

# Deck the Halls Prepare the Hearts



Advent Devotional 2024

# INTRODUCTION

What is on your Christmas to-do list? Does it perhaps include decking the halls with boughs of holly? Or maybe you have donning gay (festive) apparel on your list? And who can forget to add trolling the ancient Yuletide carol every Christmas season?

While it's tough to get past the old English in this song (decking halls, donning apparel, and trolling carols) most people get the gist of it: the writer of this song is busy during Christmas. The to-do list in this song is long. Everything before this was just in verse one. If you add verses two and three your list expands to include:

- Striking a harp and joining a chorus (Things I promise you do not want me to do).
- Telling of old Yuletide treasure (I've always wanted treasure).
- Hailing the new, ye lads and lasses (Is this talking about the dog Lassie?).

Just listening to this song makes me anxious about things that I'm missing this Christmas season. (Who wants to really miss hailing lads and lasses?!) As this song alone makes your to-do list a mile long, I want to invite you to see God's to-do list on the very first Christmas. To take it out of the old English and bring it into modern terms, our to-do list might include sending cards, hanging lights, singing songs, attending parties, and wrapping gifts. God's to-do list also included sending invitations, hanging lights, creating songs, attending parties, and wrapping gifts. And He created and accomplished this entire to-do list for you.

So "Deck the Halls, Prepare the Hearts" is not just a journey through your Christmas to-do list, it's also a journey through God's; it's an adventure to the manger, where God's love was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a humble bed of hay. Each devotion is designed to draw you closer to Jesus, to help you see Him in the lights you hang, the songs you sing, the gatherings you attend, the presents you wrap, and even the halls you deck. As you prepare your home, may these reflections help you also prepare your heart to receive the fullness of what Christmas brings.

Pastor Adam

*PS – A big thank you to all of the St. Peter's people who wrote these devotions. Your words will resonate throughout God's church this Advent season and beyond.*



## December 1

### A Christmas Invitation to Whom Willa Wetzel



**Verse of the Day:** *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. - Genesis 3:15*

Have you ever made a promise to someone? According to Merriam Webster the word promise as a verb means to pledge to do, bring about, or provide. Sometimes we make promises to others without thinking about it. Things like: “I promise to do better,” “I promise I’ll fill up the car with gas,” and “I promise I don’t have homework.” And how about a pinky promise? Have you ever made one of those with someone? Some believe a pinky promise is the most sincere promise there is. However, we know that even pinky promises can be broken. I think we often take the word “promise” for granted.

Did you know that on the contrary God will never break His promises to us? In Genesis 9, God promised to never flood the earth again. In Genesis 17, God promised a son to Abraham and Sarah. These promises might be the first ones that come to mind when thinking about God’s promises to us. A promise from God that we may not realize is in our verse for today. Genesis 3:15 reveals the first promise God made to us; and it is the best promise of all.

In the Garden of Eden, immediately after the Fall, God made a promise of redemption. He told the serpent that the offspring of the woman would crush its head. This is often seen as the first invitation to the Christmas story - a promise of a Savior who would come to defeat sin and death. But this promise was not just for Adam and Eve, this promise would be for all of their offspring that would suffer under the same consequences of sin. This invitation is for you: to trust that God sent the solution to the problem of sin. He did that in the person of Jesus.

Even when we try our best we may not be able to keep every promise we make; even pinky promises. But we can have faith in the truth that God will keep all of His promises to us, and faith in the truth that because of the promise of salvation, we will have eternal life with Christ.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we give You thanks that You kept Your promise to save us from sin through the person of Jesus Christ. Let us rejoice this Christmas season as we anticipate the joyous celebration of the birth of Your Son. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



## December 2

### A Christmas Invitation to Where Ryan Babbitt



**Verse of the Day:** *But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. - Micah 5:2*

Have you ever been given what seems like an impossible task? Whether it be a request from a family member, a work assignment, or a repair gone wrong that has to be fixed immediately..... at some point we will encounter challenges that make us wonder “can I do this?” or “do I have what it takes?”. Similarly we might look at others and question their ability to succeed: “Are they good enough?”. It’s easy for us to rely on information readily available to predict a result: we like knowing and we like to be right! I can’t help but think the tribes of Judah and Israel asked similar questions when they heard this prophecy from Micah. How could a ruler come out of the town of Bethlehem? It might be easy to be skeptical unless we know that God creates magnificent works through some of the most mundane, average, or simplest forms. Scripture is littered with examples of this:

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” - Ecclesiastes 3:11

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” - 2 Corinthians 12:9

I have found rest knowing God’s measure of success is not the same as the world’s measure of success and that God does not require worldly success to make His glory known! It also gives me hope when I am not able to clearly see the end. I know that He is with me through the challenge and that makes it OK for me to not have all the answers.

God’s glory is revealed when He works miraculously through what appears to be meager means. The magnitude of His radiance is not determined by social status, nationality, nor physical prowess. God refocuses us on Himself when He uses meek or imperfect people to accomplish incredible things.

Reflecting on the verses above, in what ways have we seen God working through those around us? How have you seen God working in you? How can we recognize and amplify the light that God is working through the average or mundane?

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we praise You that You work through the average and mundane of this world. Not only do You work through the mundane, You became mundane, just like us, that very first Christmas. Let our focus be on the mundane this Christmas season, so that we may see Your magnificent work. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



**December 3**



**A Christmas Invitation to What  
Jenny Whiteside**

***Verse of the Day:*** *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. - Isaiah 9:6*

Nicknames..... Everyone has at least one or two that have followed them through the years. Some pick them up while playing on sports teams, like the famous athletes: “Babe” Ruth, “Magic” Johnson, and “The Refrigerator” William Perry. Historical figures have also been given nicknames. Some bring honor and a few, not so much. You may recognize these names: “Ivan the Terrible”, “Old Blood and Guts”, “Iron Lady”, and “Billy the Kid”. Other nicknames are derived from a person's characteristics to make them easy to remember: “Red”, “Curly”, or “Slim”. Generally, these names are given to a person after they have entered the world and have accomplished something notable, funny, or even embarrassing that others will remember.

Jesus also has many nicknames. Through Scripture, the prophet Isaiah let the world know of the names of Jesus hundreds of years before His birth: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. There are no other names/nicknames more powerful or significant than these. And these were even given before Christ even made His first appearance on Earth! Through Isaiah’s prophecy we are told that God will send His Son to us as a gift and that will mean the promise of deliverance and salvation for all people.

After His birth, Jesus was given even more names by His followers and believers. We find these names in the Bible, hymnals, and popular Christian songs: King of Kings, Miracle Worker, Lamb of God, Redeemer, Light in the Darkness, and Immanuel. All these names remind us that Jesus is The Way, The Truth, and The Life. During the Advent season we are reminded of the many nicknames of Jesus and the importance of His incredible birth.

Christmas is a time to reflect on the fulfillment of the prophecies and God’s promise to all mankind with the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us receive the invitation through faith and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, the One given to all people to save us from our sins with the promise of eternal life with Him in heaven.

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***Prayer:*** *Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the most precious gift, Your Son, given to us on Christmas. May we take the time this Advent season to reflect on the meanings and value of all of His names. Be with us as we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



**December 4**

**A Christmas Invitation to Mary**  
Emma Christie



***Verse of the Day:*** *For no word from God will ever fail. - Luke 1:37*

Trust is one of the few things that takes so long to earn yet can be lost so quickly. Someone's word can build up a nation or it can tear down walls. When you're young, you believe everything said to you, but as you mature, you learn to be skeptical about what you accept as truth. Trusting someone completely is one of the greatest powers you can give that person. When you fully trust someone you are giving them the ability to guide you in your actions and choices; you are giving them a piece of you that you can only hope they will protect and value.

As you would trust your close family and friends, Mary trusted God. She was young, engaged, and had a full life ahead of her. When she encountered the angel Gabriel sent by God in her home, she was immediately trusting. She gave God a level of trust that people take years to establish. Not only was she trusting God's will in her life, but she took God's Word as truth. She had not been told a common truth, she had just been told that she was pregnant, carrying the Son of God. As Luke 1:37 states, "For no word from God will ever fail." Mary was a shining gold example of this verse, trusting in God that He would guide her life, and protect her. Mary's response is a remarkable display of trust and faith. Instead of questioning or doubting God's plan, Mary humbly accepted her role in fulfilling God's divine purpose.

Trust is not just a concept in human relationships, but it also plays a significant role in our relationship with God. Just as Mary trusted God's plan for her, we, too, can find strength and guidance by placing our trust in the Higher Power. God always has a plan for you, and the biggest part of that plan is trusting that He is there for you. The hardest part about trusting God is that we cannot physically see Him, but if we look around we will quickly realize that God is very obviously working in our lives. Whether it be a near-miss car crash or simply your teacher or boss having enough grace to extend the deadline. God has proved time and time again that He is worthy of our trust, so in faith we give Him the reigns.

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***Prayer:*** *Heavenly Father, time and time again You are faithful to us, just like You were faithful 2,000 years ago to Mary. Because of that trust, lead us in our lives where You would have us go. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



**December 5**



**A Christmas Invitation to Joseph**  
Micah Brinegar

***Verse of the Day:*** *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. - Matthew 1:21*

Have you ever received an invitation that you weren't sure you wanted to accept? I have. Sometimes I struggle with how I'll manage my time with additional responsibilities; sometimes I'm not even sure I want to do what's being asked of me; sometimes I find it easier to make excuses for why "I can't". I wonder how Joseph may have felt when, through a dream, an angel invited him into his role as Jesus' earthly father.

God often brings about His will through ordinary people who are called to do extraordinary things. Joseph was asked to accept that the baby conceived in Mary was from the Holy Spirit and to raise the Child as his own, having faith that God had a greater purpose in mind. This probably isn't the life Joseph envisioned when he became engaged to Mary. It would have been easy for Joseph to dismiss the dream as a figment of his imagination. But he knew the voice of God because he was a godly man. When we're in tune with God through prayer and His Word, it's easier to recognize His voice.

Despite his initial concerns, Joseph was called to trust God and protect and raise the Child who would save His people from their sins. Not only that, but he was also charged with ensuring that the Child would be given the name "Jesus." Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we are also given a name: Child of God. But what does it mean to be a Child of God? It means that the accomplishment of God's will for the greater good sometimes requires sacrifices by His people on a personal level. But we can be confident that if we share in Christ's sufferings, we will also share in His glory. Paul assures us in Philippians 2:9-10 "Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name this is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

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***Prayer:*** *Heavenly Father, throughout the ages You have consistently called on people to trust You. Draw my heart to Your call of trust and anchor it in the promise of the Savior. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 6



## A Christmas Invitation to the Shepherds

Audrey Bush

**Verse of the Day:** *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. Luke 2:8*

Reading through this verse, I can't help but think about how the shepherds might have felt. I wonder if they ever felt lonely and left out, watching their sheep in silence in the fields and gazing at the busy hustle and bustle of a town in the distance. And I can't help but think of other times in my own life where I've felt similarly out of the loop. I can remember a time where some family friends had planned a graduation party for their daughter. Listening to all my friends, peers, and loved ones chat about the details, I smiled and couldn't contain my excitement.

Only problem is, a day prior to the event, I still hadn't received an invitation. I tried to push aside the negative thoughts about why I wasn't good enough to be on the guest list. I felt on the outs over what I had done wrong. I turned to prayer, took a deep breath and a nap, and woke up feeling much better. Even if I was not invited, everyone surrounded me with love and so I decided not to let this get me down. I went outside to run around with my brother and saw something out of the ordinary. A corner of paper behind the flower pot was sitting there as if it had fallen from the mailbox. Feeling relieved I realized it was my invitation that was there all along. I waved it to my mom and we shared a laugh.

Like me, I wonder if the shepherds felt left out and unimportant watching their sheep as the days went by. But what a thrill it must have been to receive an invitation to the most exciting event in history! They were quite literally greeted by angels to meet Jesus and be a part of the very first Christmas! While they were ecstatic, I'm sure they may have had doubts about why they, as lowly shepherds, were the ones invited. They are a great example of God teaching all people a lesson in humility - that He is here for all of us regardless of status, silliness, or any limits we may hold. 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." This shows that earthly stereotypes on what is weak are proven wrong time and time again with countless stories from the Word of God. He chooses those who are humble and seen as "not good enough," to do extraordinary things.

To apply this message I encourage you to stay humble within your everyday life. Make an effort to put yourself in others' shoes; we never truly know what others are going through. While it is more difficult than it sounds, those who are the hardest to be kind to are usually those who need it most. Remain humble always but treat yourself with respect as you are one of God's children. But most of all, know that your invitation to the greatest party is found in the manger that very first Christmas!

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we, like the shepherds, are in awe that You would choose us. Grant us a spirit of humility, that we may see this world and our neighbors the way that You do. In Jesus' name, Amen.*





December 7

A Christmas Invitation to  
Zechariah and Elizabeth  
Connor Bonnell



**Verse of the Day:** *When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" - Luke 1:41-42*

The story of John is one of the coolest in the whole Bible. Even before he was born, he was so pumped up about his cousin Jesus that he actually leaped in his mother's womb. He was the textbook definition of a hype man!

I hope you have had the chance to experience young kids interacting with their cousins. I know from experience in my own household that my son believes his older cousin is a walking legend. If we so much as mention that we may be going to visit, there will be chanting of his name, plans for snacks, and definitely bright ideas of how to race, crash, and destroy monster trucks.

John provided us that example of just how cool the story of Jesus is. Yes, John was Jesus' cousin. Yes, John had an excuse to think Jesus was awesome. But more than anything, John knew the truth. He was jumping up and down because he knew the miracles he was going to get to witness. He was ecstatic because he knew that his cousin was the King. Talk about some cool insider information! Pretty trendy to know the most famous Person in all of history before that Person was famous!

However, the story of these cousins ended pretty rough. John was beheaded by Herod Antipas and Jesus was crucified for the sins of the whole world. So think about how incredible it was that John lived his life up until those harder times. He was always the hype man, always building up the importance of knowing the story of Jesus. In the face of great adversity and danger, he spread the story of joy and triumph.

I think that is pretty important to reflect upon in many different ways. How can we be a hype man? How can we share the incredible story of Jesus? The Christmas season lends a multitude of chances: Invite someone to church, participate in a charity, buy a gift for someone in need, go be with someone who is lonely during the holidays.

Go out there and make a difference! Cheer someone up, build someone up, tell someone the exciting story of the birth, life, and resurrection of Jesus! Life is too short to keep that secret to yourself!

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**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, Thank You for this day and this season. We ask that You would be with us in our journey to share the story of Jesus with those around us. Thank You for all that You have done and continue to do for us. In Jesus name, Amen.*



December 8

The True Light  
Abigail Clore



**Verse of the Day:** *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. - John 1:9*

When I was little, I was afraid of the dark. I had to have a light of some sort on like a night light or closet light because the dark was scary. I never knew what was waiting for me in the dark. Most of us were probably afraid of the dark like I was when I was a kid. Now that I am older I realize that I wasn't afraid of the dark but what could be in the dark.

One of the very first things God created was light. "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). He illuminated the world and separated the light from the dark. He made the sun, the moon, and the stars. These cosmic lights allow us to see everything around us.

If the world had been left in darkness we would struggle. What day to day tasks are easy to accomplish in the dark? Not very many. We need light to see and experience the world. Light also protects us from what we can't see, what is lurking in the shadows. When it gets dark out or the lights go out we instinctively turn on a lamp or a flashlight because we need to see.

Even though God gave us the cosmic lights, the world was in darkness for a long time because of sin. It wasn't until Jesus came that the darkness cast by sin started to fade. Our verse of the day says, "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world" (John 1:9). Jesus, the True Light shines hope in the midst of this broken sinful world. We don't have to be afraid of the darkness sin brings because Jesus came bringing with Him true light.

While the True Light brings hope, He also illuminates our path. "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light to my path" (Psalms 119:105). God gives a True Light to show us His path for us. The True Light, which is Jesus Christ, illuminates the world freeing us from the darkness of sin just as the cosmic lights bring the world light. With the True Light we don't have to be lost in the darkness of sin and can see the path God has planned for us. His path for you starts at the manger.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, thank You for the True Light of the World that came to illuminate the path to You that very first Christmas. Give me Your Spirit so I may rest in that light and so that I may shine You in the darkness of this world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 9



## The Light that Shines in the Darkness

Nick Combs

**Verse of the Day:** *In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. - John 1:4-5*

Every year we travel back to my hometown to go through the Christmas Walkway of Lights in Marion, IN. It is an amazing display of Christmas lights that starts with a lit archway of wreaths and toy soldiers welcoming you. Then comes Rudolph, elves skating, Coca Cola polar bears, dinosaurs throwing snowballs, Old Man Winter, a USA Flag, and the list goes on. All those beautiful displays bring joy, but they aren't the best part. My family always looks forward to the end where you see an old wooden stable with a huge spotlight on it. In the spotlight is the whole nativity scene. This is by far the brightest light in the Walkway of Lights. Of course, the best time to see this display is when the night is darkest. It's like the creators knew that the bright lights shines in the darkest of times.

The verse of the day shares that Jesus is the source of life. No matter how alone we feel, no matter how dark and despairing things seem, we have everything we need in us through Jesus. In modern culture there is a quote, although from a fictional character, that illustrates this same message: "Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light." - Albus Dumbledore. Jesus is the source of light and when we embrace Him, we champion His love that allows us and others around us to find joy and peace in dark times. In today's world there are plenty of factors that illustrate what happens when we have no hope or peace. That's why, as followers of Christ, it's important to remember that the light is inside all of us even when the darkness outside grows. It's up to us to "remember to turn on the light" and provide a beacon of His hope for those who feel alone and swallowed up by darkness.

I think back to a song by Creedence Clearwater Revival: "Long As I Can See The Light". This song speaks to those that may be in dark times and needing someone to shine a light so they can find their way back "home". In the classic kids tune "This Little Light of Mine", we are reminded to let this light within us shine no matter what and to not let that light be hidden. Others around us need to see this light that we have. If it is dimmed, hidden, snuffed, or turned off completely, an opportunity will be missed for more lights to be lit.

As you are painstakingly putting up those Christmas lights this holiday season, as bright as they are, remember the brightest light is that of Jesus. He should be what shines brightest through us. Just remember to turn on that light.

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**Prayer:** *Father, You are the light of the world and You share that light with us. Help us to remember to turn on our lights to shine for You so that those who are lost in the darkness may find their way back home to You. Lord, help those that are currently experiencing despairing times to not be swallowed up by this darkness but filled with Your love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 10

## The Prophecy of Light

Kyla Rodriguez



**Verse of the Day:** *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. - Isaiah 9:2*

Have you ever walked through a familiar room in the dark? It is probably a room you would not think twice about walking through during the day. But suddenly, when you walk through it in the dark, it can become an ominous obstacle course. Take your living room or family room for example. The reality of the room is not necessarily any different in its dark state. The furniture is still in the same place, the same basket of toys or books is still right in the middle of the room where you left it, your pair of shoes is still next to the couch, and your bag from work is still by the door. Once the lights are off, the room doesn't change, but your perception of it does. It makes you second-guess every step you take.

With winter quickly approaching, the darkest days of the year are ahead. This is the time of year when it may be dark when you go to work and dark when you leave work. All this darkness can warp your perception of light. As if seasonal darkness wasn't enough you may also be experiencing internal darkness as you miss loved ones or navigate other losses and daily struggles. Darkness quickly and suddenly becomes a part of your daily rhythm.

I think part of the appeal of the Christmas season is how we intentionally infuse light into all of our celebrations. Lights wrap our trees, houses, and light poles. During the darkness of winter, the lights of Christmas guide our path.

But Christmas lights on houses can only do so much to combat darkness in our hearts. As difficult as darkness can be to endure, God gives a purpose to this darkness. In our verse of the day we are reminded of a prophecy foretelling of Jesus' coming: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." This prophecy told God's people that one day an Ultimate Light would break into their darkness. Until then, in this world, darkness is part of how we experience light. John 1:5 reminds us, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

While darkness alters our sense of reality, light enables us to see how God is at work in our lives. Jesus always provides light, even in our darkest hours. His light guides our path. Whether we are facing the darkness of an unknown future, a health diagnosis, the loss of a relationship, or the fear of lying in bed at night in a dark room, we are loved by a God who is present in the darkness but not overcome by it.

May the extra presence of lights in the winter remind you that you have a God who stepped out of the light into this world of darkness. May lights remind you of the God who gives a purpose to your darkness.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning, with the newness of every light. In the darkness of this season and the darkness of this world, abide in us so that we may shine Your light to others. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



**December 11**

**Light of the World**

Damyon Hunter



**Verse of the Day:** *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” - John 8:12*

As you may have gathered from the title of this devotion, Jesus is the Light of the world. Now, as I say this, this does not mean He is “a light” but instead “The Light”. This means nothing else can compare to His significance in our lives. With the love and power of Jesus, we will never have to walk alone or in darkness. He is always with us surrounding us in an abundance of light. It is like walking around with a huge lamp attached to your head that never runs out. In the Gospel of John 8:12 Scripture reads, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” This verse prompts two questions: what does it mean to follow the Light of the world and how can we reflect that light to others in our own lives?

I truly believe that Jesus shines His light in our lives through people or situations. For me, Jesus’ light shines through my Grandma and Grandpa. They are not only great examples of how to live a God-fearing life but they also helped bring me out of darkness into Jesus’ light. When I was born, no one knew what my future would look like or if I would even have one at all. Being born to two parents dealing with drug abuse doesn’t seem like you’re set up for a great future or so that’s what everyone thought. Thankfully, my grandparents convinced my parents to get me baptized at only a week old while still in the hospital because that is where my faith in Jesus Christ began. If it weren’t for my grandparents taking me in at the age of one, I truly don’t know if I would be here with you today. They have raised me to be a respectful, kind, and God-fearing young man and they shine Jesus’ light to me everyday through their mass amounts of grace, kindness, and encouragement.

If they can shine Jesus’ light so brightly in my life, how can you and I reflect Jesus’ light to others in our own lives? I will say this has taken me a while to figure out myself but I think it can start out simply. A very important light in people’s worlds that not many people find important is just a simple smile at someone you don’t know. You never know what a person has been dealing with on the inside. This is why it is always important to be kind, positive, and most importantly, to smile. Now this isn’t the only thing you can do to spread light. You can also take time to tell others funny stories or jokes, pray for someone, or tell them your favorite Bible story. There are many great ways to spread Jesus’ light in the world but my favorite is to just smile.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Jesus, the Light of the world, to guide us out of darkness and into Your grace. Just like my grandparents, help us shine Your light to others. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



## December 12

### My Light and My Salvation Ben Elsbury



**Verse of the Day:** *The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? - Psalm 27:1*

Did you know that nearly 70% of Americans hang outdoor Christmas decorations? As a result of this, 18,400 people will also visit the emergency room while spreading their festive cheer. Imagine yourself up on an old rusty ladder that probably should have been thrown away years ago. The wind is blowing, you're cold, and a crowd of concerned family and friends are below you looking on with concern. You have your strand of Christmas lights in one hand, a staple gun in the other, and you're working away at hanging your decorations. One misstep or slip off the ladder and you're sure to end up embarrassed and potentially injured. You have to rely on your ladder to stay stable so that you can stay safe.

Our daily lives are filled with many moments of uncertainty and fear. We may fear for our futures, unpaid bills, or even the safety of ourselves and loved ones. In times like these, it can be hard to keep our focus on God and His promises for us. Luckily for us, our faith in Jesus Christ is not supported by an old rusty ladder. In our Verse of the Day we are told that with God by our side, we have a rock solid place of strength and salvation. Throughout our lives when we find ourselves in situations that make us uncomfortable and afraid, we can remain firm in our faith in God to give us strength. We can rely on God to give us steadfast support through times of trouble. The confidence that we have in keeping safe through troubling events does not come from anything that we do as sinful humans, but through God. He is our light and salvation. He gives us strength.

During this Advent season, remember to follow the words of Psalm 27. God is your light and salvation, your stronghold in times of trouble. With God as your foundation, you can face your troubles with the confidence to know that everything that you do is supported. We have no reason to fear because we have God. Just as you rely on the support of your ladder to keep you stable and secure while hanging Christmas lights, even more you can rely on God to have your back in times of trouble.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we thank You for being our rock, light, and salvation in times of uncertainty. Help us to trust in You when fear arises, knowing that You are our stronghold and foundation. During this Advent season, may we remember that true hope and strength come from Christ, Your gift to us. In Jesus' name we pray Amen.*



December 13

The Shining City

Kate Spurgeon



**Verse of the Day:** *You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden...In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. - Matthew 5:14, 16*

Have you ever been drawn to a neighborhood that almost blinds you with Christmas lights and decorations? The lights are so bright that you can't help but be attracted to all the excitement. All of a sudden you find yourself pulled over in awe of the lights that you just discovered. One of my favorite core memories when I was little was finding the house with the dancing snowman. What made it better was finding the house with its own radio station connected to the light show.

While all decked-out neighborhoods and homes with the brightest and craziest lights bring a flood of joy-filled memories, I also simultaneously love the homes out in the middle of nowhere that may have a simple star or candles in their windows. There is something so peaceful about the tiniest of light amidst the darkness of night.

Like the many forms of beautiful Christmas lights shine bright for the world to see, Jesus is asking us to use the light He has gifted us. It is important to remember that God created each and every one of us in His own image. Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." God gifted each of us with our own individual light to shine in this world! Our lights may look different from our neighbors', but having a different way of shining your light is a wonderful blessing! We can each bring our own gift God has blessed us with to glorify Him the way He intended. Each of our unique vivid lights makes up the city on a hill that cannot be hidden!

If you are called to stop and tell a builder that he is doing a great job, shine your light! If you are called to serve Jesus overseas, shine your light! If you are called to get an extra coffee for that stranger, shine your light! Never be afraid to listen to the Holy Spirit when you are being called to shine your light, no matter if your light is like a big dancing snowman or the light of a simple star. Jesus has given us all that we need to do what He is calling us to. How do you plan to shine your light for God's glory today? How can we help all to see the unstoppable light with which Jesus has blessed us with?

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**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, thank You for the blessing of unfailing love and light, help me to find the light You have placed in me to glorify You. Help me to listen to the Holy Spirit when I am in moments where I struggle to shine my light. In Jesus' name, we pray Amen.*



## December 14

The Shining Star  
Scott Ashley



**Verse of the Day:** *Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. - Matthew 2:2*

When I was a child, I remember returning from playing with all of my cousins at Grandma's house and seeing the star on the grain elevator in Petersville. The grain elevator owner placed that star high to celebrate Christmas. In my childhood days, that was a super cool Christmas decoration; no synchronized flashing rotating lights, no inflatable Santa Claus, just a simple star. To me it signified that I was nearing home after a fun day with family time. These are pleasant memories for sure.

A little over 2,000 years ago, Magi also saw a star. Magi were learned, influential and wealthy men, likely from Persia. Apparently, these Persian men were more than just familiar with the God of Daniel (Daniel was second in command in the Persian kingdom a few centuries earlier). They understood from Daniel 9 and Numbers 24:17, "...A star will rise out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel..." The Magi went in faith on a journey that took months. Think of the logistics of the grand entourage traveling across the desert. To the Magi, this was no ordinary star. They were going to see the Prophecy, spoken of by Daniel.

The Magi went to the capital, Jerusalem, to locate the One prophesied of. Surely King Herod and the priests would help them worship the Messiah. Like so many of us, due to the cares and challenges of the present time, the leaders were unaware and unprepared for the significance of the star. Even though the priests had all the knowledge of Daniel's and Moses' writings, they were not searching and awaiting the star pointing the way to Christ. In fact, Jerusalem was in an uproar, because this would change their comfortable life.

The star was a supernatural sign from God, announcing the arrival of the Messiah to all. The star guided the Magi to the exact house in Bethlehem where Jesus and His family lived so they could worship the Savior. The Magis' were rewarded by being present with Jesus.

- The star is a reminder that God did send His Son as a baby as Christ the Messiah. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
- The star is a reminder to continue searching for Jesus as we live our lives. Not that He is far off, but that we get distracted and miss His blessing. "For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:8).

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son, the true Light of the world, Who was revealed by the star to the Magi. Help us to seek Jesus with the same faith and persistence, not allowing the distractions of life to keep us from Your presence and blessings. As we journey through this life, guide us to always follow Your Son, just as You guided the Magi to the Savior. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*





## December 15

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Kerry Meyer



**Verse of the Day:** *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. - Isaiah 7:14*

**Song of the Day:** O Come, O Come, Emmanuel: Verse 1

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Today's verse from Isaiah comes from a time when the Assyrians were threatening to invade Judah during the reign of King Ahaz. The Lord had told Ahaz to ask for a sign to see if what God told Ahaz would come true, but Ahaz refused to request a sign believing that it would be testing the Lord God. This disobedience angered Isaiah who then relayed the sign chosen by God. This sign would be proof that God had done what He said He would do! The sign turned out to be the prediction of the Messiah's birth. Though it took seven hundred years for the complete fulfillment of this prophecy, it proved that God's Word always accomplishes God's plans. When we read the Bible, we see that God's chosen (including Christians) have been tested, tried, persecuted and ostracized; from Adam and Eve to this very day, and yet God has always been with us.

Today's hymn reflects on the yearning of being a member of God's chosen people. From the time God gave Ahaz a sign, the Israelites longed for the coming of God's Messiah. With the birth of Jesus that longing was satisfied and through his death and resurrection God provided the means for our redemption and salvation. Prior to his ascension, Jesus promised He would return in the final days to gather the faithful and end the reign of Satan and sin. In the same way that Israel longed for the Messiah we, as Christians, long for the return of that same Messiah.

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel", as we know it, was composed and published by John Mason Neale in 1851. The hymn lyrics were translated from ancient Latin hymns and the melody may have come from a funeral chant sung by the Franciscan order of Poor Clares. The melody evokes the emotion of sorrow and longing expressed by loss while the lyrics speak of anticipation and joy. When combined they create a moving and powerful song of hope. The words remind us that no matter what the circumstance or chaos we find ourselves facing, God's plan will come to pass. Christ will return, and we will experience the joy of being in God's presence. Our faith and trust in God's plan affords us "peace beyond understanding". Hope gives us the strength and assurance that we will no longer mourn in lonely exile! He is Emmanuel, God with us - and the Son of God will reappear. Let us rejoice!

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**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, as we approach the celebration of Your Son Jesus' birth we are reminded of the promise of His return. We know that no matter the circumstance we face You are with us. Your love surrounds us and gives us peace as we longingly await Jesus' return. Thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit. Comfort us in time of need, protect us in times of temptation, and come soon, Lord Jesus! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



## December 16

### Hark the Herald Angels Sing Beth Paluch



**Verse of the Day:** *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14*

#### **Song of the Day:** Hark the Herald Angels Sing: Verse 2

Christ by highest heav'n adored Christ the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold Him come  
Offspring of a Virgin's womb Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail th'incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as Man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Immanuel. Hark!  
The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Late in time, which is an old English way of saying, at the right time, God the Father sent His one and only Son, a Person of the Triune God, from the glories of heaven to the sin-filled earth. "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4). The time had come for the promised Messiah to leave His beautiful heavenly throne and enter Mary, a sinful virgin, chosen by His Father, living in a world that would be cruel, unloving, and stubborn.

Think about it...God, the Creator of the universe, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present, comes to earth veiled in flesh. Looking like one of us, growing like one of us, feeling like one of us but yet still being the Godhead. He set aside the beauty and the splendor to love and save the people of this world that were in desperate need of help.

Let me put this into perspective, have you ever done this: given up yourself for others? Given up comfort for pain? Given up a life of luxury for a life with less? Maybe you can say you have. But, how about this last one, giving up life for death?

Giving up self for others, giving up comfort for pain, giving up glorious surroundings for the lowly life on earth: that's what Christ was asked to do. But even greater than that was how He humbled Himself by being mocked, rejected, and beaten before being hung on the cross and suffering an agonizing death....all for us! He gave up His glory so that we might see His glory. And He willingly did it all so we could share in His victory. He came to us so that we could be with Him FOREVER! So we thankfully join with the angels and sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we pray that Immanuel, God with us, would make His second Advent soon and come again, so that we would be captive to sin no longer. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 17

What Child Is This?

Adam Frankhauser



**Verse of the Day:** *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! - Philippians 2:8*

**Song of the Day:** What Child is This? Verse 2

Why lies He in such mean estate where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear; for sinners here the silent Word is pleading.  
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the cross be borne for me, for you;  
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The babe, the son of Mary!

What child is this? This is the question on everyone's mind this time of the year. What child invokes all of this hype? According to world data, 140,000,000 babies are born every year. Why does this one continue celebrations year after year? What child is this? The song gives a beautiful answer. "This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing." Based on the lyrics, it is obvious this is no ordinary child; how many children do you know who: are referred to as a king, who has shepherds watch over him, and angels who sing and tell everyone about his birth? Parents who have a new child certainly are excited to tell everyone about the new addition to their family; however, I doubt shepherds are constantly watching over newborns (nurses and respiratory therapists now have this responsibility). Let's not forget the presents: gold, incense, and myrrh. I do not know of any other baby that received these items as their first gifts. Sounds like a great gift, right? Think it can't get better than this? Can't wait to celebrate? Our great gift continues to be a great gift in a most unexpected way; the song continues with some surprising words:

Nails, spear shall pierce him through, The Cross be born for me, for you".

It's rare for a Christmas song to include anything about the way this baby would die. But isn't that the real reason we celebrate every year? Imagine a perfect being that was sent down from heaven, became flesh, and who would later go on to die for all of our sins; this is the work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! The fact that God sent His only and perfect Son to die for us shows His love for us. Most of us would not even consider the idea of sacrificing our family members (or friends) but God did this to save us. Every year, as we gather around the world to sing this song about "The King of Kings salvation brings", let's remember that Jesus died for all of our sins, and He is the true "reason for the season."

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, Your Son came down to this earth for a purpose. Your Son came down to save me from my sins. Let me bask in that truth today. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 18

Angels from the Realms of Glory  
Joy Brown



**Verse of the Day:** *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. - John 6:38*

**Song of the Day:** Angels from the Realms of Glory: Verse 4  
Saints before the altar bending, watching long in hope and fear;  
Suddenly the Lord, descending, in His temple shall appear.  
Come and worship, come and worship, Worship Christ, the newborn King.

Oh, the anticipation of the birth of the Messiah! Hoping, trusting, and believing in the promise of the Savior. Jesus is born! Hallelujah! God's promises were fulfilled in the birth of Jesus! An angel sent to tell the shepherds, the wise men followed the star to Bethlehem, but what does this mean for us? What is the significance of this baby in a manger?

Interestingly enough, our song of the day does not answer this question. Our song paints a different picture of worship. It is a picture not of Jesus' first coming with the shepherds and the angels, it is a picture of Jesus' second coming, with the saints of the here and now watching Christ descending. Whether you are in verse one of this song or verse four of this song, the invitation is the same. This song is an invitation to worship.

The angels know worship. The angels are always kneeling before God, praising Him and singing, "Glory to God in the Highest!" They were singing praises at creation and singing praises because the Savior had arrived to right all wrongs. Think of the beautiful sound of the angels singing and rejoicing in the presence of God for sending us a Savior! That is a worship service I would have loved to see!

The verse of the day tells us that Jesus was sent to us to do the will of God. Jesus was sent to let us know God's will for us: to have eternal life with Him! Heaven was brought to us through Jesus! God's love and will for all to be with Him is so strong that He came to us through Jesus! I know for me there are times in my life when I want to make things happen. I frantically chase what I want to accomplish. I ignore urgings from the Holy Spirit to not seek things in my own power. In the end, I'm disappointed when things don't work out. Exhausting! I have not followed God's will. God wants us to know He has come to us through Jesus! God is with us! It is His will for us to cast all our burdens on to Him, to let Him lead, and accomplish His will in our lives.

The Bible tells us in Luke 15:10 of another time when angels also rejoice. "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of God over one sinner who repents." So this Christmas, as we continue to bend before the altar awaiting Christ's return, use this season to repent. For that is the significance of the baby in the manger.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Your Son Jesus to do Your will, because we know that we can't. Lead me to repentance every day so that I may be made new in You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 19

O Little Town of Bethlehem  
Hunter Carlsen



**Verse of the Day:** *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.” - Luke 2:10-11*

**Song of the Day:** O Little Town of Bethlehem: Verse 1

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by; yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.

Hope and fear are often on the far sides of a pendulum, even viewed as opposites. One emotion is happily looking out onto the horizon; the other brings concern inward close to the spirit. Both, however, involve the future. In a challenging circumstance, both emotions may coexist, even though they are often thought to be in opposition.

Phillip Brooks masterfully brings these two emotions together in the first verse of ‘*O Little Town of Bethlehem*’, “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight”. Here he wrote on the events that would occur that very first Christmas. One of the largest focal points of our hope as Christians is within that night our Savior was born. In Luke 2:10-11, the angel provides comfort amid their fear saying the frequently repeated saying in the Bible: “Do not be afraid”.

The shepherds in the fields that night in Bethlehem were regular people. Suddenly, the sky was illuminated, and the glory of the Lord was shown. Initially afraid, the shepherds’ response is not unusual or beyond our understanding. Yet in that moment, the shepherds were told of the good news. Luke 2:11 records, “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

The angel’s declaration brings immediate relief to the startled shepherds and eases their fears. It sparked a hope that would be brighter than the stars — shimmering in the dark. The angel’s message reminded them, and reminds us, that God’s presence is constant, even in moments of fear. His promises endure beyond our current struggles and circumstances.

In our own lives, when faced with the unknown or when our hearts waver in fear, let us find comfort in our Savior that was born in the O so little town of Bethlehem. Our Lord is with us, just as He was with the shepherds that night in Bethlehem. When fear takes hold, let us remember the words of the angel: “Do not be afraid.” Let our hope in Christ be the anchor that steadies us and the pendulum of our hearts, grounding us in the unchanging truth of God’s love for us. This Christmas, may the hope and fear of all your years be met in Christ tonight.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, let us rest in the command to not be afraid. Let us see this command rooted in the birth of Your Son where You began the hope for all the world. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*



December 20



Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming  
Gene Ernst

**Verse of the Day:** *But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Galatians 4:4-5*

**Song of the Day:** Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming: Verse 1  
Lo, how a rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung!  
Of Jesse's lineage coming, As men of old have sung.  
It came, a flower bright, amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night."

Who, but the Lord God, could have known! It's a statement as well as a question that we have all faced or pondered. It was six years after graduating from the Seminary when I came face to face with a major decision. Would I continue my ministry in Wisconsin or move my family to an Iowa farm to join my uncle? Who, but the Lord God, could have known! Who, but the Lord God, could have known how all the events would transpire to lead me to resign my Call to St. Paul Lutheran Church in Tomahawk, Wisconsin, to return to Iowa? Who, but the Lord God, could have known that decision would lead to a unique ministry as a worker-priest as both a farmer and a minister. But then it did!

Who, but the Lord God, could have known how He would work out the salvation of our souls, developed through the millennia, beginning with the promise to Adam and Eve after their fall into sin, through Abraham, Isaac, David, and then lastly, born into human existence through the virgin Mary? But then He did! The Savior came. Born not with the pomp and celebration of a king, born not of royalty as man would think, but when the Lord God deemed it the right time in the right place, God acted in the quietness of a little town called Bethlehem. Not because mankind deserved it nor earned it but through the grace and mercy of a loving, caring Father who sent His only begotten Son into this world as the Savior. That's the fullness of God's Word in Galatians 4:4-5. When mankind was enveloped in the darkness of death and eternal separation from the Creator God, He stepped in with His plans, His rescue, His redemption for my life, for your life, and for the lives of all people of all time. His action alone brought the gift of forgiveness, love, and an eternal hope with our God in heaven.

Who, but the Lord God, could have known! Have you ever felt that sentiment? The writer of our song of the day did. He wrote, "It came, a flower bright, amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night." Have you ever felt that you wish you knew the timing of God BEFORE the night was half spent? The writer's point is that God fulfilled His promise, but at times it seemed like it would never come. My guess is that you have probably felt that sentiment. Perhaps it was in your darkest, emptiest, loneliest, and despondent moments, when you thought and felt all was lost. But God continues to actively be at work in our lives today and every day. Just as those to whom the promise was given, so we today live in the faith that His promises are true. He is faithful to His Word that He will always be there for each of us and we can live in that promise. To Him alone belongs all honor and glory if He fulfills His promises now, or when half spent was the night.

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**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, Thank You for this day and this season. We ask that You would be with us in our journey to share the story of Jesus with those around us. Thank You for all that You have done and continue to do for us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



## December 21

Silent Night  
Makenzie O'Neal



**Verse of the Day:** *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. - Colossians 1:17*

**Song of the Day:** Silent Night: Verse 3

Silent night, holy night! Son Of God, love's pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face.  
With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.

Perhaps the most famous song on Christmas Eve is Silent Night. There is something about singing Silent Night by candlelight in God's house near the time baby Jesus entered the world all those years ago that warms your heart and soul in an inexplicable way. It's a feeling of connection; connection to your family and friends sitting around you, connection to your church family, and most importantly, connection to Jesus.

The most well-known version of Silent Night ends with the phrase, "Jesus, Lord at Thy birth." This simple phrase carries a weight of truth about the identity of Christ from the very moment He was born. Even as a helpless infant lying in a manger, Jesus was not just a child - He was the Lord of all creation. His lordship didn't begin when He performed miracles or died on the cross; He was Lord the moment He entered the world.

The verse of the day, Colossians 1:17, reminds us that Jesus, even as a newborn, held the power and authority of the Creator of the universe. The baby lying in the manger was not just a symbol of innocence or purity; He was the Lord of all - sustaining the very world into which He was born. This reality is almost impossible to fathom: the tiny hands that Mary held were the same hands that crafted the stars. The phrase "Jesus, Lord at Thy birth" calls us to recognize that Christ's authority and divinity were present from the very beginning. We may picture Him as a fragile baby, but He was also the Lord, clothed in humility, to bring salvation to the world.

When we recognize the magnitude of this, our eyes can be opened to see that God's power and glory are often hidden in what seems weak, small, or ordinary. Think of your own life. It's easier to see God working in grand and wondrous moments but look closer. Can you see God in all the little details working things for your good? What things happen every single day that are truly gifts from God that become so ordinary to us that we stop seeing them through the lens of splendor that they deserve? His authority doesn't need to be loud or forceful to be real; it can be found in the quiet, in the stillness, in a silent night when the King of kings entered the world as a newborn baby. This year as you sing, "Jesus, Lord at Thy birth," may you be filled with awe, wonder, and gratitude for the best gift you could EVER be given, Jesus.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, music has gifted our worship of You for thousands of years. Lead us to continue to sing the truth of You this Christmas season: Jesus Lord at thy birth. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 22

## The Gift of His Presence

Liam Krueger



**Verse of the Day:** *Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" - Genesis 3:8-9*

After Adam and Eve ate fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, many gifts were lost and they chose to walk their own path separate from God. The greatest gift that humanity lost was the immediate presence of our Father being with us each and every day.

In Genesis 3:9, God asked, "Where are you?". This shows that even when they sinned, God continued to want to be with them and went searching for them. Even though God punished Adam and Eve after they disobeyed Him, He still loved them. Later on in Genesis 3:21, God even provided clothes for them to erase their insecurities. This reminds us that God will love and provide even when you go against Him. After being kicked out of the Garden of Eden, God sent two angels with flaming swords to protect them from eating from the tree of life and being immortal in a sinful world.

The good and ironic thing is that the spiritual beings that were sent to guard the gift of eternal life were then sent to pronounce it's arrival through the good news to the Virgin Mary that she was going to give birth to the Savior, Jesus Christ.

Personally, I need to be reminded of this each and every day. I am a busy college student, balancing academics, a job, my personal life, and student activities. I get overwhelmed with all of this and sometimes forget God's presence and His warm, promise that everything is going to be okay. My guess is that you know exactly what I am talking about. It is easy for us to get caught up in our daily lives, whether that is becoming busy with school, a job, friends and family, kids, or extracurricular activities, and in the process we are sinners and feel like we lose God's presence.

Genesis 3:9 tells us that God is willing to find us. He was so willing to find us. In so doing He sent His one and only Son to save us and He literally learned to walk with us again. God's love is eternal and even when we go against Him, He will forgive, protect, and make us feel secure in our hardest times. No matter how far or distant we feel from God, He is always finding us. Christ is living in each and everyone of us.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we rejoice that, just like the beginning, You walked this earth in Your Son Jesus. Keep our gaze on You, and keep us steadfast until the time that we see You walking face to face. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*





December 23

## The Gift of His Peace

Jon Sylva



**Verse of the Day:** *Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests. Luke 2:14*

Christmas Eve is tomorrow! Are you excited? For some, the Christmas season is the happiest time of the year; cookies are in the oven, kids are excited for presents, and the whole family is going to church together. But for some these wonderful things cause panic. Everyone loves the joy of surprising a loved one with a gift or delivering cookies to those who need them most, but only some have the liberty to do so.

Today's devotion is all about peace. By definition, peace is a state of tranquility or quiet, a state of order and security (remember that, I'll come back to it). One of the first spoken things during the very first Christmas is a message of peace. Even at the resurrection, Jesus delivers a message of peace. In John 20:19 scripture records, "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!". Jesus' message of peace at the resurrection reminds us that He was named the Prince of Peace at Christmas, a symbol of hope for mankind. With God, we are whole, He completes us. Without Him we are lost, a troubled soul with no direction.

A complete dependence upon God is the key to a peaceful life. Putting your faith in God, and trusting His Word, you will find that He is good. We don't have to earn the peace of God, trusting in Him is enough. Reading the bible, praying, and serving every day is the light to that path.

But God gives us more than that. He gives us to each other. We can provide mental, physical, and spiritual well-being and peace to one another. I don't know about you, but some people I can always count on come from family and friends. Perhaps for you it's a spiritual chemistry with a parent, grandparent, or a friend that has turned into family that helps you find peace in this world.

One of those people for me is Mike Jessop, the Director of Youth Ministry here at St. Peter's. To me he's not just a Director of Youth Ministry, he is a mentor. Mike gave a message at Venture about the importance of quality friendships. While having friends is cool, having people who wish to see you succeed and help bring peace is one of the greatest blessings you can have in this life. Sometimes it can be easy to rush into the first relationship that looks good, but having patience will lead to peace.

Find a few things in your life (going back to the definition) that bring you tranquility or quiet, a state of order and security, and you will get glimpses of what that true final peace will look like. But know that the peace ushered in that first Christmas and guaranteed to us by His resurrection is the peace that will last throughout eternity.

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**Prayer:** *Dear God, please help to remind me of your never-ending love during this crazy time of the year. I pray for peace and love in everyone's hearts. We pray for those sick and hospitalized who might be missing family. Remind them that You are the Prince of Peace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 24

## The Gift Unwrapped

Tom Dunker



**Verse of the Day:** *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. - Hebrews 1:1-3a*

Think of a moment that changed everything for you. Maybe it was getting your driver's license - maybe it was when you met your future spouse - maybe it was the birth of your first child. Tonight is the intersection of Advent and Christmas. Advent: A time of yearning for God to come down for His people. Christmas: the celebration that the time of waiting is now over - that gift promised throughout the Old Testament is now fulfilled in the Babe in the manger! A gift that changed everything!

The verses of the day, Hebrews 1:1-3a convey a wonderful message concerning that gift. Moses wrote that first promise in Genesis 3:15 that "the gift" would crush the head of that ancient snakey serpent. That promise continued through Abraham and the patriarchs in Genesis. Then prophets Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah foretold of the future coming of "the gift".

The Old Testament prophecies created a lot of anticipation and speculation. Sounds just like Christmas Eve. The gifts are still wrapped under the tree and the thoughts of what might be coming create anticipation and speculation.

And then, it's time! The wrapping paper is torn from the packages, and the contents of the once unknown gifts are exposed. The suspense is over!

Christmas is the day we celebrate the unwrapping of "the Gift": God's own Son in human flesh. The suspense is over! God came down for His people! God now speaks to us through His Son!

Remember that moment that changed everything for you? Tonight is really that night - the night that we have been building for. Tonight is the night that we remember and celebrate what all humanity awaited for thousands of years. Because of this night, God now interacts with us through His Son Jesus: the "exact representation of His being." And in Jesus we see God's extravagant, never-failing, and unending love.

Tonight, as you sit in worship, know that this gift, this baby, is everything that you need. This baby is the Heir and the Creator of all things. And this Baby will make you co-heirs with Him meaning that everything that Jesus has claimed is now yours through His incarnation.

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**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, thank You for all of Your promises fulfilled, especially that of the Greatest Gift - Your Son. May His arrival bring us true Joy. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



December 25



## The Gift of God's Word in Flesh

Laura Burdick

**Verse of the Day:** *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. - John 1:14*

Today is the day! The day that we celebrate that the Son of God became a human being with the ability to walk and talk just like us. What gift did you hope was laying under that tree this morning?

My medical residency training was full of important words. We learned the scientific knowledge needed to diagnose and treat skin diseases from long textbooks, which each contained essential details and instructions. However, it was the thousands of hours spent working under mentors who physically showed us how to put that science into action that really turned us from students into dermatologists. The art of medicine is not just learning the textbooks, but it is also learning how to "walk out" your knowledge on behalf of your patients. Watching our mentors closely, we noticed even the most subtle things they did, and we acted like them until we became like them ourselves.

Much more important than the mentorship of my residency teachers was the gift God gave us through the life of our Teacher, Jesus. Jesus is the very Word of God and was with God from the beginning. God allowed the Word to take on flesh, being born as a baby, then sharing our human experiences and emotions, and eventually choosing death on the cross to bring our salvation. Jesus taught us how to live and "walk out" our knowledge of God's teachings, putting them into practice, but more than that, He actually embodied those words.

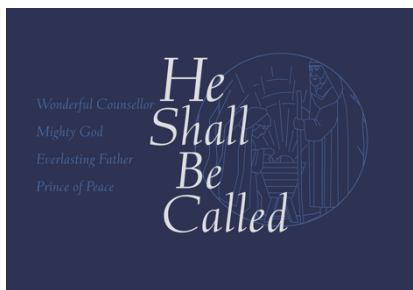
He showed us the correct interpretation of God's instructions (for example, allowing healing on the Sabbath), and we are to act like Him and keep His commandments so that we become more like Him. More significantly, however, the Scriptures were actually written about Him, and His life fulfilled its promises. Through interaction with the living, breathing personification of the Word of God, humanity was able to see the Father. Through Jesus, God was able to dwell among us and make Himself known.

Although Jesus' earthly ministry began with His birth a long time ago, we can still access it through scripture, where His words and example show us the Father's heart and the truth of God's intentions. After Jesus' death and resurrection, He also left us with His presence through the Holy Spirit, by whom we receive light, joy, peace, unity, and healing. Through these blessings, we are able to live life to the fullest in this world, with the added hope and confidence that He has given us eternal life and has prepared a place for us to dwell in the Father's house in the world to come.

Today and always continue to watch Jesus "walk out" His mission and ministry. Know that because of today He does not call you a student, rather, He calls you a friend. Merry Christmas!

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**Prayer:** *Dear God, Help us to pause on this busy Christmas day full of wrapped gifts and big traditions so that we may appreciate Your most important gift: Your Word made flesh in the form of Your Son and Your dwelling presence among us. Thank You that this is a gift we can enjoy not just today but every day. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

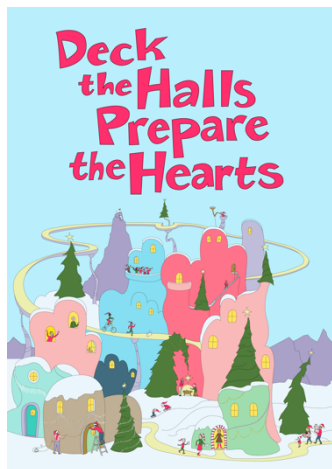


## Wednesdays of Advent:

### "He Shall Be Called"

*December 4, 11, and 18 @ 7 pm only*

This three-week Advent series looks at Isaiah 9:6, and the titles given to the Christ child Isaiah prophesied would come. Writing nearly 800 years before Christ, during a period of upheaval as the Assyrians were on the march, taking people into captivity by droves, Isaiah's prophecy gave the people of God a hope they so desperately needed: a Child would be born to fulfill the Davidic kingdom and He would bear the titles "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." This Child was the Messiah, the Christ. This great prophecy of Isaiah will reach its fullness at Christ's second coming; of which we await eagerly.

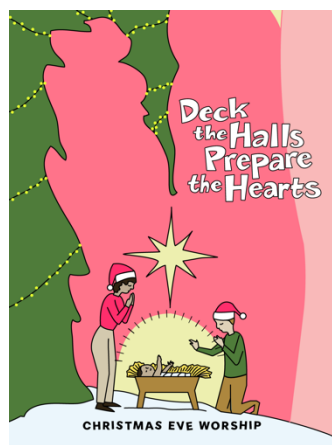


## Weekends of Advent:

### "Deck the Halls, Prepare the Hearts"

*December 1, 8, 15, and 22*

We all have long to-do lists to prepare for our Christmas. We have cards to send, lights to hang, songs to sing, parties to attend, and gifts to wrap. God also had a to-do list to prepare for the very first Christmas. He had invitations to send out, lights to create, songs to write, parties to be at, and gifts to give. Join us as we walk through our to-do lists to see how they intersect with God's to-do list.



## Tuesday, December 24 - Christmas Eve

### 4pm – Contemporary Christmas

Featuring Christmas songs, a message that brings you back to the meaning of the season—great for young families.

### 6pm & 8pm – Traditional Christmas

Featuring Christmas hymns with choir, brass, & more.

### 10pm – Acoustic Christmas

A more intimate celebration of Christ's birth featuring guitar and voice – with communion.

*Christmas treats will be served at the 4, 6, and 8pm services!  
All services will include singing Silent Night by candlelight.*



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