

A Daily Advent Study

Christmas with
Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking



Compiled by FAAST

A Weekly Human Trafficking Advent Daily Devotional Guide

It may seem odd to have an Advent devotional that focuses on human trafficking. Many times, when we focus on human trafficking, we focus on the horror and tragedy that those with lived experiences and survivors have suffered. And yes, those stories must be told. But we also need to look to the after. After they have been able to leave their situation and look to the future they have. To the restoration that many survivors find. To the hope, peace, joy, and love they can find in Jesus Christ. To the power of redemption that those working with survivors see and experience. If we don't look for the positives, then it is easy to get discouraged and start to believe there is no way to end this tragedy, giving up hope. But we know this is wrong. We know there is hope through Jesus Christ, not just for us, but for every person. For the trafficked and the trafficker. For the after-care worker and the buyer. It is our prayer that by using this guide, you will find hope, not just for you but for all individuals, and share it with others.

This advent guide will look at four topics: hope, peace, joy, and love, and will be highlighted with a story from survivors of trafficking on how they found them in Jesus Christ.

Our Hope

FAAST hopes that this guide will bring you closer to Christ during this Advent season. We desire that you will have a better understanding of what Christ's birth meant for each one of us. We hope that you will find encouragement from the stories that we can suffer through tragedy and hardship but, through Jesus Christ, we can become stronger. We hope that you learn more about God's restoring work for each of us through survivors of trafficking. And we hope that this will serve as a start for discussion for your church and your family.

Week 1 – Hope

At 14, Amy was trafficked from the United States into Mexico. Over the next five years, she endured violence, isolation, and the erasure of her identity. At 19, desperate for a way out, Amy found a brief moment to reach out to her mother. Her mother, overwhelmed but determined, turned to The Salvation Army's Santa Clarita Corps in Southern California. What followed was a quiet, coordinated effort involving Salvation Army staff in the U.S. and Mexico, the U.S. Embassy, and anti-trafficking specialists. Amy's mother flew to Mexico, and with temporary travel documents secured, the two were reunited and returned to Los Angeles. Today, she is safe, supported, and making progress on her own terms.*

*For the full story, visit the FFAST Sunday Advent Guide. We are thankful to The Salvation Army World Service Office for sharing this story of hope with us. You can learn more about SIL and its anti-trafficking work on its [website](#). *Name changed to protect the survivor's identity.*

*I*ntroduction:

Hope is defined as “to cherish a desire with anticipation: to want something to happen or be true.” We have all experienced hope at different times in our lives. It is vital to help us get through those difficult periods, knowing that there will be an end to that difficulty. The hope that Jesus provides for us, though, is a different hope, a more fulfilling hope. A hope that has us looking forward to a day when we will be united with Christ. In the following Bible passages, we see the hope the coming of Christ brought to all people, including each one of us. A future full of truth and grace. On those more difficult days, the knowledge that Jesus has granted us such grace gives us hope. It is the ultimate hope. Some days it may be harder to fight for this hope than others, but we need to fight for that hope when others cannot do it themselves.

Day 1: Isaiah 11:1-10

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the Lord. And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also, righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist. And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also, the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

The leader described by Isaiah is one that we all hope for. He is one who will not just judge based on what he sees or hears, but by the truth of the situation for all people with righteousness and faithfulness. How will he do that? Because the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him. Through this, He will have discernment thanks to the spirit of wisdom and understanding that will guide Him. He will have the spirit of counsel and strength to attend Him. He will have the spirit of knowledge, and most importantly, He will have the fear of the Lord. Those who have been wronged need not fear, but those who harmed others should. They will not be saved because they have money or they can speak elegantly. No, this Branch will see through everything to the truth of the situation. It is with righteousness and fairness that He will care for the poor and afflicted. Who are the poor and the afflicted? The poor are those who have less economically. The afflicted is anyone who suffers from physical or mental pain. This includes those who have suffered trauma, including those who have been victims of human trafficking. This Branch will bring us a just society where those who believe in Him, even those who have endured much on this earth, will find justice, healing, and restoration. The end of the passage shows us what it will be like when His reign comes, and how the church will look. Predator and prey will be no more, and all will worship together in harmony.

*P*ayer:

Lord, Isaiah presents us with a future that we all hope for. A future that is just and led by someone who is faithful and righteous. A place where there is restoration and healing, where predator can be with prey and there be no fear. This future can only be accomplished through you, who is from the stem of Jesse. On this first day of Advent, as we focus on your birth, the fulfillment of prophecies, and the future it brings us, we pray for those who are poor and afflicted, those who are hurt and suffering, that they realize that your coming will one day lead to the future that Isaiah described, and that they come to you so they can experience all of this with us.

Day 2: Romans 15:12-13

"Again, Isaiah says, "There shall come the root of Jesse, and He who arises to rule over the gentiles, in Him shall the gentiles hope." Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

By using a portion of Isaiah's words, the passage we looked at yesterday, Paul is reminding the readers of the entire section. Why would he need to do that? Because there is disunity in the church in Rome. Some Jewish believers felt that they were superior to the Gentile converts because they were of Abraham's lineage. Paul tells them that even Isaiah said that Christ's coming and rules were for all believers, not just the Jews, and all will hope in Him. How does this apply to us today? Have you been a Christian most of your life, and consider yourself more deserving than the recent convert Christian with a

more questionable background? Maybe they were a prostitute. Maybe they acknowledge that they used to frequently purchase sex. Maybe they admit that they controlled and sold prostitutes. It does not matter a person's past when it comes to Jesus. He can bring healing and restoration to all. Paul shows us this, as he himself tried to kill Christians. Yet, Paul found forgiveness and healing from the harm he did, and he was united with the apostles, just as the predator lies with the prey in yesterday's passage. Jew, Gentile, trafficker, purchaser, and victim can all find hope, and restoration, in Christ. And it is through God, the joy and peace that we find in believing in Him, that we can overflow with hope thanks to the Holy Spirit.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we thank you that you have given us your joy and peace that results in an overflowing hope that one day we will be restored with you. Help us not to think we are better than any other believer, especially given their past. Let all individuals, no matter what they have done or what they have been through, come to you so that they, too, can have the hope of peace that you give.

Day 3: Jeremiah 23:4-6

"I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell in security; And this is His name by which He will be called, 'The Lord our righteousness.'"

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

In the Old Testament, kings were often alluded to as shepherds. This makes sense as kings, just like shepherds cared for their flock, were to care for their people, provide them food, security, peace, protection, and searched for those who went astray. However, the kings of Judah and Israel were not always good shepherds to their people. Instead of caring for them, they saw inequity, inequality, and oppression reign, and focused on serving themselves instead of others. In the preceding three verses, the Lord tells them that they will see their people scattered across the nations. Yet, he provides these people with hope. There will come a day when He will raise up new shepherds (kings/leaders) for his people. They will care for their people, tending them so they will not have to fear anymore. And then a day will come when the Lord's promise to David will be fulfilled, and a king will reign. This king will act wisely, do justice and righteousness in the land, and the people will live there securely and safely. This hope is not just for the people of Judah who were scattered and exiled, but it is for people today as well. Countries, places of employment, and society in general suffer from inequity, inequality, and oppression due to each of us, and especially those who are in power over others, seeking our own good instead of helping others. People experiencing inequity, inequality, and oppression are vulnerable to human trafficking. Yet, God's promise to David will one day be completely fulfilled. Jesus, our Messiah, will reign as king in righteousness, justice, and wisdom. We all hope and long for the day when we can live in peace and safety, not worrying about the greed and selfishness of others. Until that day, we can see glimpses of it happening as His people work to to restore equality, and end inequity and oppression. (See

our Sunday Advent Devotional Story of Peace for a real-world example of this playing out today by one of our Affiliate Partners.)

*P*ayer:

Lord, just like the evil kings of Judah, we help perpetuate inequality, inequity, and oppression through our words and actions, despite our experiencing these evils as well. Forgive us and help us seek to act wisely, do justice, and be righteous with everyone we interact with. We hope for the day when each one of us, no matter the oppression and harm we have suffered, will dwell in Your land safely and securely with Jesus, the righteous branch, as our king.

Day 4: Malachi 3:1-6

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of Hosts. “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver; and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in the former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,” says the Lord of Hosts. “For I, the Lord, do not change, therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

The last phrase of the Lord gives us all hope: “For I, the Lord, do not change, therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” Often, there seems to be a disconnect between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. One is full of vengeance and wrath, while the other bestows mercy and grace. Yet, we are told here that God does not change; therefore, he has always been vengeful or he has always been faithful and merciful. Or, as we see here, both are true. But it is not some random and arbitrary person or group to whom he displays his vengeance or grace. No. It is because of a person’s disregard of God’s commands that He displays His wrath. What does God tell us he wants us to do? Love God and love others (Matthew 22:37-39, Mark 12:30-31, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18). The list of people that the Lord of Hosts will be a witness against are those who are not loving God (sorcerers and those who swear falsely) and those who are not loving others (the rest of the list.) Those who believe, who trust in God, will find that their sins are purified and will be cleansed thanks to the Lord’s coming. The sending His son to purify us show that He has not changed, while displaying His grace and mercy for us. Those who have suffered, who have endured oppression, the widow and the orphan, and the refugee, have hope in this consistency of God, that His grace and mercy will extend to them despite what they have suffered. So we too can have this hope.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we are grateful that you do not change. You have shown us who will suffer your vengeance and who will receive your grace and mercy. Help us to remember that it is those who defy your commandments who will endure your judgment, but you gave us your Son to purify our sins, so that we can experience your grace and mercy. Lord, we ask that those who are oppressed, the widow, the orphan, the refugee, come to know your grace, that despite all that has happened to them, you have cleansed them of their sins. They just need to believe in you.

Day 5: Isaiah 40:9-11

“Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; Lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” Behold, the Lord God will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. Like a shepherd, He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

In chapter 39 of Isaiah, he warns them that they will suffer exile, where they will endure pain, hard labor, and hurt. But the next chapter envisions a time after the exile is over, when the people will be returning to Jerusalem. What does the Lord declare from the beginning of the chapter that those returning will need? Comfort. By the time we get to verse 9, part of that comfort they are to receive is for people to enthusiastically share the good news in a way that all will hear and encourage them that the Lord is coming. And He is not just coming, but He is coming to save. The phrase “His arm ruling for Him” is a synonym for His power to save. The reward and recompense that travel with him and before him are the people whom He is restoring to their rightful place. He will tend to them with the care a shepherd shows his flock. As discussed in Day’s 3 meditation, saying the Lord would be like a shepherd would show that he would provide for all the needs, care, and security of his people. The hope that survivors of trafficking must feel reading this is probably comparable to those who faced the exile. To know that while they may be in severe hardship now, or in the future, there will come a day when the Lord will save them. And He will not just rescue them from their situation, but he will right the wrongs they have suffered, and take care of every one of their needs. It will be a day when they will have true rest. This is a hope we can all long for.

*P*ayer:

Lord, as your people, help us to be your messengers proclaiming your good news for all to hear. Give us the words to say and help us not be afraid in speaking out that one day you will be with us again. That you will come to save with might, and you will bring restoration and care to all your people. Lord, we ask that this news gives hope to those who are suffering and enduring pain right now. Help them to cling on to you and the hope that you give us.

Day 6: Revelation 21:3-4

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

We are in the season of Advent, focused on what Jesus’s coming and birth means for each one of us. But there is an anticipated second advent that we are anticipating. Jesus’s final coming, the one that John describes here. Consider what it means when it says “and God Himself will be among them.” God cannot be in the presence of sin. For God himself to be among us, our sins will be completely removed. With the total removal of sin, death no longer reigns. Both in the physical sense, as well as the metaphorical sense of our spiritual deaths, for each time we sin we have separated ourselves from God. But there will come a day when it cannot touch us because God is among us. With the removal of death, especially the spiritual death we experience when we sin, we will no longer experience the pain and suffering from that sin. That also means that there will be no pain or suffering from the sins that other people committed that affected us. Since God is among us, it means that we will experience complete restoration and healing from both the sins we have committed and those committed against us. The pain, trauma, and hurt that a survivor of human trafficking has experienced are vast, and the hope of the second advent and what it means cannot come soon enough. For them, or for us.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we long for the second advent. We are amazed at what it means that You will be among us. That we will be clean and purified. That death, both physical and spiritual, will no longer exist. Because of this, you will be able to heal us and bring us restoration so we can be with you. We thank you for the care that you show to us now, and will show us in the future.

Day 7: Luke 1:46-55

“And Mary said: “My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him. He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; And sent away the rich empty-handed. He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and His descendants forever.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Mary's song is beautiful in so many different ways. In this devotion, we will focus on the last part of her song, beginning with "He has done mighty deeds with His arm." She declares with that phrase that God has shown His strength. His strength is not shown by empowering the strongest ruler or country. No. He shows His strength by deposing the rulers who become too haughty and do not care for their people. He sends those who are rich away. Instead, He uses His strength to care for those in need. Those who have been humble are lifted up, like Mary. But there is a warning here as well: they cannot become proud of their elevation; otherwise, they will be brought down like those before them. The same is true for those who were poor and hungry, but now have acquired wealth. They need to be generous and caring to others, otherwise, they will lose what they have gained. Mary realizes that she could easily become haughty and proud. Yet, she declares herself God's servant. She reminds herself that God has always helped His people, including Abraham and his descendants. Reminding herself of all that He has done for those who were in need provides her, and those who have been victims of human trafficking, with hope. He will not leave them in their current state. There will come a time when they will be lifted up, when they will be full, and those who hurt them are no longer in their roles of authority. We all have been hurt by others, so we all have an assured hope in God that this day will come.

*P*ayer:

Lord, our hope is in the day when all those who have been humble are elevated, when all those who are hungry are fed. A day when your true justice will reign and your promises fulfilled. Until that time comes, we ask that we be like Mary, humble in spirit, relying on your promises, and hopeful for Your coming.

Week 2 – Peace

Community programs raise awareness around human trafficking risks in South Asia. Language and socioeconomic disparities leave them more vulnerable to exploitation, and these same factors isolate them from systems of reporting and response. Rural communities in South Asia are one such hotbed of trafficking activity, where low daily wages, social media lures and limited information in local languages leaves thousands of people at greater risk. Beginning in March 2024, SIL worked closely alongside a local partner in this region to organize a series of interactive activities in local tea gardens. Using three widely spoken community languages, these day camps connected people to trafficking prevention information in a way they could easily understand. A member of a local NGO also shared real world examples of the different ways people are trafficked and simple steps individuals can take to protect themselves. Armed with this new information, one person stated, "I am truly grateful for this program and the information shared today. It has opened our eyes to the dangers of human trafficking and given us the knowledge we need to protect our community. Thank you for bringing this to us."

We are thankful to our Affiliate Partner SIL for sharing this story of peace with us. You can learn more about SIL and their anti-trafficking work on their [website](#).

*I*ntroduction:

When a person, or even an entire community, face vulnerabilities and inequalities that make them susceptible to human trafficking, it is hard to feel peace. Socioeconomic and language disparities makes exploitation easier to happen, as well as keeps them isolated from any reporting and response systems. However, as our story of peace shows this week, when people and organizations find ways to address these disparities and vulnerabilities, individuals and communities can begin to find peace and safety, instead of fear. Then there will come a day, as Isaiah foretells, when all peoples, no matter their socioeconomic or language disparities, will stream to the house of God. There they will find peace and security for he will judge righteously and justly, and provide for His people. While God's peace will be complete, we can help usher in His peace, by helping to work to remove vulnerabilities, like socioeconomic and language disparities, from a community or person's life to help make them less likely to be a victim of human trafficking.

Day 8: Isaiah 2:1-5

"The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into

pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war. Come, house of Jacob, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Isaiah offers an invitation to the people of Israel to go to God, learn his ways, walk in His paths, and in His light. When we learn His ways and walk in His path, we truly understand His law, which ensures His justice. We understand that His justice is not just deciding between good and bad, but God’s justice is a restoration to the right order that He instilled in the Garden of Eden. A place where peace will reign, and the tools that were once used to harm others will no longer be needed and will be abolished. Instead, these tools will be transformed to help provide for the people. Nations and people will not need to fear oppression and harm. Those who suffer from hunger, and are therefore vulnerable to human trafficking, will find that vulnerability taken away. Those who fear being hurt or harmed by others will no longer suffer. While we still await the complete fulfillment of peace and shalom that is spoken of here, Isaiah tells the people that we help usher in, and are advocates for this peace when we walk in God’s ways, path, and light. Let us all accept this invitation given by Isaiah.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we long for the day when your house is established on the highest mountain, ruling over all, providing peace to all. We look forward to the day when all elements of harm and hurt are no longer desired, and they are transformed to be used for good and peace. We know that if we walk in Your ways, light, and path that we help to bring forward this peace to us, and those around us. Help us accept this invitation from Isaiah so that we may be Your shining light to others, and that they will also accept his invitation.

Day 9: Zephaniah 3:14-20

We are thankful to Bryan Varenkamp of SIL for writing today’s meditation for us.

“Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away His judgments against you, He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you will fear disaster no more. In that day it will be said to Jerusalem; “Do not be afraid, O Zion; do not let your hands fall limp. The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. I will weather those who grieve about the appointed feasts - they came from you, O Zion; the reproach of exile is a burden on them. Behold, I am going to deal at that time with all your oppressors, I will save the lame, and gather the outcast, and I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, even at the time when I gather you together; Indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, “ says the Lord.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Today's passage from Zephaniah is full of joy, celebration, peace, and hope. You can almost hear the singing and shouts of praise rising up from a place of restoration. The prophet writes to a people who have known oppression. Now God offers mercy, healing, and the promise of his presence. He has taken away all fear and replaced it with gladness and peace.

Advent is not only a time to reflect on Christ's birth, but also His coming reign of justice and hope. For survivors of human trafficking—those who have lived in the shadow of fear, exploitation, and abandonment—God promises freedom instead of oppression, honor instead of shame. God's presence not only comforts, but also gives hope. He intervenes for the silenced, abused, or forgotten. God rebuilds and restores.

This is the hope Advent holds out to all of us, but especially to those wounded by injustice. The God who came as a child into a broken world is the same God who takes great delight in them and in us, the same God who rejoices over them and over us with singing. What a startling truth: our God sings over the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Ps 34:18).

As we expectantly await the fullness of Christ's kingdom, may we also become His hands and voices. Whether through advocacy, shelter, language support, or prayer, let us help survivors move from a place of fear and shame to a place of peace and honor.

*P*ayer:

Lord God of restoration, in this Advent season of waiting and hope, we cling to your promise in Zephaniah that you are near and mighty to save. Sing over those who have suffered the wounds of trafficking, and surround them with safety, dignity, and peace. Cast out fear with the knowledge of your presence. Help us to be instruments of your peace and justice, reminding them of your light in their darkest moments. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Day 10: Zechariah 6:12-13

"Then say to him, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.'"

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Zechariah's prophecy tells of a day when the person who sits on the throne will be both King and Priest. Prior to this, these two roles had been strictly separate. Priests came from the Levitic line, and kings from the Davidic line. Kings who performed priestly acts were punished, as King Uzziah was when he lit

incense in the temple and was struck with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26). Zechariah tells us there will come a day when the person who sits on His throne will be both priest and king. The ruler will embody both roles perfectly and completely. Peace will reign between the two roles, and there will be no division. They will rule with righteousness and justice. How many people have been hurt by those in leadership? We have seen in the past the leadership of the church misuse scripture to justify slavery and abuse. Even today, we sadly see individuals in church leadership use the trust in their position to coerce people to do things against their will, including becoming victims of labor or sex trafficking. The same is true with government leadership. Many have favored laws that benefit them. Those who have the money to help elect them into office, disregard the poor and the vulnerable, and focus on growing their bank accounts and businesses. And sadly, many have abused their position as well to abuse and coerce individuals to do things they do not want to do. Yet, one day this prophecy will come true and these leaders will no longer have power. We know that this person whom Zechariah speaks of is Jesus, and we long for the total fulfillment of this prophecy and the peace it provides for each one of us.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we know that men are fallible and sinful, including those who are in leadership positions. We ask that both our church leadership and government officials at all levels care for the vulnerable, poor, and oppressed instead of themselves and those wealthy enough to help them stay in office. We realize that we also fail when we are in positions of authority. Help us, when we are in positions of authority, to lead justly and righteously. We know that we can look to you for guidance and as an example of how to lead. Help us turn to you so we can lead as you want us to lead. We know you are our king and our priest, and we long for the day when your rule is final and your peace reigns.

Day 11: Matthew 2:1-12

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.'" When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my People Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from the exact time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way."

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

This passage typically gets placed in the week dedicated to understanding the joy of Advent, and for good reason. Even before they saw Jesus, when they found the place he was at, they “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” They were overflowing with joy at finding Christ. But did you notice the peace they were provided? One has to wonder how they felt about their meeting with Herod. Did they believe that he truly wanted to meet and worship the child, too, or did they think he may have nefarious intentions? Before the dream, were they considering speaking to Herod, or maybe traveling back through Jerusalem, but trying to avoid Herod finding them? We don’t know. What we do know is that God gave them peace in His protection of them through the dream. They did not have to fear Herod or his men harming them or Jesus. This is not the first time we have seen people finding peace in knowing that God was with them and ultimately protecting them. Despite being enslaved in Egypt, Joseph found peace in knowing God was with him and would protect him. The same is true with Daniel while being enslaved in Babylon. Today, those who are enslaved, trafficked, or oppressed can know that God is with them, and He will, and can, provide them peace. When we trust in God, we know that God is always with us, that he will always protect us, and that should give us peace.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we know that you are with us at all times, no matter the circumstances we face. And because you are with us, we can find peace in you despite what is happening to us. Whether we are in pain, suffering, enduring trauma, or any other hardship, we ask that you help us feel your presence and give us peace that you have, continue to do so, and will continue to protect us.

Day 12: Jeremiah 33:14-17

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the Lord is our righteousness.” For thus says the Lord, “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

God remembers His promises to His people, as Jeremiah states here. His fulfillment of this promise began when Jesus was born to Mary, as He is the righteous Branch of David. In His time on earth, we saw him begin to fulfill the promise of executing justice and righteousness. He showed God’s true justice in giving forgiveness and peace to the adulterous woman the Pharisees brought to him for judgment and condemnation. He showed true righteousness when He healed the man on the Sabbath, bringing him peace and hope of a better future. Of course, He displayed the ultimate show of what God’s justice and righteousness are by dying on the cross as an atonement for our sins despite being sinless himself. Just

as those who Jesus physically interacted with received peace and comfort, people who come to know Jesus today can find the same peace and comfort. Just as Jesus gave peace and hope to the people He healed, He can give peace to survivors of trafficking by healing their hurts and trauma from their experiences. And just as the adulterous woman was forgiven of her sins, traffickers can find peace in Jesus, knowing that He will and does forgive them of their sins. The same is true for us as well. And as followers of Christ, we can help all these individuals find the peace that Jesus offers by reflecting His justice and righteousness the best we can.

*P*ayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to earth and giving us tangible examples of your justice and righteousness, and the peace that they can give. Please help us exemplify your justice and righteousness to those around us. We know that many are hurting physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Use us to show them Your peace.

Day 13: Micah 5:2-5a

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity. Therefore, He will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren will return to the sons of Israel. And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will remain, because at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth. This One will be our peace.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Most times, especially during Advent, we focus on these verses and ignore the two verses on either side of this prophecy. The verses on either side speak of the impending defeat of the Israelites. It may seem odd to have a prophecy about the Prince of Peace amidst the sorrow and suffering that Micah warns of, but what better time to know the Prince of Peace to counter the pain and hurt? For it is when one is in the midst of darkness that they can truly understand the promise and hope of what the Prince of Peace gives and provides. He will not be just a military ruler who will bring peace to the land, but He will be a shepherd who will care for all aspects of His flock, ensuring their peace in every aspect of life, including: safety, health, food, and circumstances. He will install Shalom. So when we are in the midst of suffering, whether enduring as a victim of human trafficking, unsure where our next meal will come from, or a health concern, know that the Prince of Peace reigns, and we will find shalom in Him.

*P*ayer:

Lord, you are our Prince of Peace. Help us to remember that when we are in the midst of suffering, and provide us with your peace. We ask that when we see those suffering around us, we can be a conduit of your peace. Let us help them and care for them in a way that shows your love.

Day 14: Luke 1:67-79

“And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy spirit, and prophesied, saying: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant - as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old - salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, with which the sunrise from on high will visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Zechariah's psalm is a great reminder that God keeps His covenants and fulfills His promises. He kept His covenant with Abraham and David. He fulfilled His promises to His people, and the words spoken by the Old Testament prophets. And He will keep His promise to John, who would be like Elijah, a voice of one crying in the wilderness, preparing the way for Jesus. He will proclaim that true salvation comes through the forgiveness of sins thanks to God's mercy. His mercy will shine down on us, leading us out of the darkness of shadow and death, away from our sinful nature. Instead this light, a light that shines on us at all times, will guide us into peace. Not just any peace, but His peace. A peace that provides shalom, including healing and restoration. No matter the sins you have committed, or that have been committed against you, God promises to lead us to peace through His salvation and mercy. Just as He kept His promises and covenants to Adam, Abraham, David, Zechariah, and John, He will keep His promises to us as well.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we thank you that you remember your covenant and promises, and that you do fulfill them. We are thankful that it is your mercy that forgives our sins and is our salvation. You promised to shine your mercy at all times, and while we know that you do, we fail to recognize it at all times. Help us to always be cognizant of your mercy and salvation. Let us follow the light that will lead us to Shalom.

Week 3 – Joy

*Healing isn't linear. It doesn't happen overnight. But when surrounded by care, trust, and practical support, it can transform lives. That's exactly what happened for Althea (not her real name), a survivor of **Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC)** from Region 3 in the Philippines. Althea became part of WHI's HILOM sessions—trauma-informed healing workshops designed for survivors like her. Over time, she began to speak more freely and smile more often. Each session gently opened a door to healing, and her progress even showed measurable improvement through trauma assessments. In 2023 and 2024, Althea and her family participated in special bonding events, including family strengthening activities designed to restore trust and connection. For a family shaken by trauma, these moments brought laughter, togetherness, and healing. Because every child deserves the chance to heal, grow, and thrive.*

To read the full story, please see the FFAST Advent Sunday Guide. We are thankful to Mariel Aira Mateo of World Hope International for sharing this story of joy with us. If you want to learn more about World Hope International and their work fighting human trafficking visit www.worldhope.org.

*I*ntroduction:

One may think that happiness and joy are similar things, as they are synonyms. Happiness, however, is a reaction to external circumstances and is often temporary. Joy, or at least Biblical joy, is internal and something that can be cultivated. One's joy grows as their contentment and relationship with God grow. It can have an outward manifestation, as we see in the Bible passage below, because God's joy will radiate from His people. It is contagious to others, as they too, cultivate God's joy and experience his goodness and redemption. We also see this in our story of joy from a survivor, that as the entire family experienced God's healing and restoration, they were able to express their joy that they didn't have before.

Day 15: Isaiah 52:7-9

"How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!' Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices, they shout joyfully together; for they will see with their own eyes when the Lord restores Zion. Break forth, shout joyfully together, you waste places of Jerusalem; For the Lord has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem."

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

The temple was believed by the Jews to be where God resided. Once the temple, as well as Jerusalem, were destroyed, it was believed that God had abandoned them. But He had not. He was with them in their exile, and there would come a day when, just as He rescued His people from slavery in Egypt, they would be freed from exile in Assyria. His messengers would bring the good news that God still reigns. With His reign comes salvation and peace. This news will be shouted joyfully for all to hear from the

mountaintops, and the watchmen will be joyous when they hear the news. The waste places will shout joyfully together, for they will have redemption and comfort. The term waste places is not just speaking about those individuals who are still living in a ruined and destroyed city, but it is speaking about those who are now considered unclean and in need of purification. They will shout in joy together because they will find salvation, purification, redemption, and comfort in God's reign. If we were to go back to verse six, though, we see the phrase "in that day." The amazing thing about that phrase is that when it is used, it does not mean just for the people who were originally being addressed. The phrase actually has a timelessness to it, meaning it can, and should be applied to each day: past, present, and future. Therefore, when David joyfully danced before the Ark of the Covenant, bringing it into the city of Jerusalem was that day. John leapt in joy when the Messiah was near; that was that day. It is today, when someone finds salvation in Jesus, whether they be enslaved, a victim of trafficking, or a trafficker. When we find Jesus, we, too, should be like the messengers announcing with joy the peace, salvation, comfort, and redemption we find in Him.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we are joyful that you reign and you have provided us with salvation through sending your son down to us. Just as David and John were joyful in their day, celebrating you and your saving nature, let us be joyful as well. Let us be the messengers shouting from the mountaintops the good news of your salvation that brings comfort and redemption to all people. Let those we interact with see and hear the good news we proclaim, so that they, too, shall know your name in that day, and they can find joy in your redemption and salvation.

Day 16: Isaiah 12:2-6

"Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and song and He has become my salvation.' Therefore, you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation. And in that day you will say, "Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples; make them remember that His name is exalted." Praise the Lord in song, for He has done excellent things; let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. "

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

We do not just find salvation in God, but He is our salvation. He has proven time and again that He will save His people, and Isaiah reminds the Israelites of this with verse two. The words He says here are almost exactly the words the people sang after crossing the Red Sea with the Egyptians in pursuit of them. Just as God saved His people from Egypt with physical water, drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea, He saves us with the metaphorical well of salvation. This well provides life-giving water, and it never runs dry. Our response to God's salvation is to be one of trust. Our trust is in Him, and we no longer need to be afraid, for He provides us strength. We are to make His saving work known to all the people. Not only does it remind us of His salvation and His care for His people, but it also provides encouragement and strength to others. For those trapped in slavery right now, there can be encouragement that He has and will continue to save people from physical enslavement. And for us, it helps to encourage us to be

strong as we wrestle with being spiritually enslaved to sin. His salvation from these things should cause us joy and be sung about around the earth.

*P*ayer:

Lord, you are our salvation. Just as you saved the Israelites from Egypt, you save us, and the life-giving water from that well never runs dry. It is open to all people to come and drink freely from. Let us trust in you at all times, finding our strength in you. Knowing that you have saved people from literal enslavement before, as well as the spiritual enslavement of sin, and you will continue to do so. It is in Your saving mercy that we find freedom. Let us speak about your good works, and sing joyfully about your good works so others may know.

Day 17: Habakkuk 3:17-19

“Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds’ feet, and makes me walk on my high places.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Why would anyone rejoice in the situation that Habakkuk describes? There is no food, and nothing is being produced for food. There is nothing to harvest. The trees and the vines are barren. The sheep are unable to return to their pen, where there is safety and food. Instead, they are trapped in the wilderness, where they may become victims of the wild animals. There are no cattle in the stalls. This troubling description could be what he sees at the time, or something that will happen. What it does describe though is the condition of the spiritual state of the Jewish people. They have abandoned God and His word, leading them to commit injustice and oppression, which is all being allowed by the corrupt leaders of Judah. They are not producing spiritual fruit. Due to their spiritual abandonment, they are, or will be, cut off from God’s safety and security, just as the sheep are cut off from the fold. Despite being in the midst of this spiritual wasteland, and all the pains and ills that come with it, Habakkuk will still rejoice in God. Why is he able to do this? Because Habakkuk knows that God is his salvation. He will provide him the strength to bear what is happening around him, and He will give him the ability to walk securely through difficult paths. The entire book of Habakkuk could be written today, and not much would have to be changed. It feels like no matter where, or when, we live, our country is spiritually bankrupt. Oppression and injustice are rampant. Yet, whether we are the ones who are suffering from the oppression and injustice, victims of human trafficking or enslavement, or just lamenting the spiritual barrenness we are in the midst of, we can still rejoice in God, knowing that He is our salvation. He will give us the strength we need, and He will guide us through this difficult path.

*P*ayer:

Lord, it does not seem like much has changed in the world since Habakkuk prophesied and lamented to you. Spiritual barrenness is all around us, oppression and injustice still reign, and those in leadership are at the very least still tolerant of it, if not complicit in creating these situations. Like Habakkuk, we lament the state of things around us, and wonder too, when it will change. Like Habakkuk, we also rejoice in you. We rejoice that you are our salvation. We remember that truly during this Advent season. It is in you that we find strength. It is you who will guide us safely and securely through the difficult paths. Let us remember that and rejoice.

Day 18: Matthew 1:18-25

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.” And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Why is Joseph described as a righteous man? The definition of a righteous person is someone who puts their trust and faith in God, as well as upholds the moral law. Often, for Joseph we focus on his trusting in God, and following the Lord’s commands given to him by the angel in his dream to marry Mary despite her pregnancy. Yet, we see that Matthew called him a righteous man before that. He was called a righteous man for not wanting to disgrace Mary, for wanting to protect her. Joseph most likely knew the Mosaic law and that under that law, Mary should be put to death by stoning. Yet, it was not Joseph’s strict adherence to the Mosaic law that called him a righteous man. No, it was his disregarding it and caring for and protecting Mary that had him called a righteous man. This is not to say one should not try and follow the Mosaic law, as the adherence to the law allows us to draw closer to God and know him better. It is in drawing closer to God, and knowing Him better we will understand His love, care, and protection for other people. Just as God wanted Joseph to not shame Mary, and protect her dignity, He wants us to do the same. Like Joseph, when we learn about a victim of human trafficking’s story, we should not disgrace them for how they ended up in that situation or what they did as a victim. Nor should we shame them in any way for how long they were in that situation. We should be like Joseph, and show care and concern for their situation, trying to protect them from how society may try to disgrace them. In having others show God’s care, compassion, and concern for them, even in protecting their reputation and dignity, they can begin to heal, leading to experiencing God’s joy overflowing in

them. And when we follow God's commands, just as Joseph did here, it brings us closer to Him, and we are more likely to be filled with His joy.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we ask that you help us be like Joseph, a righteous person who has faith in you and cares for your moral law. Help us to protect a person's dignity, just as we would like our dignity protected. Let us show your care and compassion to those around us, especially those who have experienced hurt and trauma at the hands of others. Give us empathy and compassion, Lord. In doing so, let them find healing which will lead to them being filled with your joy. We also ask for you to fill us with Your joy, as we follow your commands and draw closer to you.

Day 19: Luke 2:7-20

"And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them. "

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

It is easy to view where the shepherds were at through our Western lens of what pastures look like: vast, green fields. However, that is not the case here. In the vicinity of Bethlehem, most shepherds would only spend a few weeks outside with their flocks during the night, right after the grain harvest. The rainy season would be over, the grains harvested, and the grasses would be dying off, leaving a dry and dusty land. Even if the shepherds had only been out for one day, they were most likely dusty and dirty as well. When the angels told them of the good news of their savior being born nearby, they went to go see Him. It does not seem that they stopped to get cleaned up or purify themselves in any way. They went to him with at least a day's worth of sweat and dust covering them. It seems counterintuitive to us in some ways. When we are going to see someone of esteemed status, even a child, we want to look our best. But the shepherds didn't care about how clean or presentable they were, they just rushed to find the savior they were told about. We need to be like the shepherds. Instead of waiting to come to Christ

when we feel we are clean enough and worthy of being in his presence, we need to go to him right away, for without him, we will never be clean enough. And without Him, we will never be worthy of being in His presence. It is He who saves us and purifies us, allowing us to be in God's presence. No matter the sin, Jesus can cleanse us of it. Have we purchased sex? He cleanses us. Have we supported policies that helps human trafficking to flourish? He cleanses us. Have we blamed a victim of trafficking for ending up in their situation, or staying there? He cleanses us. Just as the shepherds went away praising and glorifying God when they found Jesus, we too, need to do the same. We need to share with others the joy that Jesus gives us in His truth and His cleansing us of our sins.

*P*ayer:

Lord, as the shepherds came to you physically dirty, we come to you spiritually unclean and in need of purifying. We thank you that you are true to Your word, including the prophecies, coming to earth to be our savior and redeemer. It is through you that we find cleansing from our sins and impurities. And for that we rejoice, and gladly proclaim Your good news to those around us.

Day 20: Galatians 4:4-5

"But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

It can be difficult to understand God's timings and trust in His promises, especially if we are enduring hardships. Sarai's barrenness despite Abram being promised to be the father to a nation, led to her unbelief. The Israelites grumbled constantly as they wandered through the wilderness. The Israelites longed for the Messiah's coming. Even today we often question. How long will I be unemployed? How long will this person hurt me? How long will I be hungry? However, God has a time for everything, including fulfilling His promises, as we see here with the phrase "when the fullness of time came." The fullness of time is His time, not ours. It is when He has determined that His promises will be fulfilled, and it is done in a manner that glorifies Him. He gave Abram and Sarai a child. He led the Israelites out of the wilderness. He sent His son, born of a virgin, under the law, from the line of David when His fullness of time came so that we may be redeemed and be adopted as His children. Therefore, we can be assured that He will keep His promises to us, not on our time table, but on His, and we should be joyous about this knowledge. It allows the person trapped in forced labor or slavery to know that as a child of God, they have true freedom in Him. It allows them to experience joy knowing that their hurts and pains will be healed by God, and they will one day experience full restoration. We too, can find joy in the knowledge of God fulfilling His promises to us.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we have seen time after time that you have fulfilled your promises to Your people. You have given us so many examples in the Bible. Let us hold fast to these examples, and to your promises, including that you sent Your son to earth so that we may be your sons and daughters. We are joyous to be brought into your family, and be known as one of your own.

Day 21: Luke 1:39-45

"Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what has been spoken to her by the Lord."

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

One of the fruits of the Spirit is joy, as we are told in Galatians 6. This joy is not dependent on any external factors, but an internal state that comes from God's presence, that can be outwardly expressed to others. Elizabeth manifests this joy when she prophesies to Mary. Having been filled with the Holy Spirit, she proclaims what Mary has not told her, what Mary has only just found out days ago, that she is pregnant with the savior. She also declares Mary blessed. Not just for finding favor with God for being given this honor, but she is blessed because she is trusting God. Trusting God that instead of experiencing shame because of her situation, she is honored. And she would, not just then, but for generations on, and is still being honored. The joy just radiates from Elizabeth. One can imagine that Mary reflected on these words often in the coming days and months, most likely giving her strength when it got difficult. Just as Elizabeth's joy radiated from her, our joy should be the same. Our joy should be a reflection of our faith in God, radiating out from us, and giving strength to others, especially those in difficult or shameful circumstances.

*P*ayer:

Lord, help us cultivate a spirit of joy like Elizabeth. One that radiates from us. One that gives strength to us, but also those around us, especially those who need it. Help us grow closer to you and as we do so, let our joy in you grow as well.

Week 4 – Love

Nina was trafficked and forced into a life of exploitation, with her young son held captive in a nearby apartment. The traffickers used her son's safety as leverage, forcing her to work day and night under constant threat. But God's provision and love were at work in Nina's life, even when she couldn't see it.

In a miraculous turn of events, she and her son were able to escape and received care at a safe home where they could finally be together. No longer under the control of their captors, they experienced the peace and protection that had been missing for so long. For Nina, it was a powerful reminder of God's love, watching over her and her son, even in the darkest times.

To read the full story, please see the FFAST Advent Sunday Guide. We are thankful for Project Rescue sharing this story of love with us. If you would like to learn more about the work Project Rescue does and its fight against human trafficking visit www.projectrescue.com.

*I*ntroduction:

God is love. To know Him is to know true love. He shows his love for us in so many ways. The biggest way He showed His love for us is by sending His Son, born of a virgin, to be our Savior and redeemer. When we are in fearful situations, we can rely on his faithfulness. Our story below shows us that even in the hardest of circumstances, even if we don't necessarily feel it at all times, God loves us, and He is Immanuel, always with us.

Day 22: Isaiah 7:10-15

"Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, "Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign; Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good."

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Ahaz sounds very devout, doesn't he? His country is being attacked on three sides, He is told that he can ask for any sign from God so he can know that he doesn't have to rely on foreign powers to survive the attacking forces. He responds by saying he will not ask or test the Lord. Yet, in doing this he is showing that he is not trusting God, and so God will give him the very thing he refuses to ask for, a sign. A virgin will give birth and name Him Immanuel. As we know from Matthew, Immanuel means God with us, and this was fulfilled when Jesus was born to Mary. He was divinity with us on earth, our savior, and embodiment of God's love for us. How often, though, are we like Ahaz facing our own dire circumstances? A person trapped in domestic servitude. Suffering in a marriage with financial,

emotional, or physical abuse. Wondering if our job is going to be eliminated. Trusting in God can be difficult when we do not understand how we can get out of the place we are currently in. Yet, Isaiah tells us that we can, and must, trust in God's unfailing love. It is what gives us the confidence to know He will save us from dire situations, and our sins. He fulfills his promises, and He is bigger than any opposition we face. So when we are called to trust in God, unlike Ahaz's response, we can rely on God's love for us to save us.

*P*ayer:

Lord, when we are in difficult situations, we admit that it is easy to respond as Ahaz did. To question you and not trust in you to save us. Yet, we know that you love us, and we can trust in your to save us from bad circumstances, and from our sins. We have seen you fulfill all of your promises, including having a virgin give birth to a son that was named Immanuel. These fulfillment of promises help us to remember your love for us, and that you will save us. We thank you for that.

Day 23: John 3:16-17

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

God wants us to be with him, and since he cannot be in the presence of sin, there needed to be a way for our sins to be atoned for. This is what the advent season is about, God sending His son to earth in order to save us from our sins and give us eternal life to those who believe. That is how much He loves us. Jesus's reason to be on earth was not to judge, or condemn, us, but to save us. His earthly ministry shows this. He spent His time with the outcast, the vulnerable, the poor, the sick. This includes the disciples. Matthew was a tax collector, a profession that was considered corrupt. Four disciples were fishermen, a profession that was considered a lower standing and unclean. He sat and talked with the Samaritan woman, who was an outcast of society. He healed the sick, including on the Sabbath. Individuals who received judgment and condemnation for their life choices, their professions, what others have done to them, or their health, found love, acceptance, and new life with Christ. The same is true today. Jesus may not be physically walking and interacting with us today, but the Holy Spirit is within those who follow Him. We, as His messengers, must show the love and care that Jesus showed to the outcast, vulnerable, poor, and sick that He did. It is through us showing how Jesus loves and cares for them, not caring about what society says about them, that they can begin to truly understand how much God loves them. As they understand and feel God's love for them, they can begin to truly transform their lives. Traffickers can become individuals devoted to protecting people, and trafficking victims can find healing and restoration from the pain and trauma inflicted on them.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we thank you that you love us so much that you sent your Son down to be an atonement for our sins so we can one day have eternal life with you. We ask that you help us display your love fully and completely to those around us, especially the ones that society has discarded. The outcast, the vulnerable, the poor, the sick. Let us be a representation of Your love on earth.

Day 24: 1 John 5:1-5

“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world - our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

When we think of God’s commandments, often the first thing that comes to mind is the Ten Commandments given to Moses. But when Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is, His response is that the greatest commandment is “love the Lord Your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind.” He then continues and says “love your neighbor as you love yourself,” adding that “all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:36-40). We show our love for God by loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. We know that this is not always an easy thing to do. While it may be difficult, it can be done. Consider Peter and Paul in the Bible. They are known for having a contentious relationship, and for good reason. Peter was originally a fisherman, a job that was considered a lower class and unclean. Paul was an educated scholar and a member of the Pharisees. Peter was one of Jesus’s closest friends and disciples. Paul was a vocal opponent to followers of Jesus, to the point of advocating for their imprisonment and death. Both were known to have very strong opinions and personalities. Paul, once converted, is known for disagreeing with Peter, and correcting him on his behavior towards other Christians. Despite all of this, we know that they had genuine love and respect for each other. Peter even called Paul our dear brother (2 Peter 3:15). It was most likely not an easy process for Peter to get to this point, but he did. How? Because he had experienced God’s love fully, and forgiveness is a part of that love. God is not calling us to be best friends, or to agree on every issue, with our fellow believers. He is telling us to not hold grudges against those who have wronged us in any way, and instead show forgiveness to them, as He has shown forgiveness to us in our sins against Him. With His help, and time, we can show those who have hurt us forgiveness and love, and be an example to the world of God’s love and forgiveness.

*P*ayer:

Lord, we know that you have forgiven our sins, and when we truly contemplate it, we are in awe of your ability to forgive us, for we have sinned against you time and again. But we know that it is a part of your love for us. Yet, we have difficulties showing forgiveness and love to those who have wronged us. We know that when a brother or sister in Christ has truly repented of their sins, and have shown they have amended their ways, we are to show them the same love and forgiveness that you have shown us. But we find it difficult. And we know that the only way we can truly show this love and forgiveness is through you working in us. Please help us love those who have hurt us. Let us be an example to those who do not know you of what your love and forgiveness looks like.

Day 25: Luke 2:25-33

“And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, “Now Lord, You are releasing your bond-servant in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, to be a light of revelation to the gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.”

*C*onnecting to human trafficking:

Simeon had spent his life anticipating advent, the coming of Christ. A person he knew would be the “consolation of Israel.” A person who would provide comfort and rest for a nation that was weary and tired from constant oppression and war. A people who were always fighting for a home where they could experience peace and safety. Simeon longed for the day that the person who had been promised by Isaiah would come that would provide them comfort, solace, peace, and rest. He had been promised that before his death, he would meet this person. And God was faithful to His promise. Moved by the Holy Spirit, Simeon went to the temple and found Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. When he held the baby, he realized that Jesus would not just be a consolation to the people of Israel, but also the salvation for all people, including being a “light of revelation for the Gentiles.” Simeon understood that God’s love wasn’t just for a small group of people, but for all people who saw the light of revelation. That those who would find this love would experience comfort, healing, peace, and restoration in it. How many people were impacted by Simeon’s belief, his perseverance, his patience, and his trust in God’s word? We must be like Simeon, faithfully watching and seeking advent. Not just Christmas day, but also the advent of Christ’s return and the fulfillment of every promise God has made to us. Knowing that in His return He is showing His love for us and we, and all who trust in Him, we find comfort, solace, peace, and restoration. For just as Israel needed consolation, we too, need it. Whether we are worn and abused from oppression and trafficking, or just our daily lives, we all need His love and consolation. How many people will we impact in our belief, perseverance, patience, and trust in God’s word and love that the “consolation of Israel” will again return?

*P*ayer:

Lord, we know that it is your love for us that has you keeping your promises and covenants to us. Therefore, we know that one day you will return again. Help us to be like Simeon, actively anticipating your second advent. Help us to be patient, trusting in your work. We ask that our belief and perseverance will be your light to those around us. We know that everyone needs your love, comfort, consolation, restoration, healing, and peace. We pray that our seeking your second advent helps to draw others to you.

Christmas Day – The arrival of Christ

So many times we wonder how we can handle the trials that God has given us. We ponder how we can overcome difficulties that seem to bring us down. The last four weeks have given us that answer though as we have looked at how trafficking survivors have found true hope, peace, joy, and love. We have seen them find hope in rescue, peace in safety and security, joy in restoration of family's, and love that allows them see that they are worthy of all love. Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, who is the reason we can find true hope, peace, joy, and love.

*I*ntroduction:

We have reached the final day of Advent; the reason we have ultimate hope, peace, joy, and love. Because God sent His son to this earth to live among us, as we see in our Scripture today, it means that one day we can fully enjoy His hope, peace, joy, and love. This world can be daunting, but we can face everything because of Jesus Christ. Looking back over the four weeks of Advent, we take encouragement and confidence from those who were not just victims of human trafficking, but through the love, hope, peace, and joy of Jesus Christ, are survivors. They have found restoration on earth, but will find total freedom in heaven, as we hope you will too.

Day 26: Isaiah 9:1-7

“But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. You shall multiply the nation, you shall increase their gladness; they will be glad in your presence as with the gladness of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For you shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, and cloak filled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire. For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.”

onnecting to human trafficking:

Today, we celebrate advent, the arrival of Christ. Isaiah tells us that He is our hope, joy, love, and peace. He is our hope as our Wonderful Counselor. As our Wonderful counselor, He provides hope in his guidance, advice, wisdom, and comfort. Those who were in gloom and anguish have hope that they will be restored, taken out of the darkness and into the light, the comfort of our Wonderful Counselor. He is our joy as our Mighty God. We rejoice that it is his strength that protects us. It is his might that breaks the rod of oppression, freeing us from those who want to oppress and harm us. Most importantly, it is his might that the power of sin has been destroyed. He is love as our Eternal Father. As His sons and daughters, his love is eternal and displayed as He provides, protects, cares, and disciplines us. He ensures we have what we need, and we know that we can trust in Him to provide for and take care of us. He is our peace as our Prince of Peace. His rule ensures peace. Not just a peace that means no more wars or fighting, but a peace that establishes true justice and righteousness. A peace that gives each person, no matter what their experience, true shalom. All of this is possible, did and will happen, because of God, the Lord of hosts, zeal for His people, for us.

rayer:

Lord, we are in awe of your zeal for us. That you care for us so much that you sent your son to earth. We thank you that you did. We thank you that he is our hope as our Wonderful Counselor. Thank you that He is our joy as our Mighty God. Thank you that He is our love as our Eternal Father. And thank you that He is our peace as our Prince of Peace. Thank you that you bring light to the darkness. That your rule will be one of true justice and righteousness. That it will be free of oppression, and it will be one of peace and shalom. We thank you for this advent day, and we look forward to the next when all of this will be fulfilled.

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