



Roots of FAITHFULNESS

DAILY DEVOTIONAL
FOR THE 2025 SEASON OF ADVENT

INTRODUCTION

During Advent we have a tendency to jump to the story of Jesus' birth. We get excited about a miraculous baby born in a manger as God with us, but so much happened before that. God planned for that first Christmas at the moment of creation. Every moment following includes the stories of God's faithful people who led us to Christmas.

This year during Advent we will journey through the story of God's faithfulness from our most faithful told through the Jesse Tree. The Jesse Tree takes its name from Isaiah 11:1, "*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*" Jesse was the father of King David, and from David's family line came the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. Each day, we will remember a person or story from the Bible that is a part of this great family tree of faith leading us all the way to the birth of Christ. Join our Elders, Deacons, Staff, Members and Pastor as we tell the stories of our faith.

We hope the Jesse Tree, along with our stories, memories and experiences, helps us see that Jesus' birth was not an isolated miracle but the fulfilment of a promise woven through generations of faithful people—ordinary and faithful, flawed and hopeful—who trusted in God's love and grace. Enjoy this Advent season as we prepare with the faithful for our Savior's birth!



SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2025 • JESSE TREE

Isaiah 11:1-2

*“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him -
The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.”*
—Isaiah 11:1-2

These two verses in Isaiah describe how a future leader, Jesus Christ, will emerge from the line of Jesse, King David’s father. It requires a lot of faith to believe this prophecy, as the royal lineage of the house of David was seemingly dead and fallen.

The entire Christmas story begins here and hinges upon the prophecy that not only will Jesus be born, but that he will embody wonderful qualities, namely wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and reverence for God. These are perfect qualities to lead God’s people with righteousness. With deep faith and hope in this promise, we watch it unfold with the true gift of Christmas. The birth of a baby boy in a stable in Bethlehem.

PRAYER: Dear God, May there be peace, love and joy this Christmas Season with the good news of the birth of Jesus. May we deepen our faithfulness, trust and hope in Your name. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | SALLY APPLEBY
DEACON

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2025 • GOD CREATED PEOPLE

Genesis 1:26-31

God said, “*Let’s make people in our image,*” and that’s exactly what He did. He made us like Him—male and female—and gave us a job: to take care of the earth and everything in it. When He looked at what He made, He said it was very good.

This tells us something important: we are made on purpose, and we matter. We’re created to reflect God’s love and goodness. That means that caring for the world around us and helping people isn’t just a nice idea—it’s part of who we are.

The work of Casa Del Sol Affordable Housing is a perfect example. Giving families safe, stable homes isn’t just building houses—it’s building hope. It’s helping people feel secure, cared for, and valued. When we do this kind of work, we’re living out God’s call to care for His creation and for each other.

Every home built, every family supported, is a little way of showing God’s love in action. We may not be able to fix the whole world, but we can make a difference in someone’s life today. And when we do, we’re reflecting God’s image—because He made us to care.

PRAYER: Jesus, Help us to care for all those around us today, the poor and hungry, the weary and wondering. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | MIKE HERRMANN
ELDER

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2025 • THE FALL

Genesis 3

If I understand it correctly, Adam and Eve were told not to eat from the tree. I know that feeling. I am often told things that I am not supposed to do. “Don’t chew on the carpet.” “Don’t eat that.” “Don’t go over there.” And as soon as I am told “don’t,” I just can’t get it out of my mind, I must do it. I am guessing Adam and Eve felt the same. They just had to know what was so great about that tree’s fruit. What I didn’t like was when instead of saying I’m sorry, Adam blamed Eve. And Eve blamed the snake.

Too often I watch the people around me point fingers blaming one person or another. I am an expert at making mistakes, and I have learned the best plan is to take ownership of my mistakes. We all make them. And we all need forgiveness.

I get forgiven a lot. Sometimes for things I did on purpose and sometimes for actions I didn’t know were wrong yet. What I have learned is a good “I’m sorry” and a hug make a world of difference for the other person and me. Somehow it is in these moments that we really see each other... and maybe part of being faithful to God is about really seeing each other with all our mistakes and realizing all is forgiven. So make mistakes, forgive often and hug it out!

PRAYER: Jesus, I’m sorry for _____. Thanks for forgiving me. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | SIMON
PARISH PUP IN TRAINING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2025 • NOAH'S ARK

Genesis 6:11-14, 7:17-8:3, 9:8-13

Most of the time when God is speaking to me, it is for small actions I should take. God says, “show kindness,” “be patient,” “I am with you.” But then there are those Noah like moments. The ones that ask me to say Yes when everything in me tells me to say no. Or when God said “go” when everything in me wanted to go back to my safe space. When God said “love” when all I really wanted to do was hate. I wonder if that is similar to Noah’s experience of building a giant ark and filling it with animals.

I often get asked how I know it was God telling me to do the very opposite thing that people might expect. I tell them, I always know it is God when the hardest thing is the one that feels like peace.

It had to be God’s peace that kept Noah building an ark when everyone else told him he was crazy. It had to be God’s peace that helped him gather all those animals. It had to be God’s peace that gave him the strength and energy to get through all the work and smell of all those animals in the same place for 40 days and 40 nights. Yuck!

Sometimes it is hard, but God’s peace makes it easy at the same time. I am grateful for every time that I followed God’s lead.

PRAYER: God, Help me be faithful when the things You are calling me to do are hard. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | REV. KELSY GUNTHER
PASTOR

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025 • THE PROMISED LAND

Genesis 12:1-7

I teach four-year-olds and I love it. In forty-eight short months, these little humans have gone from helpless newborns to strongly independent creatures that soak up and try to communicate back to us the world as they see it. Most days, my front row seat to this growth is amazing, hopeful and even hysterical. Other days there are tears, tantrums, whining and challenges. As a teacher, you pour as much as you can into every little life that comes through your classroom. Then they are gone, off to new adventures with a future I can only pray about but never get to see.

The story of Moses and the Promised Land is a lot like this experience. In saying ‘Yes’ to God, he took a major role in the promise God made to Abraham that his descendants would live in a “*land flowing with milk and honey.*” Moses remained faithful to God and His people as they wandered. I’m sure Moses dealt with daily disputes, complaints and tantrums as their leader – for 40 years. Then, after a generation of faithfulness, Moses wasn’t allowed into the Promise Land and he only saw the covenant fulfilled from afar.

Sometimes we plant a seed that we will never see grow to maturity. Faithfulness sometimes means letting go and trusting that God will continue the work we start long after our part is done.

PRAYER: Father in Heaven, Thank You that Your promises never fail. When it feels like our effort has been in vain and that we are left alone in the desert, remind us that Heaven stands and that Your plan for us is always for good. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | LIZ CAZEL
ELDER

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2025 • GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

Genesis 15:1-6

In Abraham's vision, God tells Abraham to not be afraid and that He was Abraham's shield and his very great reward. God's reference to this very great reward connects to God's covenant promise with Abraham. The promise that includes giving Abraham many descendants.

At times in our lives, we may experience the frustration of waiting for a promise to be fulfilled, and in the process, can sometimes lose hope that the promise will ever come to fruition. It is easy to see that Abraham was frustrated and filled with hopelessness when he asserted that God had nothing to give him since he remained childless despite God's assurance that he would become a great nation with many descendants.

Understanding Abraham's emotional state, God reinforced His promise by telling Abraham that a son of his own blood and flesh would be his heir and took him outside and said, *"Look up at the stars and count the stars—if indeed you can count them."* God then told Abraham, *"So shall your offspring be."* While this proclamation must have sounded unimaginable to Abraham, he believed God and God recognized Abraham's faith as righteous. This righteousness was given by God because of Abraham's faith.

Abraham's faith and trust in God's promise, even when his ability to initially believe fell short, illustrates that faithfulness is trusting God to fulfill His word even if His promise seems unimaginable.

PRAYER: God, Thank You for Your faithfulness and promises. Please help me to trust You like Abraham. I ask for the strength to believe in Your power. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | DOUG FENTON
STAFF

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2025 • JOSEPH

Genesis 37:1-36

Joseph was the 12th of 13 children born into a troubled family. While Jacob was the father common to all, Joseph's older brothers came from three different mothers fomenting rivalry and conflict among the siblings.

Jacob did not help matters by giving Joseph a coat of many colors clearly showing which son was his favorite. And Joseph exacerbated the situation by tattling on his brothers and sharing two dreams which depicted him reigning over his brothers and his parents.

Sibling jealousy turned into hatred spawning a plan to kill Joseph. Reuben tried to outsmart his brothers with a plan to save Joseph that ultimately failed. Judah suggested selling Joseph to an approaching caravan which resulted in Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt. Later, the brothers tried to cover their treachery by concocting a story that they knew would devastate their father.

Born into a dysfunctional family, Joseph was bullied and yet never became spiteful. Unlike Reuben who failed to stand up for what was right, Joseph didn't compromise, always defending God's dreams. He sustained his faith in God even when his life was threatened and his future uncertain.

Joseph's story reminds us that God works in and through difficult situations. Had Joseph not angered his brothers, he wouldn't have become prime minister in Egypt saving the lives of his family and the bloodline of David during a great famine.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, Thank You for being with me when life is hard. Help me to always have faith that You will guide me out of darkness into the light. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | CYNDI REIGHARD
ELDER

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025 • THE BURNING BUSH

Exodus 3

“The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up.”

—Exodus 3: 2-3

Being a shepherd was not a boring job. Sheep are stubborn and needy. To keep them safe and fed requires the shepherd’s full attention. Moses had a full plate watching over the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, in the wilderness. But he knew what he was doing. His responsibilities were great... get those sheep fed and bring them home again. That was his job.

But God had other ideas. God found a way to get Moses to “turn aside” from what was the focus of his life in order to present him with something different. Moses could not help but check out the marvel of this bush, blazing, yet not being consumed. And his life would never be the same. He was to be God’s instrument to free the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt.

During this season of Advent, most of us have full plates as well. There is “Christmas stuff” that we do each year...things to buy...cards to send...decorations to set up...baking to do. And in most cases, we feel that if we pay attention to our “to do lists” and not get distracted, we will get it all done.

But in the midst of all that, God offers us a great sight... a baby in a manger... a sign that God is with us in human form. If we take the time to “turn aside,” there is the promise that our lives...our world... can be changed as well. So, take the time...make the time!

PRAYER: O God, Help us to be alert to signs of Your love for us during this busy season and give us a heart to respond by loving others. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | THE REV. DR. TERRY PALMER
HONORABLY RETIRED

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2025 • THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Deuteronomy 5:1-22

When Moses went up Mount Sinai, God gave him the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets. They were God's way of showing His people how to love Him and love others.

Each commandment helps us understand: God's holiness, our need for forgiveness, and why we need the Savior, Jesus.

PRAYER: Dear God, You gave the Ten Commandments to show Your people how to live in love and peace. Help us all to follow Your ways, to honor You, to tell the truth, to be kind, and to forgive each other. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JILL HEWITT
DEACON

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2025 • RAHAB

Joshua 2:1-21

None of the Sunday School lessons I learned long ago included the story of Rahab, and I quickly skipped over this one. But when I revisited the list of available scripture passages, for some strange reason I was drawn to Rahab's story.

As Joshua was preparing a military campaign to take Canaan, he sent two spies to scout out vulnerabilities in Jericho. They went to the house of Rahab, a prostitute. After the local king learned the spies were in town, Rahab kept them hidden in her home. She believed the accounts she had heard about the God of Israel, so she helped the spies escape. In return, the spies told Rahab to gather her family members in her house and tie a scarlet cord to the window. When the Israelites invaded and conquered the city, Rahab and her family were saved, just as the two spies had promised her.

As I thought about this passage, I realized that Rahab was truly living the faith and trusting in God to keep her and her family safe. The story of Rahab speaks to the power of divine transformation and forgiveness. If we come before God and truthfully confess our sins, He will be merciful, grant us grace, and forgive our sins. In daily life we all make mistakes, but our past does not dictate our future with God. God uses people from all walks of life (even prostitutes!) to fulfill His purposes in this world. We never really know who or when God will call upon any of us to assist and demonstrate His love to the world.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, We stand before You a very imperfect people. Grant us Your mercy for our mistakes and use us however You see fit to make this world a better place for all Your people. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JAYNE PROHASKA
DEACON

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025 • RUTH AND BOAZ

Ruth 2:1-4:12

“God reward you well for what you’ve done—and with a generous bonus besides from God, to whom you’ve come seeking protection under his wings.” —Ruth 2:12, The Message

Ruth’s story starts with a lot of uncertainty—she’s a widow and a newcomer in Bethlehem, facing some tough times. But instead of giving up, Ruth shows quiet courage and sticks by Naomi, her mother-in-law. Along the way, she meets Boaz, who looks out for her and helps her. Their kindness and hope lead to something amazing: the birth of Obed, who becomes King David’s grandfather, and eventually, this family line brings us to Jesus.

Advent is a great reminder that God uses everyday people to bring hope and light, even when things feel dark. Ruth’s journey from sadness to joy is proof that God’s love and protection are always there for anyone who seeks Him.

As we wait for Christ’s birth, let’s remember God’s love and grace are for everyone—the stranger, the tired, and the faithful.

- Where do you see God working quietly in your life?
- How does Ruth’s story shape your view of Jesus as Redeemer?
- What does it mean that the Messiah came from unexpected people?

PRAYER: God, Thank You for Ruth’s story and the reminder that Your love reaches everyone, no matter where we come from or what we’ve been through. Help us to trust You, show kindness to others, and look for hope even in hard times. As we wait for Jesus, fill our hearts with Your light and make us part of Your story of grace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

WRITTEN BY | STEPHANIE KINSEY
ELDER

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025 • KING DAVID

1 Samuel 16:1-15

Israel had a king, Saul, and a High Priest, Samuel. I Samuel 15:35 says, *“Samuel grieved over Saul . . . and the Lord regretted that He made Saul king over Israel.”* Chapter 16 describes Samuel’s faithfulness to God’s plan. *“Fill your horn with oil (olive oil used to anoint a new king). Go, even though you are afraid . . . invite Jesse and his sons to a sacrifice.”* Obeying God, Samuel the Priest, did what the Lord said, verse 4, prepared for the ceremony and met each of Jesse’s handsome sons. *“The Lord has not chosen any of these,”* Samuel told Jesse, verse 10.

“Bring the one left (David who was out tending the sheep) because we will not sit down (to eat the sacrifice) until he comes,” verse 11. *“And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward,”* verse 13. Saul’s love/hate relationship with David, Goliath’s death, the love between Jonathan (Saul’s son) and David, Philistine fights, and David’s marriages fill the remaining 15 chapters of I Samuel.

All required David’s faithfulness to the God who had chosen him to be Israel’s king. David is shown doing what is honorable, what is right, what brings glory to God, often with great personal hardship.

Can I be faithful to God as demonstrated by David? What kind of faithfulness do we manifest and carry out today?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, cause us to be as faithful today as David was faithful to Your calling. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | DOROTHY HANSON
DEACON

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2025 • DAVID THE SHEPHERD KING

2 Samuel 5:1-5

David's journey to the throne was long, uncertain, and marked by hardship. Years earlier, the prophet Samuel had anointed him as king, yet the promise seemed distant. David endured exile, betrayal, and danger—but through it all, God was faithful to His word.

In this scripture reading, the waiting finally ends. The tribes of Israel come together and affirm David as the shepherd and ruler God had chosen. While David had to wait, he remained faithful to God and God faithful to him, but God fulfilled His promise on his schedule, not David's. 😊

Advent reminds us of that same faithfulness. For generations, Israel waited for the true Shepherd-King and Messiah who would reign not just over a nation, but over all creation. Jesus Christ, born in Bethlehem (David's city), fulfills the promise God made.

Like David, we often live in the in-between, waiting for spoken promises to be fulfilled. Advent invites us to wait faithfully, trusting that God is at work even when we cannot yet see the full picture. His faithfulness in David's story points us to His ultimate faithfulness in Christ's coming and future coming again.

PRAYER: God, Please help us to not let uncertainty shake our faith in You and Your plan. Help us to better trust Your plan and be comfortable that it will be revealed when You deem the time is right. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | STEVE ROWE
ELDER

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2025 • ESTHER SAVES HER PEOPLE

Esther 4

“Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, liberation and rescue will arise for the Jews from another place, and you and your father’s house will perish [since you did not help when you had the chance]. And who knows whether you have attained royalty for such a time as this [and for this very purpose]?” Esther 4:13

In the Book of Esther, some scripture talks about Esther having won favor in the palace before she became a queen. During this time, anyone who entered the king’s court without being summoned by King Ahasuerus could be put to death. So, Esther went into the King’s court knowing she could possibly perish because she was not summoned by the king. But God answered Esther and His people’s prayer and gave Esther favor in the sight of the king. Queen Esther pleaded with the king to spare the lives of her people.

This chapter shows how God protected His people and delivered them. Esther was indeed placed in her royalty position for such a time as this. Another important detail to note is that both Mordecai and Esther are from the Tribe of Benjamin, one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

God could have placed us in a different situation for such a time as this as well. Whether it’s to intercede for His remnant throughout the world, pray for justice, pray for unity in the body of Christ or families, pray for His prodigal children, pray for healing and restoration for people or nations, pray for deliverance for the oppressed, pray for Christians that are being persecuted, or any other reason God places on our hearts. God uses a willing vessel to do His will.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, Please open our spiritual eyes, spiritual ears and help our hearts to become receptive towards You. Help us to seek You first just like Queen Esther and King David sought You first and foremost. I ask that You release some favor upon us and our families. Thank You for hearing our prayers and requests. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

WRITTEN BY | GLORIA FENTON
STAFF

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2025 • PROPHECY OF A SAVIOR

Isaiah 9:2-7

When I took on the assignment of writing about Isaiah 9, I naively thought, “Piece of cake. Just say something about the “For unto Us a Child Is Born” chorus from Handel’s Messiah, add a prayer, and call it good. But I realized that simple approach does not do justice to the passage.

While it is common for good Christian folks to read this bit of chapter 9 as a prophecy about the Christ, Isaiah of Jerusalem probably wrote these words about Hezekiah, son of King Ahaz. Hezekiah would become one of the most beloved kings of Judah and the Gospel of Matthew includes him in the genealogy of Jesus. During the reigns of prior kings, including that of dear old dad, religious practice had significantly drifted away from God toward idols and pagan rites. Hezekiah is credited with purging the temple of cult objects, including the bronze serpent made by Moses, and restoring YHWH to the center of worship.

Perhaps more importantly, Hezekiah is remembered for his faith in the Lord. When Jerusalem was threatened with destruction by the armies of Assyria, Hezekiah did not give in to the demand that the people of Judah abandon God. Instead, he went to the temple and prayed, trusting that the Lord would save his people. His prayer was heard and Judah was delivered from the threat. Hezekiah *“held fast to the Lord. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him...”* [2 Kings 18.6-7]

PRAYER: Lord, deliver us from the folly of our own self-trust into the hope that only comes from trust in You. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2025 • PROPHECY OF THE SECOND COMING

Isaiah 11:6-9

When I read Isaiah's words about wolves and lambs living together, I can hardly imagine it. The world I see feels far from peaceful—news headlines, broken relationships, and worries that weigh on my heart. Yet Isaiah's vision gives me hope. It reminds me that God has a plan to restore everything, even the things that seem impossible to fix.

During Advent, I'm reminded that Jesus came to begin that peace. His birth was quiet, humble, and easily missed—but through Him, God started healing the world. The peace Isaiah describes isn't just about animals getting along; it's about hearts made new, fears silenced, and people learning to live with compassion instead of anger.

As I wait for Christmas, I realize I can live out a little bit of that peace now. I can choose patience in frustration, kindness in conflict, forgiveness when it's hard. Those small choices reflect the kind of world God promises—a world where “nothing will hurt or destroy.”

PRAYER: Lord, Thank You for the promise of peace that began with Jesus' birth. Help us to trust that Your plan is still unfolding, even when the world feels broken. Show us how to live as a peacemaker in our homes, our work, and our community. Let Your peace start with us. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | CARRIN ROWE
ELDER

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2025 • JONAH AND THE WHALE

Jonah 3:1-5

I don't know if you know this about me, but I am stubborn. I really like to keep my toys, I love guarding the front door, and I will insist on attention. I'm not proud of it, but sometimes I just don't want to listen. I have found something interesting or I am busy sniffing a new smell. I can admit this to you, sometimes I might know better but still don't want to do what is asked.

But I have learned something from Jonah. Once we realize the truth, we have to let go of the stubbornness.

Jonah didn't want to do what God asked him to do. He was stubborn and tried to run away which only landed him in a whale. He had time to think about it and realized that running from God doesn't work. Eventually, he did do what God asked. And the Ninevites, realized that changing their ways was worth it. Their lives got better when they followed God.

So I have decided to stay stubborn, but only in relation to how much I love God and my people. I will be stubborn about snuggles, time together, prayer, play time and my favorite toy. The rest I will work on, because being together matters more.

PRAYER: Holy Spirit, Help us to be more faithful and less stubborn. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | SIMON
PARISH PUP IN TRAINING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2025 • DANIEL AND THE LIONS' DEN

Daniel 6

We all know the beloved story. Daniel was thrown into a lion's den because he disobeyed King Darius' edicts and faithfully obeyed God instead. Daniel stood with God and God stood with Daniel.

The king declared to his people that the God of Daniel *“delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth; for he has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.”* (Daniel 6:27)

Today we all have our lions' dens. They could be in the form of illness, relationships, political change, finance, or other challenges. While our life situations may often seem insurmountable, God's power and faithfulness remain constant. God promises to stand with us in those challenging times. God STILL delivers and rescues. God STILL works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth. God STILL saves!

Advent is a time to step back and look for those signs and wonders. The promise of scripture is that God is here. In this season, we are reminded to live that promise; “Emmanuel, God with us.”

PRAYER: Dear God, Help us live the faith of Daniel and always be aware that Your power and faithfulness remain constant. Help us to be sensitive to the struggles of others. Help us during this Advent season to stand stronger with You. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JAN PALMER
ELDER

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2025 • ELIZABETH AND ZECHARIAH

Luke 1:5-25

Zechariah and Elizabeth's story is a great example of how we all experience ups and downs in our walk with God. They are faithful followers, yet they also face fear, doubt, and insecurity in their relationship with Him.

They remain steadfast in their faith even as their prayers for a child go unanswered. Then, when the angel appears, Zechariah is "gripped with fear." Even a temple priest is startled when God sends a messenger!

When Gabriel tells Zechariah that he and Elizabeth's prayers have been answered and that God will bless them with a child, Zechariah responds with skepticism and a definite tone of "if it seems too good to be true, it probably is." I think his reaction came from an instinct to protect his heart. No one wants the pain and disappointment of hoping for something and then it not coming to pass.

Although Gabriel rebukes Zechariah's disbelief and places him under involuntary silence until the child is born, Elizabeth picks up the baton of faith. She praises God and gives Him glory for showing her favor and allowing her to become pregnant.

There are all sorts of "both-and's:" both correction and blessing, both fear and courage, both hope and doubt, both disbelief and faith. Basically, an average day in the life. Thanks for being so relatable, Zechariah and Elizabeth!

PRAYER: Lord, help us to live well in the tension of the "both-and's." Help us to trust Your love. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JENNIFER GRIMES

STAFF

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2025 • JOHN THE BAPTIST

Matthew 3:13-17

I am not worthy to carry his sandals!

It seems John the Baptist was not the typical Judean. He wore clothing of camel hair with a leather belt around his waist. His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. Even so, people were flocking to be with him and to be baptized in the Jordan River.

He said, *“I baptize you with water, but One who is more powerful than I is coming after me.”* Then Jesus appeared at the Jordan to be baptized by John. Imagine John’s shock and disbelief! John wanted to say, *“No, it is You who should be baptizing me.”* Jesus insisted - God’s work is coming together right now in this baptism.

Many of us, myself included, cannot remember our infant baptism. With the guidance of our parents and church family, it was the beginning of our Christian journey - a life of faith, love, hope, forgiveness and grace with Jesus by our side.

PRAYER: Thank You, Jesus for loving and caring for us each and every day. In Your name I pray, Amen.

WRITTEN BY | KAREN MCDANIEL
MEMBER

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2025 • GOD CHOOSES MARY

Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that she would become pregnant and give birth to a son to be named Jesus who would be the Son of God and reign forever.

In many pictures of Mary's Annunciation, she is portrayed as a young woman. Yet the unexpected angelic announcement was made to a humble 12-year-old girl who was initially confused and skeptical. Despite the incredulity of the situation, Mary's faith and trust in God caused her to willingly assert, *"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."*

Her response absolutely amazes me. First, she overcame reasonable fear and doubt; second, she believed the impossible was possible; third, she put aside her dreams and already made plans for the future; and fourth, she willingly submitted to God's will knowing that her unmarried status would generate Joseph's wrath and expose her to disgrace and condemnation from her temple leaders and community.

Like Mary, we too, are children of God — God is alive in all of us. With God's help, we too, can face our fears and the unknown. With faith, we too, can trust that God always will lead us along the path Christ would have taken.

PRAYER: Lord, Help us to remain open to receive Your message. Give us the patience, courage, and wisdom to do Your will. Strengthen our resolve, especially when the plan You have for us is not easy, because through You, all things work for good. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | CYNDI REIGHARD
ELDER

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025 • ANGEL APPEARS TO JOSEPH

Matthew 1:18-25

There is no doubt that Joseph is a good and just man. But there were limits that even he could not resolve effectively. He and Mary were going to be married. Joseph was looking forward to marrying Mary and having a family later. However, not in the order that he had to deal with when he realized that Mary was pregnant.

Joseph did not want Mary to be shamed by other people from their village, as that would be part of the culture they lived by. He wanted to let Mary know they would not be married now, but he would sleep on it overnight and find the best way to achieve these changes in both their lives.

But the intervention of an angel changed how Joseph was going to deal with this difficult matter, and it changed the direction in life for Joseph. After he understood what his responsibilities needed to be.

So, Mary and Joseph did get married and gave the world a baby boy, named Jesus. He was born in Bethlehem, but not how the couple had originally anticipated. After the birth they did not return to their village. But they realized they had an important responsibility to raise our Lord Jesus. After all, both Mary and Joseph had received directions from angels, and they needed to fulfill these responsibilities.

And Joseph continued to be a good and just man....

PRAYER: Thank You, Lord, for the birth of Jesus, and how Joseph changed the direction in his life. Give us the courage to follow Your direction in our own life and do so in a just fashion. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | GORDON PARNELL

ELDER

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2025 • MARY AND JOSEPH

Luke 2:1-5

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem must have been difficult, particularly for Mary as she was pregnant. This was an act of obedience in following what the decree required. It also shows trust in God's plan to fulfil the prophecies of our Messiah's birth.

When they arrived in Bethlehem Mary and Joseph could not find any place to stay. An inn keeper offered a stable, where Jesus was born in humble surroundings among the animals. Despite being tired from their long journey, Mary and Joseph experienced the joy of their son's birth.

God's plans may differ from our expectations, but we must open our minds to God's grace and love. I am sure many of us have had to go on a journey not knowing the outcome, however we need to put our trust in God, that his guidance will help us adapt with love, peace, and hope.

PRAYER: God, Thank You for the gift of Jesus. Help me find a place for You in our heart even in the ordinary and messy parts of our lives. The greatest gifts come in the simplest packages. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JEANETTE PARNELL
DEACON MODERATOR

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2025 • SHEPHERDS SEE ANGELS

Luke 2:8-20

“And that’s what Christmas is all about Charlie Brown.” As a child, I remember this scripture being told in the Charlie Brown Christmas movie. Charlie Brown is in search of the true meaning of Christmas, and his friend Linus shares this scripture verse. Charlie Brown then has a moment of awe and understanding.

Have you ever wondered why the shepherds were the first people to hear the good news of Jesus’ birth? Usually, the President of the United States or the news channels are first to hear important news. But God told the angels to announce Jesus’ birth to common, sometimes dirty, sometimes smelly, unimportant shepherds in their fields.

Today, we think of a shepherd as the kind of person who carefully watches over innocent sheep. In the days when Jesus was born, shepherds were not admired. A shepherd’s job was simple. It didn’t require much skill. Anyone could sit and watch sheep all day. Since shepherds lived out in the fields all day and night, they were sometimes dirty and messy. Some people talked about how shepherds smelled bad. So why did God announce it to them first? The good news about Jesus is for everyone, not just the important or rich people. God noticed the poor shepherds and knew they were just as important. Just as God notices you, no matter what you are doing, no matter where you are. You too, are just as important. So, as you hustle around this holiday season, stop and think about the good news and how important every human being is on this earth.

PRAYER: Thank You, God, that You watch over us, even when we wander astray. Thank You that we do not have to smell good, look good or even act good for You to love us and think we are important. We ask for Your help to keep our eyes open for the daily miracles in our lives. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | JESSICA WERNAU
STAFF

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2025 • THE WISEMEN VISIT

Matthew 2:1-12

It was 1951, in our new elementary school called Little Valley. We had 4 grades: K, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. I was in the 3rd grade. Our teachers thought we should put on a Christmas pageant in our school. What is interesting to me today is that we were allowed to have the story of the Birth of Jesus (A Bible Story!) in a public school. But we did it – costumes, music – we did it all!

I was selected to be one of the three wisemen. For all these years since then, this was the best Christmas pageant for me. We had great costumes, but then a surprise came from my teacher: “Eddie, would you sing a solo for the program?” I said “Yes.” I was to sing “Fairest Lord Jesus” – 2 verses. Why didn’t we use a more familiar carol, like “Away in the Manger?” I learned later! My Dad, Ed - an excellent singer, helped me memorize the words and the program came off well.

So, I invite you to sing these words from your heart and mind, then you will see why it was the right song for a Christmas play.

“Fairest Lord Jesus, Ruler of all nature, O thou of God to earth come down. Thee will I cherish, thee will I honor, thou, my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.

Beautiful Savior, Ruler of the nations, Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, praise, adoration, now and forever-more be thine!”

The finishing touch for this Christmas! Thank you, God, for your message to me (us) back in the 3rd grade.

PRAYER: Loving God, We sing Your song again, remembering the gift You give us: Fairest Lord Jesus. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | REV. ED SPENCE
MEMBER

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2025 • JESUS IS BORN

Luke 2:1-8

As we come to the end of our Jesse Tree journey, the long line of God's faithful people leads us here—to a stable, to a manger, to a tiny baby wrapped in cloth. I can't help but think about what it meant to be faithful in this story.

So many thought they were being faithful when they condemned this young couple instead of inviting the miraculous God who planned this from the very beginning. They thought it was faithful to save space for the important people but faithfulness looked like the kindness of a stable with hay for a pillow. They thought faithfulness meant status, but it really is all about grace for all people including some lowly shepherds. They thought faithfulness was about rules, when faithfulness is really about bringing hope when we get lost on the way to meet the Savior.

The Christmas story isn't only about people who did everything right. It is about the faithful ones who simply did what was theirs to do. Today we are asked to do the same—be kind, offer space, be patient, be generous, and trust God in small and unseen ways.

PRAYER: Jesus, Thank You for Your birth. Show us how to be faithful. Amen.

WRITTEN BY | REV. KELSY GUNTHER
PASTOR



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