decide if he should marry Mary or divorce her quietly? How could he sleep while wrestling with this decision? But apparently, he did, and the Lord sent an angel to speak to him in his dream. I don't know about you, but at times when struggling, I don't sleep well. I need the Lord's help to figure out the dilemma. Lord, what am I to do? Through prayer, listening, sharing my thoughts and ideas with the Lord, more prayer, more listening, God comes to me often with answers in which I had never dreamed of. His way is always best!

In Matthew, God used an angel to speak to Joseph. We don't have many details about Joseph, but the Bible does say Joseph was a righteous man wanting to follow the Lord. He would hear the angel and know the Lord sent the angel to help bring clarity to his worries, fears, or decisions. His dreams must've been so realistic, so clear, that when Joseph woke, he had confidence to follow the message of the angel, a messenger sent by God.

In the first dream, the angel shared, "Do not be afraid!" Joseph woke at peace, ready to support and marry Mary. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel." This result fulfilled what the Lord said through the prophet.

The second dream, the angel gave a command to, "Get up and go!" We all want our family and loved ones to be safe. Joseph woke from this dream and quickly escaped with Mary and Jesus to Egypt. And so was fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son." Later he was instructed in a dream to get up and go to Israel and he did. Realizing, Israel was not safe, he had another dream to go to Galilee, and he settled the family in Nazareth. This fulfilled the prophecy, "He will be called a Nazarene."

The Lord may not speak to you in dreams, (or does He?) but He does care for you, and He does guide your thoughts and direction you may take in life decisions. God has created us and through the waters of baptism, we are His children. Like Joseph, we too have worries, fears, or decisions to be made, and we may give these to the Lord. He calms our heart, so we can listen to His still small voice and be guided in His ways. There are so many passages in the Bible to lean on when walking with the Lord, but today let's reflect on Romans 12:2. "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (as Joseph did as he walked faithfully with the Lord). Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will." As you follow Christ, listen as Joseph did to the Lord. God is speaking to you too!

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for being my Savior! Thank You for drawing me close to you. Please help me to focus my thoughts on You. Help me to listen for You and to look to You for direction in my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



December 23



Mary: Jesus' Mother

Author: Brooke Case

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." Luke 2:10

Have you ever pondered anything? Merriam-Webster says that to ponder means "to weigh in the mind, to think about: reflect on, to think or consider especially quietly, soberly, and deeply." We don't often use the word ponder in our day-to-day language, but I am sure we have all pondered from time to time. As a mother, I have weighed a lot of things in my mind concerning my children and now my grandchildren. What kind of adult will they be? Will they be successful at their chosen professions, will they be kind and generous, will they have friends that support and love them, will they have families of their own? Recently my ponderings have been about their emotional well-being since the sudden passing of my husband, Mark, their dad and Poppy (grandpa). My heart hurts for them, and I wish I could take it all away.

The verse above says that Mary pondered all the things that happened around the birth of her first child, Jesus, in her heart. I imagine she pondered many times more as she watched the Son of God grow and learn as a young child. She had other children, of course, but I would suspect her thoughts and reflections on their childhoods were much different than her thoughts and reflections regarding her firstborn, the God of Heaven and Earth.

One of my favorite Christmas songs is "Mary Did You Know." It questions whether Mary knew that her baby boy would walk on water, heal the sick, and calm storms with His hands. The last verse asks her if she realizes that the sleeping child she is holding is the great "I AM"! I would say the answer to that question is yes, but what was it like to witness Him fulfilling all the prophecies that the Israelites had been promised for thousands of years? Did she really know how things were going to end, or rather, begin? Her son was the Messiah, the Holy One of God, Immanuel! The mother in her had to be torn – proud and yet anguished as she watched her child suffer and die for all people, including herself. Did she wish she could take it all away?

As we ponder on the celebration of Christmas this Advent season, may we remember that Mary's son grew up with an earthly family just as we have. He played with His siblings and did chores. He went to school and had homework. He probably even played a few games of tag. He had a mother who cared for Him when he was sad and hurt. She loved and worried about Him as only a mother can. He lived a perfect human life in our stead and because of His life, death, and resurrection, we can celebrate with Mary and all believers in eternity.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your only Son to be a part of an earthly family to live the perfect life we could not. Thank You for His sacrifice in our place so that we can now live eternally with You and the extended family of believers who trust in the death and resurrection of Mary's firstborn child. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



December 24



Jesus: The Fulfilment

Author: Abbi Schiefer

“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in clothes and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.” Luke 2:6-7

Imagine you had front row tickets to see your favorite show, concert, game, or anything in between. This is an event you have anticipated, longed for, and can't believe is finally happening! Unfortunately for me, my dream of a Taylor Swift concert hasn't actually happened yet, but a girl can dream!

Well, here we are, in Bethlehem, awaiting the highly anticipated arrival of the King. His birth had been prophesied long before He was born. The Israelites have longed for a king. God's people needed someone to lead them, to protect them, and to save them, and that is exactly what Jesus came to do. They knew a king was coming, and now He was finally here!

God chose this time and place to bring about a boy, who would live a perfect life, die on the cross, and rise again to save us from our sins. He came for you and for me, to save us, to love us, and to lead us. He is the King that we all need. We can find comfort and joy each and every day in the fact that Jesus came for us! He is our Savior, our friend, our protector, and our teacher. He is King Jesus! I may never make it to a Taylor Swift concert, which is ok, because I will continue to look forward to my front row seat in heaven with our King.

Dear God, thank You for sending us Your son and our King, Jesus. Thank You for saving us from our sins. Help us to remember this Christmas Eve that You are always with us and will always love us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



December 25



Family of God: The Church

Author: Ellie Lutz

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:12-14

What’s your origin story? In John 1, we have an origin story to rival the best superhero movie. John instantly throws us into it with a simple sentence: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” What a way to start! It casts our minds back to the beginning of time, to God creating the heavens and the earth with nothing but His voice. And then this origin story gets even crazier. Because that Word? It became flesh.

Pause for a moment in your mind to take on the uncomprehending enormity of that thought. The star-breathing and infinite God, incomprehensibly, unimaginably, becomes one of us. The glorious, all-powerful, vast, and endless God somehow becomes finite human flesh. And then in this crazy origin story, the Word makes His dwelling...among us.

In verse 14, in an attempt to capture what Jesus truly did by coming to earth, John verbs the Greek noun for “tabernacle.” A more literal translation would read “The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.” In the Old Testament, we see how the Tabernacle was the place where the Israelites, wandering and weary in the desert, were able to commune with God. It was a sanctuary, a place where God lived among the Israelites in a present, incarnational way.

The Tabernacle was a temporary structure that eventually gave way to the temple built by Solomon. The temple was eventually destroyed, and God’s people were sent into exile. There was little sanctuary to be found...until Jesus became flesh. He broke down the barriers between us and God, and created communion with God not bound by place or process. In Jesus, we have the living Tabernacle.

When Jesus came and took on our flesh, He did so in order that we could recover the image of God – that we could become children of God. Yahweh, the Great I AM, became one of us so that in Him, we can find sanctuary. He claims our sins and our brokenness, our haunted past and our deepest regrets, and allows us to claim the life of His Son. No longer are our origins found in brokenness, sin, and despair. Instead, the beauty and hope of the Advent season is this: Jesus’ story becomes our own. His origin story becomes ours, as we are made His sons and daughters and heirs.

Your story is no longer your own. It has become Christ’s. Merry Christmas!

Jesus, you have rewritten my story and claimed me as Your own. You have given me a family where I can belong and be loved. Thank You for coming and dwelling among us. Thank You for being a living sanctuary for me. Help me to remember my story and live as Your child. Amen.



Wednesday Advent Series: Arise and Shine

November 29, December 6, 13, and 20 at 7pm only

In this Advent series for traditional worship, we welcome the Christ Child, who is the light of the world, arising in our lives this season. In celebration, we, in turn, shine with the light of Christ in various ways for all the world to see the brightness of his love.

Each week will focus on a different aspect of the light of Christ and how we are enlightened by him throughout our lives. The theme verse for the entire series is: "Arise, shine, for your light has come" (Isaiah 60:1). All services will have candlelight and Lindsey will offer special music every Wednesday. To kick off the series, cookies and hot chocolate will be served and Daniel will lead a Christmas sing-along in the church lobby on November 29.



Weekend Advent Series: Dysfunctional Family Christmas

December 3, 10, and 17

Dysfunctional Family Christmas: Somewhere, some people are going to have a perfect Christmas with chestnuts roasting and sleigh bells ringing. Those people are going to be in the minority. Most of us are having just the opposite: a nutcrackin' struggle of disappointment, carbs beyond counting, maxed-out credit cards,

and a ham that your vegan in-laws want to hurl through the frosty window. The holidays have a way of showing the dysfunction in our families. This three-week series will zero in on Matthew 1, the genealogy of Jesus. A genealogy is more than just a whole list of names that we have trouble pronouncing. In a genealogy we are able to unearth part of the present that is buried in the past. And buried in Jesus' past is a family of dysfunction. A family of sinners. But through the dysfunction, comes one without sin, the perfected Son of God redeeming His family and His past. This Christmas Jesus shows up to do the same thing for you.



Sunday, December 24 – Christmas Eve

10am Worship – "Carols & Lessons"

Evening Worship: "Waiting on Christmas"

4pm – Contemporary Christmas

Featuring Christmas songs, a message that brings you back to the meaning of the season—great for young families.

6pm & 8pm – Traditional Christmas

Featuring Christmas hymns with choir, brass, & more.

10pm – Acoustic Christmas

A more intimate celebration of Christ's birth featuring guitar and voice – with communion.

*Christmas treats will be served at the 4, 6, and 8pm services!
All services will include singing Silent Night by candlelight.*



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