

## Advent 2017

The theme for Faith Lutheran Church's Advent devotions this year is *God's Promises*. Each devotion will focus upon a promise that God made to someone in the Bible, and ultimately the promises that God has made to us as well. Obviously, as we move through this season of Advent, our focus is primarily upon the promise that God fulfilled when He sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins and give us salvation and life eternal through His resurrection from the dead!

As Christians we make time to prepare ourselves for Christmas, and that's not just buying gifts, sending cards, and baking goodies. No, as Christians we recognize that the most important things in life are many times the things that are least obvious and seldom noticed or seen by others. This is true in our preparations for Christmas as well, for the most important thing we can do is to make time to be in God's Word, reflect on what Jesus has done for us, share our thoughts with loved ones and friends, and pray that God's will would be done.

I would encourage you to set a given time each day to read the devotion and to pray. Some of the devotions may speak more directly to you, but each one has an important message for us. I would also encourage you to make the time special - make an Advent wreath and light the candles each day. Turn off the phone and eliminate the distractions so that you can truly focus upon the message that God is giving to you through your fellow members. If you wish, you may also pick up an extra copy of this booklet to give to a friend or relative.

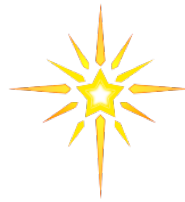
As always, I thank God for the many gifted members of Faith who have given of themselves by taking the time to write these devotions. God has truly blessed us with many members who have gifts of writing, as well as some stories to share about how God has worked in their lives. I would encourage you to individually thank these people as you see them in coming days and weeks.

As you reflect upon the promises of God may you be lifted up and encouraged, and may your faith be strengthened as you spend time in prayer and talking about your faith with family members.

Serving Christ,

Lyle Heggemeier, DCE

**Sunday, December 3**  
**“God’s Promises...to Adam and Eve”**



Genesis 3:14-15

In February of 2017, while visiting my parents and in celebration of our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Anna and I took the kids to “the lock bridge” in Frankfurt, Germany. It is a common practice there for couples to place a lock on the bridge after they are married, symbolizing the unbreakable bond they now have and of their commitment to one another. Anna and I thought this would be a special activity for us to do, to demonstrate to our kids and to remind ourselves of the commitment we have to each other.

The ironic part about our lock of love, that symbol of our unbreakable commitment to each other, is that in a couple of years someone is going to walk over to our lock and cut it off and throw it away. Because if they don’t cut the locks off of the bridge it will eventually be too much weight for the bridge and the bridge will collapse. Now this will have no impact on Anna and my relationship but I find the irony to be kind of funny.

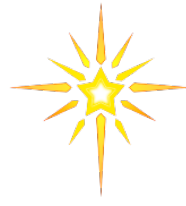
But isn’t that how our earthly promises so often feel, here today and like so many locks on a bridge, thrown away tomorrow. This is not the case with God, who keeps all of his promises to us, going all the way back to Adam and Eve. After their fall into sin God promised to provide them with a way out, that He would conquer even their sinful condition. And He did. He sent Jesus Christ to crush the head of the serpent, to conquer sin on our behalf. And Jesus is the One whom we are preparing to celebrate this Christmas, for when Christ was born in Bethlehem, the serpent’s fate was sealed. God would keep His promise to save us.

Unlike the broken promises of this world, God’s promises are unbreakable and He sent Christ to show us just how far He was willing to go in order to keep that promise.

*PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for keeping all of your promises to us. Help us to trust in You each and every day that we might live our lives with complete reliance upon Your goodness and faithfulness. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

Pastor Ben

**Monday, December 4**  
***“God’s Promises...to Noah”***



Genesis 9:12-17

In the Bible reading of Genesis 9, God made a promise to Noah. He promised to never again destroy all of the world by a flood. Instead, He will preserve nature's actions until the end. This covenant has no conditions attached to it because God made it with animals as well as man. God still keeps that promise today and will forever.

Just as God made promises with Noah, He also makes promises to us as Christians. He promises to love us and guide us in life. God never fails on His promises because He has everlasting love for us. Sometimes it feels as though God isn't there because of tragic things that happen in our world. We must keep our promise to Him by having faith. Faith means having complete trust or confidence in someone or something. Although this is a difficult task, we can not give up on God and the path He has planned for us.

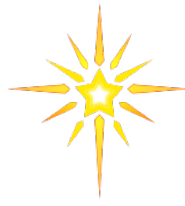
I not only have promises with God, but also the dependable people in my life. Most importantly, my friends and family. I promise to always believe in them and they promise to believe in me. This support system gives me confidence to take risks because I know even if I fail they will still have faith in me. During my sectional game for soccer, all of my closest friends and family came to support me. Even though we lost the game, my family and friends still congratulated me on having a great season and working hard.

People in your life may not always be able to keep their promises because no one is perfect, but we can always rely on God to keep His. By making our relationships with the people in our lives and God stronger, the stronger our promises will become. God's promise with Noah in Genesis is one of the first examples of His many promises in the Bible.

*Heavenly Father, let everyone have a rock that gives them promise and also that they have promise in. Help them to find the gifts that You gave them and share them with the world through Your promises. Amen.*

Genevieve Foster

**Tuesday, December 5**  
***“God Promises...to Abraham”***



Genesis 12:1-4; 21:2

In today's reading God promises Abraham that his descendent, Jesus, would be a blessing to all people. Abraham, then seventy-five, was told by God to leave his homeland. In doing so all the people in Abraham's path would be blessed by God. In turn, Abraham would be blessed. Abraham had faith in God's plan and did as He asked. When one hundred years old, his son Isaac was born to him.

Today's Advent devotion marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my father's passing. It was like any winter Wednesday night, a basketball game for my sister, a college school night for me. My mom and dad were doing what they loved most; sitting in the bleachers together watching my sister's basketball game. Cheering proudly. Always beaming with unconditional love. My father was called home suddenly shortly after halftime. My father lived every day grateful. He was grateful to God for the struggles he overcame as an abandoned child. He gave thanks to God for us two daughters he was blessed to love and teach. My father glowed with thanks every day for being on this earth.

Healing from my father's passing started when I remembered how grateful my dad lived. I made a promise to God that I would appreciate life just as my father had. For the last 20 years, I have strived to live this promise, embracing every struggle, blessing, and challenge. And to lead by example for my children. I pray for God's help when I have failed to live up to these promises.

I promise to give my heart to all who will accept and, to share with, care with, and pray with others. My passion for missions and other ministries at Faith are directly attributed to my father's legacy living through me. And I cannot wait to give more and be a blessing to others!

**Activity:** Each of us has the ability to live God's word through share, care, and prayer. What is one promise you can make to share, care or pray this Advent season. Discuss your promises with a friend or your family. Throughout the season, share the ways you have lived your promises.

*Heavenly Father, help us to always walk with You in faith remembering Your promises. In turn, give us strength to hold true to our promises to You. Help us be a blessing onto other children of God as we share, care, and pray Your great word. In Your name we pray, Amen.*

Erica Capozzi

**Wednesday, December 6**  
**“God’s Promises...to Jacob”**



Genesis 28:14-15

When I was growing up I had a younger brother who I tended to protect, being the older sister and very bossy! We lived in an area where there were no school buses so we walked the ¾ mile to school. My parents were worried about our safety but were unable to drive or walk us to school. I made a promise to them that I would walk with my little brother to school every day and make sure he was safe and didn’t fool around on the way there. I loved him and wanted to keep my promise to my parents because I had learned in church that you do your best to please God. There were times when I just wanted to be alone with my friends and not have my brother tagging along. At the end of the day I went to his classroom to walk him safely back home. He thanked me (when he was older) and realized what a good sister I had been to take on that responsibility.

God also made a promise. God made a promise to Abraham to make him into a great nation and to bless him and make his name great. He said He would bless those who blessed him and he would curse those who cursed him and that all the families of the earth shall be blessed through him. God also spoke to Abraham’s grandson Jacob and promised him that he would have numerous descendants. They would spread out in all directions and all the families of the earth would be blessed through him and his descendants. He promised to be with Jacob and protect him wherever he went, one day bringing him back to his land. Jacob was reassured knowing that God would not leave him until he had everything he was promised. God kept those promises, especially with the sending of our Savior, Jesus!

*Heavenly Father, help us to always keep in mind Your promises that we read about in the Bible. Make us want to reach out to others and share Your word and Your greatest promise...salvation. In Your name we pray, Amen.*

Sharon Finkbeiner

Thursday, December 7  
“God’s Promises...to Moses”



Deuteronomy 18:15; John 5:46

In our journey along the timeline of God’s promises this Advent, we see God promising to the Israelites, through Moses, a great prophet who will rise up from their own people. This prophet will come after Moses and they should listen to him. Understand that Moses is not just speaking of another one of the Old Testament prophets to follow, but he’s speaking of Jesus. In John 5:46 Jesus tells the Jews, “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me”.

Many millennia later we have the Bible and various ancient historians attest to the fact that Jesus did walk the earth. We witness once again God being faithful to his word. He did provide not only a great prophet from the people of Israel but also the savior for the world. As we celebrate the coming of Jesus we can also celebrate the faithfulness of God’s word to us. He keeps His promises. It’s a shame we can’t claim the same ability. We often say or promise things that we can’t provide or we fail to accomplish.

When I was growing up my father worked unbelievable hours at his job as a tool and die maker. A minimum of 12 hour days, 6 days a week were the norm. Sometimes the only day we would see him was on Sunday. When I was about 12 or 13 my dad and I had made plans to go on a fishing trip together with my cousin. We were going to gather at a wilderness outfitter in Minnesota and paddle into Canada for a week of solitude and great fishing. I even got a new fishing pole! The day before the trip my dad called home to tell me he wasn’t going. I was crushed. Instead of us doing this trip together I would have to go alone with my cousin and a friend. Not to worry though, I didn’t come away from this experience with deep emotional scars. I soon forgave my father. But what I did learn was a lifelong lesson in integrity. Do what you say you’re going to do.

How wonderful it would be if each of us could be more like God in being true to our word. But let’s also remember when we do fail, we can ask forgiveness.

*Father, we thank You for the faithfulness of Your word. We realize that it is the sure foundation of all things. We ask Your help to enable us to only speak that which we are able to accomplish and forgive us when we don’t. Amen.*

Don Reschke

**Friday, December 8**  
***"God's Promises...to the Israelites"***



Joshua 21:45

In today's Bible reading God gave Israel all the land that He promised them, and they took possession of it. Not a one of their enemies withstood them. God gave His people a victorious life. God kept His promises.

In 1816, Tom's third great-grand parents were led by God to emigrate from Germany to America. During the crossing it was learned that the ship was bound for South America in order to sell the passengers as slaves. They mutinied and turned the ship north landing in Newfoundland. In Quebec, the captain was tried, found guilty and imprisoned.

Crossing the St. Lawrence River with wagons pulled by oxen, they headed southwest ending up in what is now Rochester. They were the second German family to settle in the area.

After a while they acquired land and became the first truck-farmers in Western New York taking their produce into the city to sell. Because of their great faith, the mother and son walked to Albany then on to New York City to have their baby baptized. There was no minister in this area at that time. Eventually they became prosperous and funded the first German church in Rochester.

In writing to his daughter, a grandson said, "There is an inheritance I leave you which is far more precious than earthly possessions---namely, faith in God. May you persevere in it. Embrace tribulations God has destined you, knowing Jesus will give you the necessary help to carry on."

The Israelites were brought out of slavery in Egypt to God's promised land. Our ancestors were brought through trials into a land where they could thrive. The Lord will be faithful to us fulfilling all His promises. He will be with us in all circumstances with His peace and love as He promises in His word.

*Lord God, help us to continue to believe in Your promises knowing that one day we will enter that promised land. Amen.*

Tom and Linda Hanss



**Saturday, December 9**  
***“God Promises...to Gideon”***

Judges 6:36

God's call to Gideon in Judges 6 is another example of how He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). Gideon was the least in the least of families and yet he was called by God to save Israel from the Midianites. Time after time in our history, God has chosen the least or the weakest of persons to do the most mighty of deeds. Each one has had to rely on God's promise that He would be their strength.

Gideon wanted to be assured of God's promise. He very likely wanted confirmation that it was really God calling him to go to battle. Judges 6:36 tells how Gideon asked God to show him signs that it was truly His will that Gideon lead the Israelite army. Gideon asked God to prove that He would, indeed, be with them and guarantee victory. God actually did give Gideon these signs. God proved that He, alone, was the guarantor of Israel's victory when He whittled down Gideon's army to only 300 men, and they still won!

Reading about Gideon's experience made me wonder what it would be like to be called by God to take on such a task. If God came to me today, how would I know that this was really Him and the task was His will. Would my faith be strong enough to rely completely on Him to see me through?

Unlike Gideon, we have God's Holy Spirit within us to guide us and convey to us His will for us in this life. Perhaps the task that God assigns me might be less bold than leading an army but as simple as leading others to the salvation of our Lord. I know that I can rely on God's promise to be with me as I tell others about His love for mankind and the way He has provided eternal life. God's Spirit within me assures me of His promise to be with me and emboldens me as I seek to do His will.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your son, Jesus, as You promised, to save the world from sin and death. Help me, Father, to have faith in Your promise to always be with me and to help me tell others about You and Your Son. Thank you, oh God, for all the blessings You have given to me and for loving me and calling me to Your service. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Dianne Longhenry



**Sunday, December 10**

***“God’s Promises...to Ruth and Naomi”***



Ruth 4:13-14

It didn't look promising. Severe famine chased a family out of the Promised Land to fifty miles away, beyond the Jordan River and Salt Sea. A decade later the father and both sons were dead. The widow, Naomi, was destitute and despairing, without the hint of a prospect. Rumor had it God was feeding his people! Manna from heaven again? Or just a rumor? Another disappointment?

She could hardly ask her daughters-in-law to stay. She had nothing to offer. “Go back to Mom! Dad will take you back! You’ll find another husband! Go!” One daughter-in-law took the practical, earthly advice. Ruth looked at her mother-in-law with compassion and remained. To do so she would give up everything; her country, parents, customs, and even her gods.

The two women returned to the Promised Land to find the rumors were false and thousands were rummaging fields to collect whatever grains the harvesters had missed. Naomi (meaning Joy) was so despondent at what greeted her she changed her name to Mara (Bitter). Some “Promised Land.”

Naomi and Ruth were unaware God was working: protecting them from assault, leading them in exactly the right season to the right farm, foreman, owner and family redeemer. Boaz, fully understanding he was God’s agent, said, “The Lord will reward you for all the good things you have done. The Lord, the God of Israel, will pay you in full. You have come to him for safety, and he will protect you.”

What’s in a name? God didn’t name our Redeemer, ‘no famine’, ‘no miscarriage’, ‘no lost eyesight’, ‘no depression’, ‘no failed education’, or ‘no (fill in your own blank)’. He named him ‘Emmanuel’--God with Us.

Like Naomi, God may not remove us from our circumstances, but He is there with us during our struggles. He’s already redeemed us on the cross. The final word in the book links Ruth to her great-grandson, David...and a thousand years later to our Messiah, Redeemer, and Friend.

*Blessed Emmanuel, we are grateful You are with us through life’s storms. Show us Your workings as You increase our faith and trust. Amen.*

Duane Cook

**Monday, December 11**  
**“God’s Promises...to David”**



2 Samuel 7:16, 25-26

I often tell my children they should pray for things they want to happen. I then think to myself if what I’m asking my kids to pray about is really okay with God. Is that something the kids should be asking for from God? What is the right thing to ask for in prayer?

Going to God with any of our wishes, problems, woes, failures, successes, or accomplishments is okay with God. He promises us eternal life and salvation through Him and as we know, He keeps His promises. David prayed to God regularly. God made a promise to David He would send a king who would be King forever. At just the right time God sent Jesus to become our King.

But for us right now, not everything goes as we expect. We can gain confidence in prayer by knowing that in some way, God will keep His promises to us, just as He had to David. In this certainty, we can gain confidence in prayer knowing God keeps His promises. In God keeping promises, He shows us He is faithful to His Word and He can be forever trusted.

We try to enforce in ourselves and our children to pray for things that make this world a better place and that make us better people. Through today’s reading, I have allowed myself to feel confident I am teaching my children and myself to be in God’s greatness, the power of prayer, and God’s promises. We can be confident God hears our prayers and keeps His promises.

*Thank you, Father, for Your promise of salvation and eternal life. Thank You for the certainty You will keep Your promises and You do as You promised. I know this to be true because at the right time You sent Jesus for us, Your son the sinless One for a sinner like me. God bless us and keep us. Amen.*

Christy Coles

**Tuesday, December 12**  
**“God’s Promises...to Elijah”**



I Kings 18:37-39

When I was a freshman in college, I was studying to become an architect at North Dakota State University. I had wanted to become an architect since I was a young boy. My freshman year was filled with late night sketching and endless art projects. I enjoyed it... but something felt off. I began to think about going into the ministry. Was this the right choice? Should I be an architect or something else? I began to ask God for clear direction and I waited... and waited some more for His answer. I learned many lessons in being patient. Then finally at the end of my freshman year, God’s answer came when my best friend said, “Peter, I’ve always seen you as a youth minister.” I transferred colleges and became a Director of Christian Education.

God promises to hear our prayers and answer them. Elijah knew this promise when he faced 450 prophets of Baal. In his epic showdown with these false prophets, Elijah challenged them to call upon their false god to burn up their sacrificial offering. The false prophets called upon the name of Baal all day but there was no response. In fact, in one of the funniest moments in the Old Testament, Elijah taunts them and tells them to shout louder. Elijah then had them dump water all over his altar to the Lord. Things were about to get real. He then prayed to God – trusting that indeed God would answer him. And God answered him by burning up the sacrifice, wood, stones, and water! This miracle proved to the false prophets that God is real... and their god wasn’t.

God hears our prayers and answers them in His perfect timing. Sometimes the answer is: yes, no, or keep waiting.

**Activity:** Think of a time when God answered a prayer in your life. What was His answer? Keep a list of prayer requests this week and see how God answers them.

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for promising to hear me and answer me in Your perfect timing. In Jesus’ Name I pray, Amen!*

Peter Johnson

**Wednesday, December 13**  
**“God’s Promises...to Isaiah”**



Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; John 1:45

This time last year was a low point in my life. I had spent two years of undergraduate school to apply to Purdue University’s Doctor of Pharmacy program, just to be placed on a waitlist that I would never get off of. Not only did I feel like a failure, I felt let down and rejected. I believed that God’s plan for me was to get into that program, but it didn’t happen. Have you ever experienced this feeling?

Imagine how Isaiah felt after speaking the words in today’s scripture reading. God spoke through him, promising the coming of a “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” In a time when the Israelites were enslaved, the promise of a great king “establishing and upholding [the kingdom] with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever” was great news! They would soon be freed from their chains! Peace and prosperity would come to their land... Right?

God did have a plan for the Israelites. But it would take *hundreds of years* for that plan to finally happen. That is generations after Isaiah lived on the Earth! With Jesus’ birth, that centuries-old promise finally came true. The Savior of the world had come! But, Jesus was not the great governmental liberator the Israelites probably anticipated. He was someone much greater. He was our spiritual liberator, as He died on the cross to save us from all our sins!

Just like how the Israelites had to wait, I waited and worked for another year at Purdue before finally being accepted into their pharmacy program. I am very thankful for how much I grew in that one extra year of school. God did have a plan for me, just as He has a plan for every one of us!

*Lord, help me to believe in Your promises, especially when everything seems to be going wrong. Remind me that You are always with me. Amen.*

Christian D’Ambrosio

**Thursday, December 14**  
**“God’s Promises...to Hezekiah”**



Isaiah 38:1-8

Hezekiah was king of Judah. He became sick and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah that God said he would die. Hezekiah wept, prayed and implored God to let him recover. He told God of his faithfulness and good deeds. The Word of the Lord came to Isaiah, who went to Hezekiah with God’s promises of life and deliverance. Hezekiah lived 15 more years! God kept his promises to Hezekiah.

How many of us keep our promises - to God - and one another? I made a promise to God that I have actually kept. Several years ago one of my granddaughters was involved in an horrific automobile accident. I’ll never forget that phone call that she was being air-lifted to the hospital! I cried and prayed all the way to the hospital promising God many things I suppose. I can’t really remember driving there. In the days ahead my family room became a hospital room, complete with hospital bed and paraphernalia. Thank God she recovered.

My biggest promise to God was that I would start attending church again. I had been a member of St. Matthew for years until we moved to Webster. I was confirmed there; my children were baptized there and attended Sunday School there. I was even the church secretary for several years. I drifted away after moving. I visited Faith one Sunday and immediately felt that I was “home”. I have met so many wonderful people here, became involved with groups and ministries. So, through my promise to God, He has promised and given me much more. His greatest promise to all of us is everlasting life through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. That promise is never-ending!

*Heavenly Father, help us to remember our promises to each other and especially to You, who has given us the greatest promise of all! Amen.*

Carol Letky

**Friday, December 15**  
***“God’s Promises...to Jeremiah”***



Jeremiah 33:14-15

People can now have their DNA analyzed for specifics about their ethnicity. In one TV ad for a company offering this service, a young woman happily dances down the street in (one of) her newfound native lands. In another, a man discovers his family is actually from Scotland, not Germany, and “trades his lederhosen for a kilt”. This knowledge of “who they are” is pitched as central to their existence and a resolution of their questions about where they came from.

The prophet Jeremiah was called by God to announce the destruction of the kingdom of Judah. Ever since God had led the Israelites out of Egypt, they continually sinned and rejected Him, then repented and renewed their faith, then sinned and rejected God again. Jeremiah’s message to God’s people was that God had determined their way of life, of living, was coming to an end. But along with that message was a promise: forgiveness and cleansing would usher in a new day which would exceed any promise made by God before. And that this was not only for them, but for ALL people.

Jeremiah’s revelation of God’s promise was like ancestry in reverse. He said the Israelites and all people would be saved and righteousness restored by a future person from King David’s line. This is an awesome prophecy – and promise! God promised David that his children would never cease to exist – his descendants or generational offspring would continue throughout the ages. This promise was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the promise from God fulfilled for people of all nations.

We Christians know exactly “who we are”. We are children of a loving God, brothers and sisters united in Christ, recipients of salvation and eternal life because we believe in Him. While we may find out through DNA analysis where our ancestors came from, we know through faith that our future is with God in heaven.

*Dear Lord, You kept Your promise to us and sent Your Son as a living sacrifice. As we celebrate His birth, a promise fulfilled, help us remember who we are, Your children, and give us strength to live in faithful love toward you and one another. Amen.*

Carol Keeler

**Saturday, December 16**  
***“God’s Promises...to Daniel”***



Daniel 7:13-14

As we read Daniel 7, the visions Daniel writes about seem to jump off the pages and would make for a great opening scene in a movie. Over the years, many of us have been fascinated with the images of superheroes, whether in comic books or movies. The story of good winning over evil is almost always a good one. As a young teen reading the Bible, I was mesmerized by good conquering evil, and the lessons found in biblical history and teachings. There were also many heroes to read about: the strength of Sampson, the fearlessness of Daniel, the faith of Noah and finally a different kind of hero... Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Unfortunately for some, Jesus was not the hero they were looking for. Today many are still looking for a hero that will fight their battles, right their wrongs and punish evil. It’s no wonder that hero movies do so well at the box office. The truth is, ***Jesus is that Hero!*** Not only will he put an end to all evil, he also gave us all a path to eternal glory by dying for our sins. Daniel was given a glimpse of that future Promise in Daniel 7, as he witnesses Jesus Christ receiving His glorious kingdom and His coming reign of power.

Many years ago I read a book on the power of prayer. It recommended keeping a prayer journal to remember and honor God’s faithfulness. After completing my reading, I simply wrote on a sticky note “praying for a spouse”. Seven years went by and I forgot about that note. On the day I was moving, that book fell out of a box. I opened it and found my sticky note. Ironically, it was one week after I was wed to my darling wife. God is indeed our hero who keeps His promises.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for keeping Your promises and for all our answered prayers. Thank You for sending Jesus and Your loving Spirit and for your perfect (agape) love we are given, even when we fail. Amen*

Vincent Alello

**Sunday, December 17**

***“God’s Promises...to those who suffer”***



Psalm 119:49-50

In recent months, parts of our country have suffered from devastating hurricanes. Lives have been lost. Homes and business places have been lost. People have been temporarily displaced from their homes, such as some of my own family members. Though only a part of the country was affected, the whole country reached out to help restore communities and lives. Neighbors have helped neighbors and organizations have promised not only physical help but have given comfort and hope. Right after Hurricane Harvey, I donated blood, which is something I have promised to do whenever I can. We know what it is to suffer loss, so we promise to be Jesus to those in need.

In today’s reading, David prays to God to be faithful to His word and the promise He has made. He experienced suffering and needed comfort, just as we do. Like David, we can take comfort in knowing that God promises to be with us, no matter the circumstances, and He will preserve us.

I recently heard a quote that you can live a couple of weeks without food, but you can’t live a second without hope. As a hymn I grew up on says, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” God remembered His promise and sent Jesus, Immanuel, which means God with us. When we remember God’s faithfulness to His promises, then we realize we can trust His word. We can take comfort in knowing that no matter what we may be afflicted with either physically, mentally, or spiritually, He is with us and preserves us by giving us eternal life. Just as homes and businesses are being restored after these hurricanes because of promises being kept, God renews us through His Son whom He promised would come, and whose birth we prepare for during Advent.

*Thank you, Father, for the comfort and hope we receive from those who help us through times of suffering. Help us to always remember that You are there with us and will preserve us, just as You have promised. Amen.*

Terry Allen



**Monday, December 18**  
**“God’s Promises...to Micah”**



Micah 5:2, 7:18-20

In today’s Bible reading from the Old Testament book of Micah, we learn that from Bethlehem will come forth “one who is to rule in Israel”. God is promising that Jesus is on His way, long before God’s promise is fulfilled in Bethlehem. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, “whose origin is from of old ancient days”, will soon rule the land and carry out His ministry and ultimate sacrifice on the cross. God’s promise of our coming King gives hope as recorded by Micah. I cannot think of a better promise from the Bible – a ruler is coming, born on Christmas.

Just as God made a promise to us that Jesus was coming, I think of the pledge I have made to my family. My family is so very important and special to me and I promise to do the very best I can for them. As a father, husband, son, and brother, I will try my best to show constant love and patience. I will serve them and be faithful to them. My family can trust and be confident in me. As Jesus is the shepherd to his people, I will watch over my family and pray God’s blessings on them. Christmas is a special time for our family and we enjoy the many events together. I hope each family member knows the peace and security in Jesus and the faith to get through the difficult times we all encounter. That each one of us finds strength in the Lord and remembers His promise.

*Thank you God, for reminding us of Your promise of Jesus. We thank you for His birth at Christmas and the ultimate gift of forgiveness He brings. Through Jesus, eventually we will all be together in heaven. In Your name we pray. Amen.*

Greg Gerbasi

**Tuesday, December 19**  
**“God’s Promises...to Zechariah”**



Luke 1:5-20

Zechariah receives a promise from God, but pays the price when he doesn't believe it.

So often we pray and pray for something we desperately want. Surely this is done by every one of us. Zechariah had been praying for a child, probably a son, to continue his family line. He and his wife, Elizabeth, were both descendents of Aaron and faithful to the Jewish faith. In time they would become the parents of John the Baptist. While serving as chief priest, Zechariah was met at the altar by the angel Gabriel. Gabriel promised Zechariah God was answering their prayers. He and Elizabeth were going to have a son to be named John. Because Zechariah doubted the good news, the promise delivered by Gabriel, Gabriel chided Zechariah and told him he would not be able to speak until his son was born.

God promises to answer our prayers. We tend to expect an early answer and the answer to be what we want it to be. God promises to answer, but He does not promise we will get the answer we want or expect. Shouldn't God have answered the prayers of these two righteous people sooner? But God's promised answer is not always when or what we expect, nor should it be.

To what sort of prayers does God promise to listen? Do prayers of pastors or people like Zechariah and Elizabeth mean more to God than ours? Our "Small Group" is studying prayer. We are looking at different ways to pray by looking at different people in the Bible to see how they prayed. In the Psalms, David shouts at God, cries, argues, confesses, talks to himself and pleads for understanding. Jesus used prayer to ask God's help for healing, to teach His disciples and eliminate the expected crucifixion. Throughout the Bible, we find all sorts of people reaching out to God in prayer. Did God not keep his promise to answer these prayers in all circumstances? Shouldn't we also trust that promise?

*As so many others have, we go to You in prayer. You always keep Your promises. Help us follow Your example to keep the promises we make. In the name of Your Son, Amen.*

Nancy Hammond

**Wednesday, December 20**  
***“God’s Promises...to Mary”***



Luke 1:35-38, 45

When we got married, my husband Todd and I truly believed that it was God’s plan for us to have children. Becoming parents for the first time was not difficult and brought us great joy. We were thankful to God for our son, Chance, but our faith was never tested as it was leading up to and including the pregnancy of our second son, Cole. We had tried for many years to have another child, enduring the heart wrenching pain of multiple miscarriages. Our faith was strained as we continued trying, despite the uncertainty of whether it was God’s plan to expand our family. We were hopeful when we found out that we were pregnant again, only to be told that the pregnancy was “not viable” and we would again lose a child. The frigidly cold and painfully scientific words hung in the air as my husband asked if there was any chance that they could be mistaken. We were told that there may be a 1% chance of survival. I would be lying if I said we left the office full of hope and gratitude for the percentage our child was given. All we could do was believe in God and prayerfully put it in His hands.

Inexplicably, the hours turned to days, then weeks to months. Amazingly, Cole was born without incident on December 16, 2002 and praise God, he was recently confirmed at Faith’s altar! He is our living, breathing, thriving example of what true faith in God can do!

In today’s Bible reading, the angel Gabriel appears to the Virgin Mary, telling her that she is going to be the mother of the Son of God. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, she and Elizabeth both will give birth. Mary receives a promise that she will have a miraculous baby-Jesus, and she believes. In verse 45 it is written that Mary was blessed because she believed that the Lord would do what He said.

We too are blessed that we continue to believe in God’s plan for us and that our faith was strong and our prayers were answered when Cole was born. “For nothing is impossible with God.”(Luke 1:37)

*Heavenly Father, help us to believe in You with a faith that does not waiver. Give us the strength to believe in Your promises just as Mary did. In Your name we pray. Amen.*

Kimberly Nadritch

Thursday, December 21  
“God’s Promises...to Joseph”



Matthew 1:18-24

When my daughter was little, a favorite pastime was telling ‘pointing stories’. Jack would begin a story of wild adventure, then stop and point to Marissa. She continued the story, eventually stopping and pointing to her father to take up the narrative. They went back and forth until someone finally said, “The End.” This led to some very interesting tales!

Joseph had a difficult decision to make. He and Mary were betrothed, which in Jewish tradition was a binding commitment. They were known as man and wife without living as such, until the marriage ceremony occurred, usually within a year’s time. But Mary was pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Was this possible? Joseph knew the child was not his. Mary could be stoned to death for adultery, divorced, or Joseph could marry her and face public scorn. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that Mary “will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” Your turn, Joseph.

Joseph believed the promises of God and acted. He found a place for Mary’s baby to be born, protected Jesus from Herod’s plot to kill him, and was Jesus’s human father until at least the age of twelve.

In his book on prayer called Moving Mountains, John Eldredge notes that we live in a world where “the choices of men and angels matter.” From the very beginning God has guided and worked with imperfect humans to fulfill his promises. He promises to be with us, to help and guide us. The rest is up to us. We have a role in the story. Unlike a ‘pointing story’, the final outcome is known, but the path is not a given.

*Heavenly Father when You point to us and tell us it’s our turn, guide us in the way we should go. Teach us through Your Word. Strengthen us as we pray. Inspire us to follow the path You wish us to follow. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Marline Fitzpatrick

**Friday, December 22**  
**“God’s Promises...to the Shepherds”**



Luke 2:16-18

I remember it clearly, with each of my kids. I remember Anna telling me that we were expecting. I remember waiting for the right time to tell others of our joy. I remember the doctor appointments, the baby showers and the endless bags of clothes. And most of all, I remember the moment, seconds after each of their births when the doctor placed them in my arms. The love and the joy that I felt was uncontainable and my life was changed each and every time.

There are some promises, some anticipated events, which we spend months, years, and even decades preparing for. Then when the event actually arrives and the promise is finally fulfilled, it becomes one of the most joy filled moments of our lives and we want others to be brought into that joy.

That is how I view the joy of the shepherds on that first Christmas night. These were Jews who had been told of the promised Messiah. Their people had been waiting for thousands of years for this event. Then God’s own messengers, His angels, came and told them that the promise was being fulfilled. Imagine the joy that must have given. They must have been awestruck as they gazed into the manger and realized this was the moment when God fulfilled His long anticipated promise.

It is no wonder that they could not contain their joy and had to tell everyone all that they had seen! You and I have the same calling. Every day God invites us to the side of the manger, to the reality that God did take on flesh, and kept His promise to us. If that doesn’t fill us with overwhelming joy then I don’t know what will. Now how will we respond? Will we keep our joy contained or will we proclaim all that God has done for us? The answer is up to you. My prayer is that joy would flow from us with every breath we have.

*Heavenly Father, as You filled the hearts of the shepherds with uncontainable joy, fill our hearts with the joy that the Messiah has come, and through His blood we are saved. Amen.*

Pastor Ben

**Saturday, December 23**  
**“God’s Promises...to Simeon”**



Luke 2:28-32

Simeon knew God in his heart, mind and soul and was comforted by the promise made to him by God. The promise was that Simeon would not die until he saw the Messiah. The knowledge of that gave Simeon comfort. When he was an old man the Holy Spirit guided him to the temple where Mary and Joseph brought the baby Jesus to be dedicated. Simeon took baby Jesus in his arms and declared Him to be the Messiah.

God followed through on His promise as He always does. This account in Luke 2:28-32 is the only place where Simeon is mentioned, but what a big role he had in our Christian history!

On June 1, 2014, my life was changed forever. My beloved husband, Mike, died and went to heaven to be with God. How do I know he is in Heaven? Because my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for all of our sins. His sacrifice means that all believers will join Him in heaven. God has promised this unmatched gift to each and every person on earth. Even though my loss is great I am comforted by the knowledge that Mike truly worshipped God and thus will be there to meet me when my time comes.

We must remember that with life there are no guarantees. God does not promise there will be no sorrow or pain. Instead He is with us during the hard times and puts people in our life that stand in for Him and give us consolation and hope. I cannot put into words the love and caring I felt from this church when Mike died.

*Dear God, our great comforter, thank you for being the constant support and love in our lives. Thank you for our Faith Lutheran community and the love and support we receive from each other. We pray that many others will be touched by the Holy Spirit and join our Christian family in the coming year. Please be with us during this Advent season and all our remaining days. Amen.*

Donna Kaser

**Christmas Eve, December 24**  
**“God’s Promises...to Gentiles”**



Galatians 3:14

Thanksgiving at my mother’s house had many traditions. For most of my childhood, the extended family all came to Mom’s and each one brought something to eat. We knew what was coming because it was the same tradition every year. Everyone dressed up and dinner was served on the best china. There were tables borrowed from the church so we could all sit together. The rules were clear on who sat at which table, what was going to be served, who was bringing which dish and when the turkey would appear. We prayed the same prayer and each of us said what we were thankful to have before we ate.

Then one year, we learned that a man who worked for my dad was going to be alone on the holiday. He was invited to join the family for the holiday. Everything had to change a bit to make space for someone different. He did not know our traditions; he was not a relative; and he did not dress in his best clothes. He did not have a designated part of the meal to bring nor a pre-assigned place at the table. He didn’t even know the prayer! But when it was his turn, he told us he was thankful to have a place at our table. We happily made room for this man for many years and created new traditions to make him part of our family.

As Christians, we struggle with similar things. God’s promise to Abraham was not just for Abraham and his family but for all of us. The Galatians were like us; focusing on the rules rather than welcoming in those new members of faith. These new members, who don’t understand our traditions, sit differently in our pews, don’t dress like we do, have an accent, or come from a background we don’t understand, are to be welcomed into our fellowship. The gift of God’s grace is for all of us. Jesus came to remove the weight of the law and replace it with grace. There is enough room at the table for all believers.

*Thank you Lord, for the gift of grace and the promise of salvation. I pray that I can open my heart and make room at the table for those who are different than me. Help me to share Your promise with others. Amen.*

Robin Wagstrom-Arnone

**Christmas Day, December 25**  
**“God’s Promises...to Us”**



Galatians 3:22

I haven't spent any time with kids in a school setting or playground for many years, but I still remember the old line, "I promise...cross my heart and hope to die." Have you heard that old expression? Did you ever use it? More importantly – did you ever stop to think about what it means?

When we use that expression we're making a promise to do something and saying that if we don't do it we hope that we'll die. Now that's a pretty serious promise, if we really mean it. But most of the time I don't think the person making that promise really stops and thinks about it. It's just an expression we use for emphasis.

But as we think about the Bible reading for today, we're reminded that God keeps His promises. As you think about all of the promises we've heard in these devotions throughout Advent it should be obvious God doesn't break His promises. God has kept every promise He ever made!

But to give us proof that He has kept and will keep ALL of His promises God said, "I'll go to the cross and I *will* die." Even as we celebrate Christmas and sing all the joyous songs and open all the gifts, as Christians our minds always see what's coming – Good Friday! God made a promise that all who believe will be saved, but the promise was kept with a tremendous price – Jesus' death!

But we can't end a Christmas devotion with Good Friday. Be assured as you celebrate Christmas today, that not only did Jesus die for us, He also rose from the dead and gives us victory over death! And so the liturgical circle continues. From "Merry Christmas" we proceed to an even more joyous line, "He is risen! He is risen indeed!"

*Jesus, we give thanks to You that You humbled Yourself and became one of us. As we celebrate Your birthday today, may we realize that You are the fulfillment of all of the Father's promises to us and that we have eternal life through our faith in You. Amen.*

Lyle Heggemeier