

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Monday December 7

Listen

John 1:23

²³ **He said,**

**“I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,
‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said.**

A singer or popular music group will rarely, if ever, put on a show that they do not promote in any way. They wouldn't make all kinds of arrangements for their musical gear and stage equipment to be sent to a rented hall or stadium without telling the community about the show. At the beginning of the gospel, we witness the arrival of the promised king. God doesn't send Jesus without first letting people know. He wants them to be prepared. He wants people to make arrangements to receive this heavenly king. So, he sends a messenger named John the Baptist. John doesn't even use his own words! He quotes the prophet Isaiah in response to the people's questions about who he is. God has been making the announcement for hundreds of years before John the Baptist arrives on the scene. John doesn't have to come up with the script. This was not a surprise announcement. This promise had been in the works for centuries. As the Gospel unfolds this Christmas season, how does this King expect to be received? What does it look like when he arrives...does he fulfill the Old Testament prophecies? And if the Messiah is not John the Baptist, who could it be?

Take **2 minutes** to think about these verses in John. If it helps fill the time, answer these questions:

Why is it important that we hear a word from God before we see God in action?

Three times at the beginning of John's gospel we are told that John is not the Messiah...why do you think that is?

What would you tell someone if you knew that Jesus was going to be in town tomorrow?

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Tuesday December 8

Pray

Psalm 126:5

**⁵ May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.**

God is actively at work in our lives. He is the God of salvation and we are often in need of it. Some of the predicaments we find ourselves in bring us to tears. There was a mother who couldn't understand why her child wandered away from the faith as he grew into his young adult years. She prayed and often she cried. But later, her son remembered and understood how God was listening to those prayers throughout those dark years of his life. "You heard her and did not despise the tears which streamed down and watered the earth in every place where she bowed her head in prayer," (*Confessions, Augustine*). When her son finally returned to the faith and a vibrant relationship with God, she was overjoyed. What she had sown in tears grew into a harvest of rejoicing. We pray to a God who answers prayers. We have faith that he will answer us with kindness because of the love that we see so clearly in Jesus. During this season, we are focused on his coming to us in the manger. This is where all our hope begins. Let us not grow weary in our prayers, especially those prayers that are sown with tears.

Take **2 minutes** to pray about what you have been learning from God. Remember:

God speaks and things happen.

Christ was sent into the world for you.

Prayer is a two-way road. God not only listens and answers, but he asks questions, he teaches, he warns, he encourages, he challenges us and so much more.

Feel free to end your prayer in this way: *Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, I have entrusted you with so much of my pain over the years. You have been kind in answering my prayers and even now I am still in need especially as I cry out to you on behalf of others. Father, do not be distant during this time but help me to see when you are guiding, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen*

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Wednesday December 9

Family Devotion Day

I love hearing the story of Christmas- the story of Jesus' birth. Whether it's from a children's Christmas book, a cartoon, or straight from the Bible, I just love this story.

Every year after Thanksgiving, and sometimes before, I watch A Charlie Brown Christmas. I've seen the movie countless times and sometimes, since I know what is going to happen, I do other things while "watching". But there is one scene I just have to watch. I'll stop what I am doing and give my full attention to the screen. I'm sure you know what I am talking about, too. When Linus says "Sure Charlie Brown; I can tell you what Christmas is all about.", walks to the center of the stage, the spotlight shining on him as he begins to speak the words from the book of Luke "...¹¹For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord..." I have to listen. I stop whatever I was doing and just listen to those words. I am like a child hearing the most wonderful story ever for the first time. Although I have heard and read this story many times, it will never be enough and my amazement in it unending.

We are going to spend the next three weeks reading this story and writing verses in our Bible journals. Write as much of the passages as you'd like.

Today we will read and journal passages from Luke and Matthew about Mary hearing that she will soon be with child and Joseph's reaction when he hears about Mary being with child.

Luke 1:26-35

³⁰Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

³⁵And the angel answered and said to her, "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. ²⁰But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

²²So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ²³"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

²⁴Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

Write: I suggest writing the following verses in your Bible journal- little 'snippets' of the story to help us remember it. Please feel free to write out your favorite verses from these passages or the whole thing.

Luke 1:30-31

Matthew 1:20-21

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Thursday December 10

Study

John 1:21

²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No."

At the beginning of John's gospel, we find the testimony of John the Baptist's ministry. First, John and John the Baptist are two different people. John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. John the writer of the gospel of John was one of Jesus' closest disciple. He even calls himself "the beloved disciple" in his own gospel. He was one of two disciples that was on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured and met with God, Elijah, and Moses. And he wasn't the first to the tomb after Jesus' resurrection, but when he saw the empty tomb and he believed. John the Baptist is not this disciple! He is a family member of Jesus, a blood relative through Mary's side of the family.

Although John and Jesus were born at the same time, John got into ministry before Jesus. He began to baptize and teach. He had his own followers and disciples. He became so popular that the religious headquarters of the Jews sent out folks to ask him some questions. They all revolved around one topic, "Who are you?" John first tells them he isn't the promised Messiah. People knew parts of the word of God and saw the current state of things...they were ready for a Messiah and they were looking for one. But he tells them very clearly, "I am not the Christ." (John 1:20). So, these religious "Sherlocks" continue to ask questions to get to the bottom of this investigation. They ask if he is Elijah or THE prophet referring to Moses or the prophet that Moses foretold would come to lead the people. John answers, "No." Some might remember that Jesus says something different in the gospel of Matthew, "If you are willing to accept it, John is Elijah who is to come," (Matthew 11:14). How can this be? Why would John say that he is not Elijah and Jesus claim that he is?

The easiest way to understand why Jesus and John disagree is by looking to what John says elsewhere. Later in this gospel, John the Baptist says of Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease," (John 3:30). God gave John a wise humility that prepared him to prepare the way for Jesus. John doesn't claim to be Elijah because he does not view his own ministry with that level of significance. Yet, Jesus knew the importance of his cousin's ministry and it was right to notice the fulfillment of God's word. John, in a very fitting way, wanted to shed more and more light on the ministry of Jesus to the extent that he didn't consider the significance of his own role.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, we praise you for sending your word to us. You do not leave us alone, but you send your word so often in family or friends or pastors. We often cannot see how significant a word from another was in our own lives. And we do not notice how significant our own words are in the lives of those closest to us. But you work in words and through the Word and we praise you for it in Jesus' name, Amen

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Friday, December 11

Hymn of the Day Devotion: *"On Jordan's Banks the Baptist's Cry"*

Holy Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28

History: Charles Coffin wrote this text in Latin for the Paris Breviary, published in 1736. In 1837 it was translated into English by John Chandler for his Hymns of the Primitive Church (Chandler mistakenly thought it was a medieval text). The text has since undergone many revisions, and today it is hard to find two hymnals in which the text is the same. Almost all hymnals include the same five verses (most modern hymnals leave out the original second stanza), but the wording changes quite significantly between texts.

1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings!

2 Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin;
Make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.

3 We hail Thee as our Savior, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without your grace we waste away
Like flow'rs that wither and decay.

4 Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,
And make us rise to fall no more;
Oh, let your face upon us shine
And fill the world with love divine.

5 All praise to you, eternal Son,
Whose advent has our freedom won,
Whom with the Father we adore,
And Holy Spirit, evermore.

The overall theme of the verses, however, is evident regardless of the version used. Stanzas one and two are a message to us, instructing us to prepare the way of the Lord today. In stanza three, we confess our need for salvation, in stanza four we pray for healing and love, and stanza five acts as a doxology.

Since this hymn explicitly calls us to make way for Christ, it is most fitting for the season of Advent. It references John the Baptist, a key figure in the narrative of Christ's birth, and also addresses us today, to prepare the way for Christ's second coming.

Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said,

"I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

'Make straight the way of the Lord,'"

as the prophet Isaiah said. (John 1: 22-23)

Reflection: In *The Message* (a contemporary version of the Bible by Eugene Peterson), Peterson paraphrases John 1:23 in these words: "I'm thunder in the desert: 'Make the road straight for God! I'm doing what the prophet Isaiah preached.'" Why does Peterson use "thunder" instead of "voice"? It's possible he's trying to evoke the imagination, or startle us into being aware and ready for Christ in a way that a normal voice couldn't do. Peterson uses this tactic again in Revelation 2-3, where, at the end of each letter to the churches, it is written, "Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches." In preparation of Christ's birth, and in preparation of his second coming, we are instructed to listen. Before we can prepare our hearts, we must know why and how we would do so. We must listen to the cry of the Holy Spirit with all of the captivating attention with which we listen to great peals of thunder and rustling winds. We must sharpen our senses so they are alive to the voice of God in our lives. As the hymnist writes, we must "awake and harken!"

Prayer: Heavenly Father. We thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ, who came for our salvation and grant us eternal life with You. Help us to heed the words of John the Baptist to prepare our hearts and make straight the way for our Lord not only during the Advent season but in every day of our lives as we wait for your second coming. We know You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Guide us and keep us awake in Your Word so we are ready. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Source: Laura de Jong - www.hymnary.org

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Saturday, December 12

Prepare for Worship

Isaiah 61:10

**¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.**

We have been taught to anticipate the worst in this world. Isaiah calls us to anticipate the time when we shall be united with God in His presence. To understand this many paintings and sculptures have tried to convey this feeling. The Danish master sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen carved an enormous statue three and a half meters high (about eleven and a half feet). It's called "Christus Consolator" Christ the Comforter. In the inscription is written in Danish, "Kommer it mig," or "Come to me." In English. To look into the eyes of Jesus you can't just view the statue from a distance, you have come to the feet of Jesus, kneel before him and look up into Christ's face. It's only then you can look into His eyes of compassion.

There is joy that we experience when we know Christ's forgiveness in our lives. Isaiah writes about the final redemption, like the joy of a newly married couple. All of the disappointments of this world fade away all that is left is the anticipation of being with the one you love. Finally, the couple's joy is complete.

God will be united with His people. He completes them with the "garments of salvation," He provides. He will give the bride, "The robe of righteousness." (His righteousness) The bridegroom celebrates wearing garland and the bride is "adorned with jewels." The couple is radiant, because everyone gathered is there to celebrate their love for each other. This is the fulfillment of all that Christ has done for us. When we look into His eyes we will see his compassion and love for us beyond anything we could ever imagine. "My whole being shall exult in my God." (Isaiah 61:10b) Will be our response.

Almighty God, let me look forward to the day when I will never be disappointed again and will know the fullness of Your love for me. Teach me to have compassion on others as You have on me. Amen

Saving Grace Daily Devotion

Sunday, December 13

Praise

1 Thessalonians 5:16

¹⁶ **Rejoice always...**

Paul gives us instruction. It's simple, **"Rejoice always..." (1 Thessalonians 5:16)** What more can you say to that. Just do it! If you can't just do it, if your whole life is about the fear that something bad is going to happen, then we have to dive into this a little deeper.

We may be tired of all the changes in the world. We may at times feel as if God has abandoned us, but He hasn't. He is always faithful. Paul calls us to act with a clear mind, ⁸*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him."* (1 Thessalonians 5:8-10) We don't have to fear the things of this world, because we are not of the world, we are, "children of light," "children of the day." We are children of God, not of this world. It is Christ who has given us faith and salvation. Faith and salvation protect us from the despair and hopelessness we can feel in life. We are called to be faithful as those who have gone before us, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, David, Samuel and countless other followers of Christ. **"They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland."** (Hebrews 11:13c-14) If faith brings about hope, then why are we consumed by the concerns of this world? Why do we get wrapped up in all of our little concerns and forget that we are strangers and foreigners on the earth? We miss the very point of our identity in Christ Jesus our Lord. It means that we don't have to worry, Christ has come to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17) and **"is all and in all."** (Colossians 3:11) This means that everything that God is doing is in His eternal purpose and is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that's something to **Rejoice** about in our lives.

²⁸**"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."** (Matthew 11:28-30) God is perfect in His timing. (2 Peter 3:9) **"Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."** (Philippians 4:4)

Almighty God, help me to see you at work in the world. Remind me that the faith You have given me was to give me compassion and peace. Thank you for Your patience with me, teach me to be patient with others and to encourage them in faith toward You. Amen