



*Catching
Glimpses
of the Promise*

*Written by
First English Lutheran
Congregation Members*

We offer our deepest gratitude to all those who have been part of creating this booklet. What started as a brainstorm in an early fall meeting has bloomed into a beautiful collection of thoughts, inspirations and heartfelt prayers... because of your contributions. May your words inspire others to pray, reflect and share the joy of this most holy season.

☪ Your Worship and Music Ministry ☪

Cover photograph by Rhonda Felton.

We were falling in love and caught a glimpse of its promise at the Starbucks counter. Horace ordered first, and I exclaimed, “That’s exactly what I was going to order!” We grinned at each other, convinced that this was a sign our love was meant to be. Twenty-one years later, we know our coffee preferences were an infinitesimal gauge of our compatibility, but that glimpse at Starbucks pointed to the promise of many good cups of coffee together in the future.

This Advent devotional booklet is filled with glimpses that point to God’s Promise--the Savior who would save all people from their sins.

You see, sin had entered the world and brought judgment and death upon God’s beloved humans and all creation. Fortunately, God didn’t walk out on that hopeless predicament. Instead, God promised a Messiah who would come to conquer evil, sin, and death. Little did humans imagine that the Messiah would be God’s very Self wrapped up in human baby flesh, laid in a manger and later nailed to a cross.

Over twenty members of First English Lutheran Church have pondered Advent scriptures that point to the promised Messiah. They’ve moved from, “Why is this an Advent scripture?” to, “Oh! This really *does* point to Jesus.” They’ve caught glimpses of the Promise.

I encourage you to keep track of the glimpses you catch as you read their writing. I did that and can assure you it’s a long and wonderful list.

Thank you to our Worship and Music Ministry that conceived the idea of this booklet last year and made it happen this year. A special thanks to our writers for their time and careful thought, to Joan Johannes for her editorship, and to Tammy Parszewski for doing the “boots on the ground” work that has produced this beautiful booklet.

May you all enjoy *Catching Glimpses of the Promise*.

Pastor Cheryl

November, 2024

December 1

Jeremiah 33:14-16

*“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time, I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called:
‘The Lord Our Righteous Savior.’”*



HOPE IN THE PROMISE

As we embark on this Advent journey, we pause to reflect on God’s unyielding faithfulness. In Jeremiah, we find a promise rooted in hope - a hope that transcends our circumstances. In a world often clouded by uncertainty, this scripture reminds us that God is at work, weaving his plan even when we cannot see it.

In these verses, the Lord speaks of a righteous Branch - a promise fulfilled in Jesus. He is our Savior, bringing justice and righteousness, illuminating our hearts during this sacred season. As we light our Advent candles, may we remember that the light of Christ dispels darkness, offering us peace in tumultuous times.

Let us take this moment to center our hearts. What are the longings you carry? As we wait, let us trust that God is faithful to his promises, guiding us toward renewal and hope.

Dear Lord,

As we begin this Advent season, help us to hold fast to your promises. May we find comfort in your presence and strength in our waiting. Ignite in us a deep longing for your coming. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

- Anonymous

December 2

Psalm 90:1-2

(A prayer of Moses, the man of God)

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.



Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

This prayer written by Moses declares that God is God from the beginning to the end of ages. God created the mountains with the rest of creation. Our God will be God for all of time.

The Israelites were waiting on our God for a great gift. As a child, do you remember waiting for that very special Christmas present with the anticipation of that one item you wanted more than any other and hoped beyond hope of receiving? The Israelites were waiting for that kind of gift, the gift of a child named the Messiah, the gift that would bring freedom from their bondage. During Advent, we again wait for and anticipate this Christ child to love us and give us that eternal joy and hope.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for being a God who loves us as we are — sinful children. We pray you mold us into the people you created us to be. Amen.

by Anne Handschke

December 3

Psalm 90:14

*Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.*



As we enter the Advent season, we again feel compelled to think of God's greatest gift to us in the person of his son Jesus, who was born in human form, suffered, died and rose for our sins, and loves us unconditionally.

This verse invites us to daily seek the great joy in God's love for us rather than seeking love from earthly things that appear to fill us with disappointment. His love is the true source of happiness. May we daily reflect on this as we arise from sleep all the days of our lives and give to God the glory.

*Dear Father, may we start our days thanking you for the love you show us everyday.
May we share that love with others. Amen.*

by Dave and Sue Davies

December 4

Psalm 90:17

*May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.*



When God's favor rests on us, he guides us to the special work he has established for us.

In my case, throughout almost all of high school, going to college and teaching were not on my radar. I took business classes to prepare for an office job. I filled any extra space in my schedule with choir and a couple college-prep classes.

During my last semester, the counselor encouraged me to apply to Stevens Point. A tuition scholarship for the first year helped financially, and four years later, I had a teaching degree. God knew I would be happier helping fourth graders learn on their way to their futures than I would be in an office.

God also calls us to volunteer in our church and community to accomplish his purposes. God's Work, Our Hands is one example for which we can use the skills we have to help our neighbors and glorify God. I've been a volunteer and a recent recipient of the help. Both are a true blessing and source of joy.

*Thank you, Lord, for leading and equipping us to carry out your will.
May our efforts make an enduring difference to others. Amen.*

by Karren Zahn

December 5

Luke 1:68-69

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant, David.



Zechariah, husband of Elizabeth and father of John the Baptist, praises God for the birth of Jesus with a prophecy that echoes prophecies of the Old Testament prophets. The term “horn of salvation” used in the scripture is from the original Greek and refers to animal horns being seen as a symbol of great strength. Some newer Bible translations use “Mighty Savior” or “Powerful Savior” in place of “horn of salvation.”

Zechariah’s complete prophecy about Jesus in Luke, which continues to include verses 70-75, shows how the Jewish people believed the Savior would be a descendant of David and would rescue them from earthly enemies “who hate us” and enable them to serve God in holiness and righteousness without fear.

Today we still find persecution and wars that result from religious differences, just as in Zechariah’s day, but we can live and love our neighbors because we know Jesus came to show us how to live by his example, save us from the consequences of our sins, and deliver the promise of eternal life with him in heaven. We are thankful that Jesus still provides us with the strength to be faithful servants of humanity.

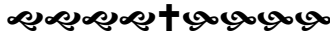
Lord Jesus, thank you for being a horn of salvation to strengthen us for ministry in our congregation, community, and world. Amen.

by Dave Mueller

December 6

Luke 1:76-77

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.



Coming Soon...

Sitting in a movie theater with a popcorn bucket in my lap, I'm startled (as usual) when the booming voice of God comes over the speakers, narrating the trailers for the next great flicks that are "Coming soon..." Sometimes we say, "Eh, I'll skip that one." But other times we smile and say, "I can't wait to see that!"

When the elderly priest Zechariah and his barren wife Elizabeth were blessed with a son, he was not only an unexpected miracle and an answer to prayer, but he also had a job to do. As John the Baptist, he was to prepare the world for the greatest show of all – the arrival of the Messiah.

These days, with the convenience of television commercials and social media platforms aplenty, he'd have a much easier job of spreading the word, but I can guarantee it would not be as effective as personally baptizing each "audience member" with water and forgiveness!

This season, sit back with your popcorn or Milk Duds and wait patiently for the "new release." Instead of giving it two thumbs up, press your two hands together in prayer and thank God he sent his son for our salvation!

*Lord, help me cut through the clutter of noise this holiday season
so I can hear your message of hope and salvation once again.
Please prepare my heart and mind for what's coming soon.
With gratitude, Amen.*

by Robin Austin

December 7

Luke 1:78-79

Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."



As these weeks have passed and I thought about writing this Advent devotion, I have been amazed by all the ways this scripture has come up in my mind and by seeing it in everyday life. I have realized that God's tender mercy comes to us from Heaven, and can and does shine on our darkest days, during our struggles, and even in the shadow of death; and yet Jesus guides us through these days and struggles. He walks with us in the path to peace that only he can give to our hearts and minds.

In the prophecy in this scripture, we can see the promise that was given to us concerning John the Baptist and the coming of the Messiah, which gives us hope, as we wait for the birth of Jesus Christ and his second coming.

Oh Lord, we thank you for your tender mercy, and for coming to us and giving us light as we sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Guide our feet in the way of peace.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

by Rhonda Felton

December 8

Luke 3:4-6

As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all people will see God's salvation.'"



On first reading, those of us who marvel at the natural beauty of mountains and valleys may not appreciate the image of hills being brought low and valleys raised; however, this scripture is not about a nature walk, but is a description of the path of righteousness that leads to salvation. In these verses, Luke assures us that this path will be accessible. This scripture came to life for me recently when my husband and I had lunch in Henry Demitz Park across the street from Aspirus Riverview Hospital. There is a sign there memorializing Dr. Paul Egge, who was a member of FEL before his untimely death in 2016. His family provided the funds for outdoor fitness equipment in this handicapped accessible park that even has a bike repair station! It made me realize just how important access is. Everyone can navigate this park's terrain just as everyone can follow the straightened path to righteousness.

Lord, thank you for the rugged beauty of hills and valleys, and for your assurance that they are not barriers in our path. Amen.

by Joan Johannes

December 9

Psalm 126:1-3

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.
Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was
said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*



According to Halley's Bible Handbook, Psalm 126 is one of the Pilgrim songs or Songs of Ascent believed to have been designed for vocal music and likely sung on the road to Feasts in Jerusalem. It is a Jewish song of thanksgiving after the people's return home from a forced detention in Babylon. This situation is echoed today. On its website, the U.N. Refugee Agency estimates that 117.3 million people currently have been forced to flee their homes because of persecution, conflict, violence, disasters, or the impact of climate change. 43.4 million are refugees, and the majority are under the age of 18. These people are just like you and me, wanting to live their lives, marry, raise children, and be part of a loving community, not unlike First English Lutheran. Imagine their laughter and joy if they could return to their homes knowing they will be safe and allowed to live meaningful, loving, and productive lives.

One way we can find the Light of Christ this Advent season is by donating to humanitarian organizations such as Lutheran World Relief and offering hope, peace, joy, and love in the form of food, shelter, water, and healthcare to refugees around the world or to hurricane victims in our own country.

Lord, fill me with joy and let me feel the Light of Christ in my heart through giving or volunteering to help those who are asylum seekers in need of international protection or those displaced and in need of assistance. Amen.

by Jeffrey Johannes

December 10

Psalm 126:4-6

Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.



Shouts of JOY! Singing SONGS of praise. God promises to sustain us through the challenges and tests that make up LIFE.

Just as he did for the exiles as he led them out of captivity and into the Promised Land, so will he do for us. Life is composed of a mixture of experiences. The seeds of sorrow, disappointment, failure, loss, and hurt are sown in life's path along with good seeds of peace, success, and happiness. God sustains us. God wants his children to experience JOY. God wants his children to experience hearts filled with SONG. Only by eating the bad seed can we learn to appreciate the good seed and experience the fullness of JOY. Let our hearts SING his praises!

God, sustain us as we navigate through life's uncertain times. Only you can guide us and bring us the JOY that is your desire for all of us. Amen.

by Ann Kroll

December 11

Isaiah 35:3-4

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."



When I look at these verses from Isaiah, the words that jump out at me are, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come...He will come to save you." Whenever I see the words, "Don't be afraid" or "Do not fear" in the Bible, I pay attention to what comes after because these are words of reassurance in the face of something that looks, sounds, or feels overwhelming or dangerous.

Isaiah warns Israel about a coming disaster for Israel. The people's decisions and actions have led them, once again, on a path away from God. Things will get bad, but Isaiah holds up a light as well. When the time is right, God will send a king who will not only set things right between him and Israel, but with all of humanity.

As we count the days of Advent, as the nights get colder and darker, as we live out our days in a world that can seem overwhelming or even dangerous, be strong, do not fear. Unlike the people in Isaiah's time, we know how the story turns out. God came in the form of Jesus Christ and through his sacrifice, we are saved.

Redeeming God, help us calm our fearful hearts. Strengthen us as we patiently await the coming of your Son, through whom all is set right.

by Mark Stultz

December 12

Isaiah 12:2-3

*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation.”
With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.*



Like many of you, I've seen my share of challenges. Balancing duty with family can be tricky, especially with my parents and grandmother reminding me of just how fast time flies! But in the midst of life's chaos, this scripture brings a refreshing dose of joy.

Picture this: drawing water from wells overflowing with happiness! That's what God offers us—an endless supply of strength and cheer. When I think of my parents, I remember all those hearty laughs and warm hugs. Their wisdom, seasoned with a touch of humor, teaches me that joy is often found in the little moments.

So, whether it's a shared meal or a phone call filled with laughter, I'll draw from those wells of salvation. Today, I choose to celebrate the joy God gives us, knowing that he's with us every step of the way. Let's raise our cups and toast to the blessings in our lives, finding joy even in the everyday!

Heavenly Father, help me remember to find joy and count my blessings, even when challenges try to block my path to the well. Guide me to your joy every day. Amen.

by Cedar Hamilton

December 13

Isaiah 12:4

In that day you will say: "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted."



My first thoughts after reading this verse were that it seems more like a verse for after Easter than before Christmas and wondered why it should be part of an Advent devotional. However, after reading all of Chapter 12 for more context, I realized the verse and chapter are all about sharing this gratitude and praise with the world.

So, as we reflect on our need for a Savior during Advent and review the events leading up to Christmas, why not also get excited about the overall story and share the entirety of it? And that means, not just the new baby part! Speaking for myself, I can make small talk or have conversations with anyone about anything, but seldom bring up Christ; however, it is time to proclaim what God has done!

Most of us will put up some kind of Christmas decor, so why not use that to help start conversations about Christ? Pick out some new ways to share the message with the nations, be it our local Packer Nation or the nations of the world!

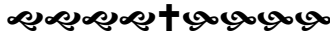
Thank you, Heavenly Father for the gift of your Son; thank you, Jesus for coming to us on earth; and thank you, Holy Spirit for helping us to share the whole life story of Christ. Amen.

by Brian Tessmer

December 14

Isaiah 12:5-6

"...Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."



As I sit in my favorite pew at church, the words of Isaiah 12:5-6 resonate in my heart. Singing has always been a part of my life. From my first choir performance as a child to the joyful hymns we sing every Sunday, music has a way of lifting our spirits and connecting us to God. It's a reminder of his goodness and faithfulness throughout the years.

These verses invite us to share that joy! Whether it's belting out our favorite songs at church or humming a tune while we go about our day, we have an opportunity to celebrate the glorious things God has done.

As I think of all the blessings—family, friendships, and the sweet moments of grace—I'm reminded that my voice can echo his love. So, let's not hold back! Let's sing, shout, and share his goodness, allowing the world to hear of his greatness through our joyful hearts. After all, praising him is a beautiful way to reflect his love!

Lord, help us to share your blessings through song and verse. Please give us the confidence to learn and grow as we celebrate your love. Amen.

- Anonymous

December 15

Zephaniah 3:16-17

On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."



Like many others in the Old Testament, Zephaniah's prophecy delivers some fearsome news in the form of God's judgements. Not only are these judgements leveled against the enemies of God's people, but also against Judah. They had turned away from him and had turned to false gods. God called out both groups for their arrogance, treachery, insults towards his people, violence, deceit, oppression and corruption. Quite a list!

One wonders how anyone could stand when God said devastating punishment awaited the guilty, but he is never done with those he calls to himself! He promises to purify his people so they may again serve him. He will bring about a change and make his own meek, humble, truthful and righteous. God says in Zephaniah 3:16-17 that they will no longer have to fear or be discouraged. He tells them that he is mighty to save, he will take delight in them, he will quiet them with his love and will rejoice over them.

See how Jesus the Messiah has fulfilled all these promises and more! God, through our Messiah, saves us, quiets us with his love and rejoices over us. How wonderful!

Dear Father, thank you for the promises you've given to your people. Thank you that these are ours, through Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

by Louise Berg

December 16

Isaiah 11:1-3a

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 might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord - and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.



The Prophet Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ, the human embodiment of God, would be born of the lineage of Jesse and endowed by the Spirit of the Lord with all the necessary attributes to fulfill God's perfect promise of reconciliation for mankind.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection now have assurance of reconciliation with God.

A Prayer:

Psalm 27 (A Psalm of David):

"Wait upon the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

Psalm 100:

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands; serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God... be thankful unto him and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting and his truth endureth to all generations."

by John Berg

December 17

Isaiah 11:3b-4

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.



“Jesus will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness, he will judge the needy, and with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.”

The Lord will pass judgement over all of us, and we all are in need of his intervention in our lives. He will act with truth and justice to the way we have lived our lives. The Lord is righteous and wants all of us to be in his kingdom: the poor, the rich, and all of us in between. Therefore, we must carry out our daily activities according to his will.

“The Lord will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”

The Lord will punish those who do not follow his ways, but he has taught the way! The truth of his words and actions must be followed in our daily lives: in our actions and our interactions with the Lord and all people we encounter.

*Dear Lord, I pray for daily guidance in my life;
lead me on the path of justice and grace that my actions will be to the benefit of
others and pleasing in your sight. Amen.*

by Joe Fraundorf

December 18

Isaiah 11:5-6

Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.



As a mom of five, my days are filled with both chaos and moments of pure joy. In Isaiah 11:5-6, we read about a time when the Messiah will reign in righteousness and peace, where the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat and a little child will lead them. This vision paints a picture of harmony that feels so distant in our busy lives.

Some days, I wish for that kind of peace at home, where my kids can coexist without annoying each other and where love reigns supreme. I often find myself longing for the unity and gentleness that God promises. In those moments, I remind myself that I can foster this environment in our home by embodying the qualities of Christ—patience, kindness, and understanding.

Each time I witness my children share a laugh or come together in play, I see glimpses of that future harmony. My heart swells with hope, knowing that as we strive to reflect God's love, we are participating in his vision for peace.

Lord, help us nurture moments of connection throughout our days, allowing your Spirit to guide all of us toward a life filled with grace and unity. Amen.

by Trina Barnett

December 19

Hebrews 10:16-18

“This is the covenant I will make with them after that time”, says the Lord. “I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.



In a world of uncertainty, God has promised that all who follow him will know right from wrong. By writing his law in our hearts, God has made it clear to us what we must or must not do in our day to day lives.

This can be a source of comfort for those of us that struggle with knowing what God expects of us. We don't have to find an expert in theology to give us the commandments and laws of God. Instead, as we live in Christ, we instinctively know his law, and our consciences are unable to bear it when we break God's law. However, when we inevitably fall short of perfection, God has promised to forgive us completely.

God not only gives us the law by which to live our lives, he also absolves us when we break it.

Dear Lord, thank you for your guidance. Thank you for your discernment in morality, your abundant faithfulness to us, and your merciful forgiveness every day of our lives. Amen.

by Steven DeMunck

December 20

Isaiah 42:16

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.



It can be hard when life doesn't seem to give you a clear direction or when the path you thought you were on leads to a dead end, and you are forced to change direction. Sometimes we can be tempted to think that we might be better off on our own, that God's path will only lead to heartache.

Only God knows the true path of how our lives will unfold. He puts obstacles in our way to help us prepare for a future that only he can see. We can trust that he will be our guide during the dark times and will lead us to the light. When we put our trust in God, we can rest assured that we will be taken care of.

*Dear God, please be with those whose faith is wavering
and help lead them back to you. Amen.*

by Barbara DeMunck

December 21

Jeremiah 31:33-34

“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”



These two verses from Jeremiah certainly present a significant difference between the darkness of the Old Covenant and the promises of the New Covenant. The Old covenant portrays Christ as a shadow in which sins are prevalent and not necessarily forgiven. The New Covenant is a more positive promise of light and describes his promise to forgive our sins. As God says, “He will put his law into our minds and write it on our hearts. He will be our God and we will be his people.” (Jeremiah 31:33). This is a most inspiring message!

As Christians we are currently witnessing a world of division, hatred, sadness and evil doing. There is corruption in business and in government, mass media manipulation, and misplaced persuasion and deception. During the last five years, we’ve seen rioting in our streets, and abortion and sexuality issues are abounding. The social media platforms worsen all these matters not only for our children, but for mature adults, as well. We must question how these issues affect the mental health of all of us.

So, how are we as Christians supposed to react to these evils? Satan would love nothing more than for us to react extremely or pass judgment. However, we must remember and demonstrate our true belief and faith that God is truly the one in control - not us. We need to be cognizant of what is going on in the world and not pass evils off as commonplace or just passing phases. Jesus spoke the truth and was crucified for it. We must never lose our nerve; we must speak his truth. Christ is our hope and our stable force. Jesus is alive, and he will make the earth right, overcome evil, and save us sinners.

Heavenly Father, this is a wonderful time of year to celebrate your birth, and we thank you for all you have bestowed upon us. We pray that you will guide us in your New Covenant; we promise to be the people you want us to be and to be willing followers of your Word. Amen.

by Carol Daebler and Judie Arneson

December 22

Luke 1:39-45

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 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! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"



As I read Luke 1:39-45, I'm reminded of the power of connection and encouragement. It's a beautiful reminder that we are never alone in our journeys.

At 55, I've seen many seasons in life, and I know how vital it is to share our joys and struggles with others. Just like Mary and Elizabeth, we can lift each other up. Their meeting wasn't just a casual visit; it was a divine encounter that filled both of them with hope and reassurance.

In my choirs, I see how harmony emerges when voices blend together. Life is much the same; when we come together in faith and support, we create something beautiful. Today, let's be intentional about reaching out to someone who might need a word of encouragement.

Remember, each connection can spark joy and strengthen faith. Let's carry this spirit of camaraderie and joy, knowing that we're part of something much bigger—a song of hope that resonates through our lives.

Dearest Lord, please help each of us remember that we are not in this alone. Guide us to reach out to others and make connections - new or renewed - in order to share your love with others.

by Tammy Parszewski

December 23

Luke 1:46b-55

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation."



December 23rd sits deep in the trenches of Advent, so close to Christmas you can taste it. Yet one look at today's scripture, and I'm immediately thrust forward into the season of Lent. This passage echoes the all too familiar "Holden Evening Prayer" so strongly that I tried to sing along during my first read through. For comparison, these are two lines from the "Holden Evening Prayer":

"My soul proclaims your greatness, oh God, and my spirit rejoices in you."

During Lent, this passage evokes humility in the face of God, a quiet moment to bow one's head and reflect on the magnitude of God. At Christmas time, the words ring differently. Instead of bowing our heads, the scripture seems to invite us to raise them up in exaltation. It asks us to proclaim boldly, like the Bethlehem star, that Jesus is coming. As Mary predicts here, it's a joyful refrain shared by Christians for thousands of years.

While we gladly proclaim Christ's coming this year, we cannot forget the Lenten undertones steeped in this passage. In a few short months, this baby born into the world will be leaving it again. It's a reminder to celebrate humbly, knowing that the ways of God are complex and unknowable.

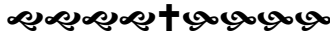
Holy spirit, guide us to be humbled this Christmas season by the wonder of new life and help us embody Mary's boldness in sharing that love with our neighbors all year long. Amen.

by Hannah Wangen

December 24

Luke 2:6-7

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.



LOVE COMES TO US

Walk with me through a journey of life. It is one of great struggles, both physically and emotionally; one with constant fears, risks and danger with every step of the animal the pregnant wife rode. Their destination was a distant city to which the government had summoned them. It was a long time getting there, but it had been destined centuries before that the young couple would be the major actors in a plan which forever would fill the entire world with the promise of hope, love, grace, forgiveness and justice. Eventually they arrived, and they sought suitable accommodation for the delivery of the baby only to be turned away and denied suitable accommodation. The poor and obviously needy travelers were not included on the guest list nor given a hospitable welcome and recognition. A suitable place could not be found to take them out of the darkness of their arduous life experiences and into that light that would forever shine. Finally, they were given accommodation in an unsanitary place with straw on the ground for bedding and a trough from which the smelly, larger animals presently fed.

“While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” - Luke 2:6-7

That child we have come to believe and love is Jesus, the Christ. Theologian J. I. Packer states the claim by Christians, "is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man." C. S. Lewis states in his book Mere Christianity, "The Son of God became man."

Here is a reminder for me each Christmas and throughout the year. My hope is that it is for you too... "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." - Isaiah 9:6

Father God, as we again celebrate Christmas, help us so do with humility, peace in our hearts, and love for one another, including those who cannot find suitable living accommodation and are counted among the poor. Let this show of the love that is you who communes with us, now and forever. Amen.

by Horace Davis

December 25

Luke 2:10-12

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



The angel exclaimed, "Do not fear! I bring you news of great joy for all people." That announcement terrified the lowly, despised shepherds. Quickly, the angel reassured them that God's gifts of mercy, salvation and love were for all people, even those rejected by society.

After the angels left, the shepherds scrambled to Bethlehem. There was God's gift, given in Jesus' humble birth. God came to dwell with us. God came to a lowly, sinful, and rebellious people in love and gave us the gift of a babe lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes for whom there was no room at the inn, a babe to heal our broken hearts, a babe who cradles ours hearts and lives in love, a babe to rescue us from sinful habits and who gifts us with salvation.

The shepherds couldn't contain their joy! They left praising God! And so should we! Good news of life and salvation is meant to be shared. In Jesus' birth, God rescued us from certain death and promised us eternal life.

So fear not - for this is Christmas joy! Filled with that joy, like the shepherds, we can go out into the world praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth!"

What a miracle we find this Christmas. May the angel's message comfort you so that you understand Jesus is God's gift to save you.

Glory to God in the highest! Amen.

by Roxie Kenitzer

Household Blessings and Prayers

This brief order may be used on any evening during the season of Advent. If the household has an Advent wreath (one candle for each of the four weeks of Advent), it may be lit during this service. Alternatively, one simple candle may be lit instead.

Lighting the Advent Wreath

May this candle/these candles be a sign of the coming light of Christ. *One or more candles may be lit.*

WEEK 1: Lighting the first candle.

Blessed are you, God of Jacob, for you promise to transform weapons of war into implements of planting and harvest and to teach in your way of peace; you promise that our night of sin is far gone and that your day of salvation is dawning. As we light the first Advent candle, wake us from our sleep, wrap us in your light, empower us to live honorably and guide us along your path of peace. O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

WEEK 2: Lighting the second candle.

Blessed are you, God of hope, for you promise to bring forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse who will bring justice to the poor, who will deliver the needy and crush the oppressor, who will stand as a signal of hope for all people. As we light these candles, turn our wills to bear the fruit of repentance, transform our hearts to live in justice and harmony with one another and fix our eyes on the shoot from Jesse, Jesus Christ, the hope of all nations. O people of hope, come, let us rejoice in the faithfulness of the Lord. Amen.

WEEK 3: Lighting three candles.

Blessed are you, God of might and majesty, for you promise to make the desert rejoice and blossom, to watch over the strangers and to set the prisoners free. As we light these candles, satisfy our hunger with your good gifts, open our eyes to the great things you have done for us and fill us with patience until the coming of the Lord Jesus. O ransomed people of the Lord, come, let us travel on God's holy way and enter into Zion with singing. Amen.

WEEK 4: Lighting all four candles.

Blessed are you, God of hosts, for you promised to send a Son, Emmanuel, who brought your presence among us; and you promise through your Son, Jesus, to save us from our sin. As we light these candles, turn again to us in mercy; strengthen our faith in the word spoken by your prophets; restore us and give us life that we may be saved. O house of David, come, let us rejoice, for the Song of God, Emmanuel, comes to be with us. Amen.

(Continued on next page)

Reading

Read the scripture passage printed in the devotion for the day.

Hymn

One of the following hymns may be sung:

Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah (ELW 240)

People, Look East (ELW 248)

Savior of the Nations, Come (ELW 263)

During the final seven days of the Advent season, the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (ELW 257) is particularly appropriate. The stanzas of that hymn are also referred to as the “O Antiphons”. The first stanzas of the hymn could be sung each day during the final days before Christmas in addition to the stanza that is specifically appointed for the day.

Following are prayers to celebrate the Advent Season at home; Use them as they are transcribed here or as a foundation for your own family prayers;

Table Prayer for Advent

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, the One who is, who was and who is to come. At this table you fill us with good things. May these gifts strengthen us to share with the hungry and all those in need as we wait and watch for your coming among us. In Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lighting the Christmas Tree

Use this prayer when you first illuminate the tree or when you gather at the tree.

Holy God, we praise you as we light this tree. It gives light to this place as you shine light into darkness through Jesus, the light of the world. God of all, we thank you for your love, the love that has come to us in Jesus. Be with us now as we remember that gift of love and help us to share that love with a yearning world. Creator God, you made the stars in the heavens. Thank you for the light that shines on us in Jesus, the bright morning star. Amen.

Blessing of the Nativity Scene

This blessing may be used when figures are added to the nativity scene and throughout the days of Christmas.

Bless us, O God, as we remember a humble birth. With each angel and shepherd we place here before you, show us the wonder found in a stable. In song and prayer, silence and awe, we adore your gift of love, Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.



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