Standy MONDER

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

FOR THE 2023 SEASON OF ADVENT

INTRODUCTION

There are so many things to wonder about at Christmas. We wonder what it means for God to become human? How a virgin could have a baby? What made these wise people follow a star in the first place? Why God chose to come? What it was like to hear the angels singing about the birth of Jesus? Behind all those questions is a deep sense of wonder and awe about our God who comes as a baby in an unexplainable way to save us.

We see a little bit of it in the child-like wonder of the season. The contagious joy found in singing Christmas carols. The house all decked out in Christmas lights. The hope of seeing your loved one's face when you found them the perfect Christmas gift.

Sometimes we get wrapped up the events, expectations, and busyness of the season. But during Advent we get to be in wonder of a God who loves you more than anyone else. We spend the month in awe of the power of hope, peace, joy and love to change the world.

Join our Elders, Deacons, Staff, Members, and Pastor as we spend the season in awe and wonder of the ways God shows up in our lives. Each devotional tells stories, history, shares scripture and experiences of awe and wonder found in our lives especially during this season of anticipation. Find the wonder this Advent season and we hope you reflect about the awe of God in your life.

We invite you to use the pages in the back of this devotion to write down the awe and wonder you see this season. Or post them on social media using #starofwonder or #wonderatmissiondelsol.

Blessings as you prepare for our Savior's birth!

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2023

"Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child." Luke 2:5-6

As a child, it seemed that the calendar on the refrigerator served two purposes: to remind folks of my birthday and to let me know how many days it was until Christmas. I remember learning how to count by using the calendar and figuring out for myself how many days still needed to pass before those two "red-letter days" arrived. It saved my parents from dealing with my constant questioning!

And oh, how I wished I could have made those calendar days pass more quickly. Our culture seems to be about the business of pushing us from one holiday to another as quickly as possible. The 4th of July has barely passed before Halloween decorations appear in the stores. Christmas trees appear for sale before the last Halloween candy is handed out.

As frustrated as I get with the time that presses on around me, I am in awe of the deliberate pace of God's plan. Everything in the Christmas story seems to happen at just the right time for just the right reason. Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem for the census and "while they were there, the time came." Our time became God's time. There was no rush... no panic. God used that time to change the world!

PRAYER: Loving God, Make our time YOUR time during this busy season. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | REV. TERRY PALMER
MEMBER

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2023

This year, my new doctor ordered a review of all the standard tests we all take as I was getting older, including a mammogram. It came back positive; I had cancer! 20 years ago, I had supported my mother when she had a radical bilateral mastectomy and was fearful for myself and my future.

As I began treatment and shared my fears with friends and family, I was awed and overwhelmed by their wonderful love and support.

One friend even emailed me from London to check on me, and my "tough" brother offered to hold my hand "if things got bad."

I found myself responding to God's love as demonstrated by all this outpouring of care. Like the sparrow, even the least of us (in this case, me) is in God's care!!

I've gone through a summer of tests, surgery and radiation, and my current status is good. I would never have gotten through it without the strong, awesome support of God, family, and friends.

PRAYER: God, Help me to remember that You care for all of us down to the smallest sparrow, and that You will support us when we ask for Your love. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | SALLY HUFF

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2023

My wife and I recently returned from a wonderful vacation that took us through western Colorado and the amazing fall foliage on our way to Denver for a wedding. Seeing the breathtaking fall colors that we so rarely witness here in scorching Phoenix, I reflected on the cycles of our lives and especially on how our perceptions change during the different phases of our life. During Advent, we celebrate the constant love of God sending His Son to the world, but through the years, we see this constant in different ways.

As a child, the season of Advent was always focused on the future. The presents I might receive; the break from school; the promise of snow (I grew up in the Midwest so it was much more likely!). Later, as a parent, and especially now that our children are mostly grown, the season of Advent causes me to reflect more on the past; thinking about time shared with family and friends. That being said, the future is still present, as I think about how our family and celebrations will change as the children grow into adults and add partners and children of their own.

Throughout the seasons of our own lives, the season of Advent and the promise of Christmas remain a constant joy we share with our family and friends. As we wait for the birth of our Savior each year, we can see the blessings we have received, the unchanging love God has for us in the present, and the hope that we have in God for the future. As we grow older and the seasons of our life pass, the gift of Christmas remains a constant source of hope and joy.

PRAYER: Jesus, In our ever changing world, You are our constant. Thank you for being with us through it all. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JAY KARLIN DEACON

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2023

I have been in awe many times but the most memorable happened in my living room. I understand now what all the hype is about. I didn't believe it before... but when Santa showed up all I could do was be in awe. He smiled down at me and I couldn't help but get excited. My tail started wagging and I just wanted to please him.

I think about this moment every time I am in awe of God because sometimes when God does amazing things like show up in my living room I don't stop, wag my tail excessively or even pause in order to recognize it. I hate to admit it, but sometimes I just expect God to provide beauty, connection and care all the time.

Maybe you are better at this than me, but I really need to practice being in awe of the extraordinary things that God does in my life every day. I will work on this because there are so many things I could be in awe of like breakfast, lunch and dinner for one...plus treats. Walks with my girl, visits from friends, play time with my friends, carrots and blueberries, snuggles with my girl, love, sunshine, squeaky toys, and Jesus coming to save even me.

PRAYER: God, I am in awe of you—Your compassion, Your power, Your grace, Your love, Your presence here with me. Thanks. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | CALVIN BROWN
PARISH PUP

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2023

The Wonder of Christmas! When I was first in the ministry in Colorado, I had not accumulated many resources to help with special seasons, like Christmas. But one day, I opened the newspaper shortly before Christmas, and found a beautiful message about the wonder of Christmas that speaks of the simple gifts for the season. This list was from an anonymous contributor – enjoy these gifts and share them:

"...last minute gift suggestions that everyone can afford this Christmas:

- Love,
- Patience
- Cooperation
- Silence
- Compassion
- Tolerance

- Encouragement
- Gratitude
- Forgiveness
- Succor (help in time of need)
- Faith
- Hope

All these were given to us over two thousand years ago. They are strange and wonderful, because the only way we are allowed to keep them is to constantly give them to others."

Enjoy the wonder of Christmas by sharing these special gifts every day!

PRAYER: Almighty God, We are blessed and excited, Lord, for He is here! Thank you for the gift of life through Jesus Christ. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | REV. ED SPENCE MEMBER

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2023

There are many things that put me in awe of God: the ocean, the nighttime sky, a baby growing in her mother's womb. All these speak of the vast generosity, beauty and creativity of our Maker, which definitely leaves me amazed.

But lately I have been particularly in awe of God's grace for me and this world. The scripture in Galatians 2:21 says it perfectly: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, then Christ died for nothing."

I am struck by the phrase "I do not set aside." I think of other ways to say it—I do not take for granted/I do not take lightly/I do not ignore or brush off— the grace of God. Then I am so convicted! Because many days, I do take it for granted. There are many moments when I do not stand in awe of the fact that God— the actual Creator of the Universe!—made a way for me because He wanted us to be together now and forever. He redeemed me at a huge personal cost. He came after me and rescued me, despite my brokenness and the ugliness in my heart. And he just keeps doing it, day after day after day. Waiting on us to realize the immensity of the fact that He desires us that much, and then open our hearts to Him in awe and surrender.

PRAYER: Dear Father, Thank You for the amazing grace You offer. Please keep me in awe of it and help me not take it for granted. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JENNIFER GRIMES

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2023

It's that time of year again. We're in the season of Advent and awaiting the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, on Christmas Eve. Everyone seems to be in a brighter mood. Families are busy decorating their homes and shoppers are scouring the internet looking for the perfect gift to order. Charities are mailing out requests for year-end donations, and many of those requests get answered.

Did you ever ask yourself, "Why don't we see this joy and wonder at other times of the year?" The fact is, God blesses each of us with two amazing gifts every day of our lives. He loves us unconditionally, and bestows upon us His forgiveness and grace. Embrace every day of your life with the same awe and amazement that you express during Advent. Accept these gifts from God, but don't just keep them for yourself. Freely accept God's love, forgiveness, and grace, and then look for ways that you can pass them on in the world. Step out of your comfort zone and sign up for a mission project that you've never tried, or agree to be liturgist on a Sunday morning. Church committees are always looking for more help, and before long the nominating committee will be looking to fill a slate of church officers. Saying "yes" the next time someone asks if you can help is the simplest way of expressing the awe and wonder of the Advent season throughout the entire year.

PRAYER: God, I freely accept Your love, grace, and forgiveness. Thank You and may I follow in the path of Your son, Jesus, and share those gifts with the world daily. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JAYNE PROHASKA DEACON

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2023

In October, I had the opportunity to spend four days backpacking on the Supai Reservation inside the Grand Canyon and all I experienced was the awe of God. It was a labyrinth like experience as I left the world with no contact with the outside world to walk towards the holy. For two days I hiked around the beauty of the cascading waterfalls, turquoise water and awe of the divine in this place. But as I walked on the well-worn path out of the canyon I couldn't help but think about what brought the awe of this place.

Was it the total separation from the outside world? The beauty that can't be captured in pictures alone? The challenge of hiking 50 miles over four days? Or maybe just the time and space for awe to be awoken in me? I strongly believe that God brings awe inspiring moments into all our days from the simplicity of the stars that blanket the night sky, the way yeast makes bread rise, the quiet of the morning, a conversation with a friend, or a perfectly timed hug.

I wonder if in all the busyness of Advent with all the extra fun events, traditions and expectations maybe the thing we lack is the space to see the awe of God in our world. I am going to try to find that space this Advent season in hopes that I will see the awe inspiring beauty and power of our God who chose to be with us in our days.

PRAYER: Almighty God, Help me find the awe of Your presence in my life today. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2023

When asked to write a devotion focusing on awe and wonder, Mary and Joseph came to mind. No doubt Mary and Joseph were in awe and wonder at the birth of Jesus. I must admit, I continue to be in awe and wonder at the birth of Jesus. However, Mary, Joseph and I are not the only ones that experience awe and wonder.

When have you experienced a sense of awe and wonder? Take a moment and think about a sense of wonder and awe? Does a sense of awe and wonder emerge when you experience joy after seeing the first smile on an infant's face or notice the sparkle in a child's eyes when looking at lights on a Christmas tree? Or perhaps seeing a sunrise and/or sunset or walking in the desert or forest brings you a sense of awe and wonder.

Can you recapture the awe and wonder of that moment?

During this season of Advent, pause and observe the beauty around you. I hope you experience a sense of awe and wonder at love, peace, hope and joy. And remember, God loves us so much that He sent His son. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

PRAYER: God, We praise You and stand in awe and wonder of Your everlasting love. Thank You for sending Your son, Jesus. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | NELMA SHEARER
MEMBER

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2023

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.' Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." - Luke 2:10 - 12

As a little schoolgirl I remember singing Christmas carols in December. I loved While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks By Night. Sometimes, with a sense of anticipation and naughtiness we would sing, "While Shepherds Washed Their Socks By Night." Our music teacher would have words with us but we still thought it was great fun!

As I was about to move up to middle school, I received a gift certificate for books for "services to the school" and felt all grown up and important for a moment. I chose a French dictionary and a Bible. I remember a picture in the Bible I kept gazing at intently. It was a painting of the angel Gabriel appearing to the shepherds. If you want to google it, the painting is called, "The Angel Gabriel Appearing To The Shepherds" by Alfred Morgan. For me this painting really encapsulates the sense of fear the shepherds felt witnessing Gabriel descending surrounded by an incredible light show. Gabriel told them to "fear not," and as the carol goes, "for mighty dread had seized their troubled minds." The shepherd's fear turned into pure amazement, wonder and joy over the good news of the birth of a Savior, with remarkably specific details about a baby lying in a manger wearing swaddling clothes. What an unparalleled experience this must have been for the shepherds! It is not lost on me that the very first words of this good news came down from heaven to the poorest of shepherds living close to Bethlehem.

That little schoolgirl in the 1960's used to be driven home in the dark from her grandparent's house with her Mom, Dad and brother. She would start to sing Christmas carols and one by one her family would join in. She would look at the stars and would count the Christmas trees all lit up in the windows of houses. She was filled with joy, wonder and awe. And sometimes a giggle about shepherds and their socks.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, May we gaze with awe upon all of the cheerful lights around us during this dark Winter season and remember in these lights the astonishing vision of angels the shepherds witnessed. Let us remember to keep our own guiding star on the good news of a Savior being born as we share love, joy and peace with one another. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | SALLY APPLEBY
DEACON

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2023

"Here there is no Greek or Jew, no circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." - Colossians 3:11

Can you imagine giving birth to a baby in a stable, under the subjugation of a foreign government, surrounded by people in the outer community filled with fear and hatred, but having hope for someone to come and free them, to be for them, a Messiah? Can you imagine living among a people who believed in holiness by living a very structured life of rules and regulations designed to please God, but those guidelines were so exacting that even the food one ate and the dishes that were used had to fit strict regulations? Conformity to law was the way of life. Jesus was born into that world, grew up in that world, and that was, indeed, His world.

Yet, the Christmas story tells us of another way. What they did not know in that stable when Jesus was born, was that this beautiful baby was going to change everything. Laws and specific ways of outward living would be replaced by grace and love. Jesus shook up the Romans and the powerful Jews, acting from His truth with courage and a willingness to die for the opportunity to see and feel this hope anew.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, As we view the world that we find ourselves living in, may we know that though Jesus arrived small and vulnerable, He had the power to eventually open the eyes of the multitudes. Lord, we ask You to help us have patience and believe that You are still opening eyes to new and better ways, that love will dissolve hate, and that peace on Earth will, one day, become a reality! Amen.

WRITTEN BY | LYNN KINSEY MEMBER

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2023

"The wonder and awe that is Christmas." "The wonder and awe that is Christmas." Repeating this phrase over and over in my head as I walk my pups this morning. What does that mean? Well, it means so many things to me at different times through my life. Of course, my earliest memories are of Santa and gifts and songs and family and cookies. Every year, my school put on a little pageant where we wore choir capes and carried battery operated candles and sang songs. I loved all those songs. I would create construction paper carol books for my family to sing all my favorites at home.

Then over the years, Christmas changed and ultimately became about my boys and handing down all my favorite memories to them. The magic, the fun, the gifts, the songs and yeah, the cookies. Today it is about showering my grandson with gifts. Bless Amazon! But wait a minute. (Sound of screeching tires)...it's not about gifts, Santa or even cookies. It is about the music because the songs tie us together and give us that warm connected feeling. We all know the words and melodies. We all sing along. What lies underneath all of that is the sense of community, the joy, that familiarity that we get when Thanksgiving is over and we can pull out the decorations, find a tree, smell the piney smell and, yes, make the cookies and sing the songs.

Yes! Yes! I know it is about the birth of Jesus and the many teachings and love Jesus brought us in His short 33 years. In my own traditions, these very Western cultural conventions and memories are what connect us to Jesus. Christmas carols, family, letters to Santa, popcorn strands on the tree, stockings on the mantle, waking up to a ton of toys, and yes chocolate chip cookies with red and green sprinkles...are all demonstrations of love, connection, magic, joy, tradition, family, kindness and giving. And isn't that truly what it is all about? Isn't the look on a child's face Christmas morning the wonder and awe that is Christmas. Well, I think so.

PRAYER: Jesus, Thank you awe and wonder found in all our traditions that help us prepare for Your birth...especially the Christmas cookies. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | HILARY CUMMINGS DEACON

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2023

Many of my earliest memories of Christmas revolve around the living nativity created every Advent by my home church in Garden Grove, California. Besides Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus in a manger, shepherds, and wise men were the animals: a cow, a donkey, sheep, and baby pygmy goats (my favorites). One year I remember there was even a camel standing by the wisemen. A light, suspended on the church steeple, always looked like a real star to me. My sister and I would ask, "Is today Christmas?" A wise parent would answer, "Not tonight. We need to wait." Waiting for Christmas was always a difficult task!

Those earliest memories didn't include the full meaning of Christmas. It wasn't until later I realized that the baby in the manger was God's Son, sent to redeem the world and save us from our sins by dying on the cross and rising from death on Easter. The nativity was simple. It provided the foundation of my faith which was nurtured by my parents, Sunday School teachers, and learning from the Bible. Later in life, the nativity helped me, as a parent, to help develop the foundation of faith for my own child.

In a world full of pain and complications, it is hard to realize that God is in charge. But Jesus was born into such a world. God, who chose that simple and humble way to come to us through Jesus, helps us to work to relieve the world's suffering.

PRAYER: Dear God, Help us to return to the simplicity of our faith and use the foundations of Jesus' teachings to help Your people. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JAN PALMER Elder

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2023

Laughter is a great gift that we often hear during the holiday season. It's a gift that unites people, transcending boundaries and filling hearts with warmth. As we embrace the joy of Advent, let's not forget that laughter can be a form of worship. It is through laughter that we express our delight in the birth of Jesus. In the midst of the bustling holiday season, may our hearts be lightened with the laughter of those around us. Just as the angels' announcement of Jesus' birth brought joy to the shepherds, our laughter can have that same joyful response to the good news of Christ's arrival.

Amid the carols, shopping, and busy preparation, let us listen for the sweet music of our own laughter. This sound, a beautiful symphony of happiness and togetherness, not only brings joy to the heart but also gives glory to God.

In the laughter we share with one another, we recognize the divine gift of human connection and the extraordinary joy that this season brings. So, this Advent, may our laughter be an offering that celebrates the Savior who brings light and happiness into our lives.

PRAYER: Gracious God, As we take this Advent journey, we thank You for the gift of laughter that binds us together. May our laughter reflect the joy we find in Your Son's birth and bring glory to Your name. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | SMITH GRAHAM

MUSIC MINISTER

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2023

Jesus entered by birth, the most arduous journey of human beings. His human form was first seen by His mother, Mary and His earthly father, Joseph. (I feel certain there was at least a local midwife as well.) And what about the place of birth – contemporary interpretations and artists ask us to consider how homeless parents with a newborn find shelter.

It takes all four of the gospels to generate the story surrounding Jesus' birth, Luke probably interviewed Mary, gathering details before writing his gospel, the only recording of Elizabeth's prophecy to Mary in Luke 1:42-45 and Mary's song 1:46-55. John grasped the magnitude and glory of this event in John 1 – the Light of truth (v. 9), He entered the very world He created (v. 10), to the very people He created (v.11) but unrecognized (by the Jews) yet those who did recognize, "believed and were given the right to become children of God" (v. 12). How could this happen, John explains – "not by natural means but born of God" (v. 13). So He came to live among us and "we have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (v. 14).

There is more – John the Baptist's father, Zechariah's prophecy Luke 1:67–79 and Simeon's prophesy as he held the baby Jesus in his arms Luke 2:29–32. About the adult Jesus, John the Baptist declared "the Lamb of God," John 1:29–34.

PRAYER: God, Awaken me to the fullness of the LIGHT in baby Jesus, human, growing into the adult Jesus SAVIOUR. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | DOROTHY HANSON MEMBER

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2023

As a child, I never really understood the point of Advent. Don't get me wrong; I loved Christmas, and not just the presents; the songs, the lights, the 2 weeks off from school. It was all so magical. But during the Advent season at Church, we were celebrating waiting for something that was about to happen. We couldn't sing Christmas songs since it wasn't Christmas yet. That idea of celebrating the waiting always stumped me; why not just skip the whole waiting thing and get straight to the good stuff? And now, as an adult and parent...I think I'm still a little confused. After all, why not start celebrating the Birth of the Savior of the World starting the day after Halloween like the rest of the world (or at least the world of retail stores). Why not stretch out the Good News of the Birth of the Son of God for as long as possible?

But as I stop to reflect, maybe the real magic of Advent is about encouraging that time of reflection; about slowing our impulse to jump ahead to the celebration and instead focus on the waiting. Waiting, after all, is what God's people have done for thousands of years. Waited to be freed from slavery in Egypt; waited to be led to the promised land of milk and honey; waited for the Messiah to be born. As an adult, I know there is something to be said for anticipation. Anticipating a vacation, the completion of a plan... anticipating the birth of a child.

I think the gift of the Advent season is that we're waiting with certainty for Christmas. We can be confident that our anticipation will be fulfilled, as it is a season focused on the future with the assurance of the past. We can enjoy this time knowing that the day will come because it has come; that Jesus is born into this sinful world to save us, and that we can rest secure in our salvation.

PRAYER: Jesus, As we wait for Your birth once again this year, open our eyes to the wonder of waiting for You instead of rushing ahead to the greatest gift found in Your birth. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JAY KARLIN DEACON

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2023

I'll never forget where I was and exactly what I was doing at 9:00 AM Monday, June 8th, 1992. I was a new agent with my company, so I was required to be at a meeting (which I really did not want to be at).

Just as it was beginning, I received a message on my pager (no cell phones back then!) from my wife to call her right away. Of course, I called immediately, and my wife told me she was at my parent's house, scared because she was just told at her regular prenatal appointment to go straight to the hospital.

She ended up having to drive herself to the hospital and check herself in while I was making the forty minute drive back across town. Shortly after I got there, I was informed that she had preeclampsia and was in danger, and we were going to have an emergency C-Section in about thirty minutes. I really cannot remember what happened over the next few hours until we had the baby.

What stands out so vividly was the overwhelming emotion and awe of laying eyes on my firstborn. It was such an incredible moment for me that I could only cry uncontrollably. We had waited to find out the gender of our baby until she was born. Like most men, I wanted a boy, or so I thought. The first thing my wife asked me when they told us it was a girl was, "Are you mad?" I immediately said, "Of course I am not mad!" As I am sure she would have been happy with a boy as well, we were both just so elated to finally have our baby to hold. To this day, as soon as another man tells me his wife is pregnant, I tell him about the overwhelming joy, happiness, and awe they can expect as their child is born. It makes me just as excited for them as I was thirty one years ago, and a memory I will never forget.

PRAYER: Almighty Father, We are in awe of the miracles around us. Especially of the births of our own children and Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | MIKE HERRMANN Elder

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2023

I can't tell you how many times people say "awe" to me. "Awe, isn't he cute." "Awe, he loves a car ride." "Awe, he likes carrots." "Awe, he is getting old" (I hate that one). Every time, I think...way to state the obvious. Of course I am doing these things. They are what brings me joy or facts about my life. So when I heard this devotional was all about awe...I thought we don't need that. We need more time recognizing God in our lives not cute moments that my girl wants to take another picture of.

What I realized is that I was thinking of the wrong awe. The awe I hear all the time, is a phrase that gives emphasis before a statement an individual makes. What this devotional is about is real AWE! Reverence, wonder, amazement about God choosing to save us, to be with us and to love us.

This is a miracle that we should be in awe about every day. At the same time, maybe all those times people say "awe" about me, it should be a reminder that this world is different because God is in it.

PRAYER: Jesus, I am in awe that You are in this world with me through the good, the hard, the challenging and the ordinary. Thanks! Amen.

WRITTEN BY | CALVIN BROWN
PARISH PUP

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2023

In the heart of the holiday season, as we gather to celebrate with family and friends, it's vital to remember the awe-inspiring miracle of Christ's birth. The story of the nativity isn't merely a historical event; it's a timeless source of inspiration that continues to light our path.

Imagine a humble stable in Bethlehem, a young couple far from home, and a newborn baby nestled in a manger. In this scene, we witness the embodiment of God's love and grace, born into the world as a vulnerable child. It's a reminder that God's greatest gifts often come in the most unassuming packages.

Reflect on the shepherds, summoned by a host of angels, and the wise men who followed a star. Their journey symbolizes the longing within our own hearts, a yearning for something greater, a divine purpose. Christ's birth is an invitation for each of us to seek Him and find the true meaning of life.

Consider the peace that filled the night when Jesus was born. It's a peace that transcends understanding and can calm the storms of our lives. In the midst of the chaos and busyness of the season, we can find serenity by embracing the Prince of Peace.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ, we're reminded of the boundless love, compassion, and hope He brought into the world. His life is a testament to the potential for transformation and renewal, inspiring us to live with kindness, to reach out to those in need, and to carry His light into a world that often craves His love.

The awe of Christ's birth is a timeless source of inspiration, a reminder of the enduring significance of this holy season. In His birth, we find the truest meaning of Christmas, a celebration of love, hope, and the boundless grace of our Savior.

PRAYER: Jesus, Thank you for coming with love, hope and boundless grace! Amen.

WRITTEN BY | CRYSTAL KING DEACON

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2023

I begin most days by going out for a long walk. My favorite time of year for walking is winter. I love getting outside on dark, cold, and clear mornings so that I can look up and see the stars and planets. I try to remember the names of all the constellations I learned as a schoolboy, and I keep track of their changing positions throughout the winter. I can imagine a group of shepherds doing the same thing on a hilltop near Bethlehem long ago. I can imagine them huddling together in the cold, taking turns sleeping while they kept an eye on their sheep. But try as I might, my imagination cannot capture the combination of wonder, terror, amazement, and joy when suddenly the sky above them was filled with angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those he favors!" What a way to announce the birth of the Prince of Peace. God did not choose to announce the birth of the Savior of the world in the halls of government or at a banquet for the rich and powerful. Instead, God chose to proclaim the birth of the Messiah to some of the most common people in that society, people not very different from many of us. This year, as we again make our metaphorical pilgrimage to Bethlehem, let's not forget to look up and try to envision a sky filled with singing angels.

PRAYER: Lord, grant us the feeling of awe that the shepherds experienced, if even for just a fleeting moment. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2023

About twelve years ago our neighborhood began weekly parties. A couple would agree to host a "Friends on Friday" event. An email invitation would be sent to neighbors who had signed a list. Word of mouth would inform others of the event's time and place.

Friday at 6 pm neighbors would gather. Each person or couple would bring food to share and their own drink. For the next three hours, we would share stories and experiences. Friendship developed. We built our own community.

Then covid struck. The parties ceased. Neighbors moved. New younger neighbors moved into our neighborhood. The parties withered but they have not quite died.

Several neighbors who remember the parties have agreed to revive them. Halloween night is the chosen night to reignite the parties. This effort is awe inspiring. I am challenged to reach out to old friends as well as new neighbors to bring them together. Will they willingly participate or politely ignore our invitation? I have faith that old neighbors as well as new neighbors will reignite our sense of community.

PRAYER: Lord, Bring us together. Help us be a faithful community following You. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | FRED HUFF

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2023

BEHOLD!

My calendar says it is Advent and once again time to reflect on the amazing, almost unbelievable story of the Nativity.

A young couple from Nazareth, Joseph and a very pregnant Mary, travel to Bethlehem (city of David) to be registered because he is of the house and lineage of David. Upon arrival, they seek shelter with the local lodge. The proprietor informs them: "I'm sorry there is no room at the Inn, but you may stay in my barn." So. . . in the middle of the night, with only Joseph and livestock for strength and comfort, a baby boy is born.

Simultaneously a band of angels announces this birth to a group of lowly shepherds tending their sheep. They immediately go to see this newborn child.

My most favorite line in the Christmas story is the angel's proclamation. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of a great joy for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord."

Good news of a great joy - a life as a follower of Christ is one filled with grace, peace and gratefulness.

For you - Jesus came to show us the authentic way to live.

Rejoice - God and Jesus love you and me for now and for always!

PRAYER: Jesus, Thanks for coming and bringing good news of great joy. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | KAREN MCDANIEL MEMBER

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2023

When I think of the awe of Jesus, I can't help but think of my daughter in law who is battling breast cancer and in this circumstance, Jesus still shines bright. She has tremendous faith and knows that Jesus will see her through and that during this painful time, she knows God is still doing good works in her life. She demonstrates daily that her heart is focused on Jesus, by her servanthood and selflessness and focusing on His mission and work.

She has turned a terrible disease into a path for her to bless others. It is a reminder that no matter what we are going through, we can trust in Jesus and know that His plans are good. If she can be the hands and feet of Jesus during the battle she is fighting, all of us can serve others and share the love of Jesus!

Philippians 1:6 (NIV) "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

PRAYER: Lord, Help us to be more like you. To serve others and share are talents in a way that is pleasing unto you. Heal those who are sick, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2023

Humans have always been fascinated with the night sky, pondering what the stars were made of, how many stars were really out there, and our own place in the vast expanse of the universe. Among this celestial canvas, there's a hymn that resonates during these dark Advent nights: "Creator of the Stars of Night."

The first verse of this hymn speaks of the Creator who crafted the stars, the moon, and the endless expanse of the universe. This hymn reminds us of the divine hand that set the heavens in place, and in this realization, we find ourselves in profound awe of the Creator's majesty.

As the hymn unfolds, it speaks of the Creator descending to our human existence, becoming a beacon of light in the darkest of nights. Wonder fills our hearts as we contemplate this divine mystery – that the Creator of stars now walks among us as a vulnerable child.

"Creator of the Stars of Night" concludes with a powerful note of amazement. We are amazed by the boundless love of God, reaching across the cosmic expanse to be with us. The birth of Jesus; a divine gesture of love.

PRAYER: Dear Creator of the Stars, in the midst of this Advent season, we find ourselves in awe, wonder, and amazement at Your cosmic majesty and Your humble incarnation. As we sing this hymn, may it remind us of Your boundless love and fill us with gratitude. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | SMITH GRAHAM Music Minister

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2023

Awe can be described as something so amazing that it leaves a mark. The birth of Christ has left a mark on the world but more importantly, on us personally. Christmas is the time to celebrate Jesus' birthday but I am also awe-struck at the unexpected times throughout the year.

For example, my colleague at work is known as "the nicest person you will ever meet." She cares for so many at our school and notices when the one staff member is carrying a heavy burden. She always leaves notes telling those she is praying for them. This colleague leaves a mark of Jesus' love every time she leaves her notes!

PRAYER: Dear Lord, Please help us to spread the awe of Christ to those we know and are getting to know. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2023

"After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was."

Matthew 2:9

Our shortest days of the year are in December, with early sunsets and late sunrises. Even in Phoenix, the evening air is cool and crisp. However, there is a sense of warmth from the Brilliance of the Advent Season achieved by the dazzling holiday light displays in our neighborhoods. We have traditions to visit neighborhoods or businesses known for having magnificent light displays that we find awe inspiring. They often promote positive feelings and goodwill.

The holiday light displays are not only beautiful but remind us of the wonder of the season with the birth of Christ, and the stars that shone so brightly over Bethlehem. Make it a point this holiday season to take a slow walk in your favorite neighborhood to enjoy the brilliance of the lights and reflect on the spirit of the season! May the light of Christ shine on you and through His presence may you find peace.

PRAYER: Holy Spirit, May your light shine upon all the places that your grace, truth, and peace rest this season. Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2023

As we live our lives, we become distracted. We aren't acknowledging the work of Jesus and miracles that happen around us daily. Many times we underestimate who Jesus is, like the disciples did, so that we go through life afraid that He can't take care of us in our trials. But we should remember that Jesus is more than able to save or help us in situations we find ourselves in. Jesus is God's Son and He can speak peace and calm into our lives.

Many everyday things happen and maybe we miss them as Jesus' work. Perhaps we aren't paying close enough attention. For instance, the disciples were in awe of Him, and later came to acknowledge Him as the Son of God and worshiped Him, as we should.

We should recognize how quickly Casa del Sol was approved as a 501(c)3 AND Arizona is now recognizing the non-profit as a tax credit. We are months ahead of schedule and this could only be recognized as Jesus' work.

PRAYER: Dear God, help us recognize when Jesus' work is in our lives. Remind us to be awed as we lift Jesus up while involved in fulfilling His work. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | SUSAN HERNANDEZ

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2023

"Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times." Micah 5:2

While looking through lists of Advent verses hoping for inspiration, I was struck for some reason by this verse, despite its relative brevity and simplicity. Today well-known is an understatement when it comes to Bethlehem; even if you're not a Christian you likely recognize the name, and the town is considered a sacred site where many pilgrimage each year, hoping to be closer to Christ.

At the time of Christ's birth, the verse would lead us to believe that Bethlehem was small, perhaps insignificant, and likely not a spot where people were likely to travel unless they had a specific reason. And yet, God had a master plan, to bring greatness from humble beginnings, and this small, insignificant village was where He chose to place the birth of His Son.

The same could be said of many of the actors in the Advent story- the shepherds, and Mary herself. This makes me think of each of us, and how from time to time (or even most of the time!) we feel small and insignificant. The world is such a big place, with such big problems and issues- how are we to hope to contribute or to make changes? This verse reminds us that God has a plan for each of us, and has always had a plan for each of us, from the beginning of time. We may be limited on our own, but with God working through us, and working in His name, there are no limits. We can trust God and find meaning and purpose in his plan for us, knowing that no task is too small or too humble when done in God's name.

PRAYER: Almighty God, We are in awe of how You orchestrated this whole event. Thanks for being in our lives. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JAY KARLIN DEACON

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2023

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem saying, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east and have come to worship Him." Matthew 2:1-2

When I think of the star over Jerusalem guiding the magi, I think of the joy and wonder they must have felt. It causes me to reflect about the joy and wonder when I feel God's peace and presence; in the early dawn of a new day; in the barn hearing the nickering of my horse; in the woods with sun coming through the trees; in our home when our family is together sharing laughs and love.

These times and others I wonder of the magnitude of God's love and forgiveness for all the wrong things that I have done or thought or said. I am so thankful that He loves me just as I am.

I marvel at the birth of Christ, in a simple manger, who reconciled all to God, from the tax collector to the most innocent of us all.

PRAYER: Please God, Guide me as that star did for the magi, to shine Your light of love and grace and forgiveness to all those I meet. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | LIZ MCKENNA Elder

MONDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2023

Merry Christmas! Today we are in awe of the birth of our Savior. God becoming one of us. As we gather with friends and family, open presents, eat delicious food, laugh, tell stories and just be in awe of the moment I think about the people we met in Kentucky on our mission trip.

We worked with two families who lost part of their homes during the tornadoes and waited twenty-two months, including two Christmas days before their homes were back in order. Today is different. Today they spent Christmas in their homes with siding, heat, and a beautiful deck to enjoy with friends and family.

I am in awe of their strength and faithfulness. I am also in awe of the work God did through our team. God brought together skills, time, tools, and supplies in order to come among us as sign that God is still doing amazing things in a world that is just as broken and hard as it was the day Jesus was born. And I hope the families we served in Kentucky are in awe, too, of a God who remembers them, loves them, and sent five folks from Arizona to bring awe in the midst of disaster.

PRAYER: Jesus, On this day, You are the awe in my life. Thanks for loving me, for using me to help others. Thanks for your care. Amen.

WHERE I SEE WONDER DURING THIS SEASON

You are invited to write down the awe and wonder you see this season below or post pictures of Wonder and Awe on social media using the hashtag #starofwonder or #wonderatmissiondelsol.

November 26	
November 27	
November 28	
December 1	
December 2	
December 3	
December 4	
December 5	
December 6	
December 7	
December 8	
December 9	
December 10	
December 11	
December 12	
December 13	
December 14	
December 15	
December 16	

December 17	
December 18	
December 21	
December 22	



