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# **ADVENT** devotional

booklet

*December 1 - 24, 2019*

# table of CONTENTS

About Advent . . . . . 4

Dec. 1 — Christmas is About Christ. . . . . 4  
*submitted by Dr. Rich Menninger, retired Andrew B. Martin Professor of Religion*

Dec. 2 — Little Care . . . . . 6  
*submitted by the Fredrikson Center Team*

Dec. 3 — Wait . . . . . 7  
*submitted by Trish Dowd Kelne*

Dec. 4 — Compassion . . . . . 8  
*submitted by Sydney Shrimpton*

Dec. 5 — Conquering Your Sin . . . . . 9  
*submitted by Kurt Hamilton*

Dec. 6 — Holiday Babble . . . . .10  
*submitted by Chaplain John Holzhüter*

Dec. 7 — Mid-winter Hope. . . . .11  
*submitted by Chaplain John Grummon*

Dec. 8 — Christmas is About Cradle . . . . .12  
*submitted by Dr. Rich Menninger, retired Andrew B. Martin Professor of Religion*

Dec. 9 — Understand . . . . .13  
*submitted by Trish Dowd Kelne*

Dec. 10 — Bear Love . . . . .13  
*submitted by Ryland Miller*

Dec. 11 — Today is the Tomorrow You Spoke of Yesterday . . . . .13  
*submitted by William Wallace*

Dec. 12 — Instructions . . . . .14  
*submitted by Kurt Hamilton*

Dec. 13 — Recalcitrant Son. . . . .15  
*submitted by Chaplain John Holzhüter*



Dec. 14 — Giving Jesus the Perfect Gift for His Birthday . . . . .16  
*submitted by the Reverend Dr. Dorothy L. Smith*

Dec. 15 — Christmas is About a Cross . . . . .17  
*submitted by Dr. Rich Menninger, retired Andrew B. Martin Professor of Religion*

Dec. 16 — Come Home . . . . .18  
*submitted by Trish Dowd Kelne*

Dec. 17 — Blessings and Challenges. . . . .19  
*submitted by Lara Boyd*

Dec. 18 — An Advent Examination . . . . .20  
*submitted by Jan Lee*

Dec. 19 — Strive for the Future . . . . .21  
*submitted by Nicole Brey*

Dec. 20 — Only One True King . . . . .22  
*submitted by Kurt Hamilton*

Dec. 21 — Imperfect. . . . .23  
*submitted by the Reverend Matt Sturtevant*

Dec. 22 — Christmas is About a Crown. . . . .24  
*submitted by Dr. Rich Menninger, retired Andrew B. Martin Professor of Religion*

Dec. 23 — Thank You . . . . .25  
*submitted by a Community Contributor*

Dec. 24 — A Very Full Evening! . . . . .26  
*submitted by Chaplain John Holzhueter*

Dec. 25 — Wishing You Peace . . . . .27  
*submitted by the Fredrikson Center Team*

Acknowledgements . . . . . Back Cover  
*submitted by Dr. Richard Menninger*

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# about Advent

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## What is Advent?

Advent is from the Latin word *adventus*, “coming” or “arrival.” The term is associated with the practice of many churches of observing a time of preparation for the birth of Jesus Christ.

Traditionally, the Advent season begins four Sundays before Christmas Day and continues through Christmas Eve. An additional thought associated with Advent is that it serves as a reminder that the Messiah who came the first Christmas will someday return at His Second Advent.

## Sunday DECEMBER 1

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### Christmas is About Christ

“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 (NIV)

Though the title of my devotion is hardly original, the truth behind it is critical for our understanding of God’s plan for the world. The Christmas season can be one of fellowship with loved ones and friends, focusing on Christ’s birth. But it is easy to reduce this time to pageantry and memories of Christmas’s past, so much so that we lose our reverence of and gratitude for what our Lord’s birth represents.

In God’s timing, He sent His Son to enter the human race, born of Mary. The Second Person of the Trinity became a man: Jesus was the one and only God-man. He was sent to save us from our sins, for His perfect life is what we claim when we come to the cross and find forgiveness from the Father; by faith, we are redeemed.

That is not the end of the story, for He welcomes those into His family who believe in His Son; unbelievably and undeservedly we can claim God as our Father, for we have been given the right to call Him “Abba!” Furthermore, the Holy Spirit witnesses to our spirit that we are children of God and in line to inherit the unthinkable blessing of life with Him forever (Romans 8:14-17).

Christmas is more than celebrating Christ’s birth. It is about remembering His love, His perfect life, His death and resurrection, and His ascension to the right hand of God. In this devotional, we celebrate His first advent or coming to earth; but our writers testify to the fact that Christmas teaches us to anticipate His second Advent or appearance on earth. To celebrate this advent season is to testify that Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16).

It is the hope and prayer of those who have contributed to this devotional that all who read it will experience what Christmas is all about, namely the overwhelming glory of the One whom the heavenly host sang about, Jesus Christ (Luke 2:13-14).

**PRAYER:** Dear Father, as we remember the Babe of Bethlehem may we fall to our knees and worship Him as our Savior and Lord. In the Name of our Mighty God, amen.



## Little Care

"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants! Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor[d] of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!" Psalm 90: 12-17

**PSALM 90: 12-17**

Over the past three years little care has been given to my teeth; there's been a lot going on – right? So here I sit, staring at the cartoon posted on the dentist's wall. It goes like this: the hygienist asks the patient, "How often do you floss?" To which the patient replies, "Twice a year, and you do it both times." It's been three years for me.

As I wait, I learn the hygienist is out on maternity leave. The dentist is doing the cleanings. Gracious! Usually the doc only sees clean teeth, humbling to say the least. My dentist's short stature hides her larger than life kindness and straight forward truth. She smiles at me as I lie flat and tilted up into the glaring light. She says simply, "Well, we can't get this all at once, it did not take a day to get this way and it won't take just a day to tend to it."

I am scheduled for a crown, and two deep cleanings which tend to one side of the mouth at a time. So it goes, and painfully so.

It is the daily tasks that set our ways; it is the daily forgotten tasks requiring much work to catch up or clean up. What task are you neglecting for yourself, for your loved ones? For your God?

In this Advent season, number your days. Take time to do a simple chosen task-maybe it is not flossing, but perhaps it is morning prayer, reading or taking time outside. Perhaps even, it is setting a date for visiting a homebound friend or offering your help at a local community event. What will count for you? In these daily choices, may you prepare for the miracle awaiting us.

**PRAYER:** God of steadfast love, bring the glory of your goodness to our daily workings, our daily rememberings and our forgotten cares; in the preparation of this season, guide us onward that each little care may be numbered as portion of a wise heart. In Your care, we place ourselves. Amen.

*submitted by Fredrikson Center Team*

# Tuesday **DECEMBER 3**

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ISAIAH 30:18

## Wait

“Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!” Isaiah 30:18

This is the season of waiting for the light to come, waiting for the reason to make itself known, waiting for the welcoming of peace, making ready for the celebration of life born into a dark and confused time. What use can be made of these precious moments? What time do you just spend, passing time? In your days, what time is yet open to usefulness?

I am reminded of an analogy in eastern thought, “Clay is molded to make a pot, but it is in the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the clay pot lies.” (Tao te Ching, Ch 55).

May our hearts and hands be open to hold the nothingness that makes us useful to God and to each other. May grace be the use that flows through- not in what is done or created— instead the openness to allow grace to be present, to be born forth.

**PRAYER:** God of Goodness, open us to your grace in all its forms; may we wait and make ready for the coming of Your Son. In your name we pray, amen.

*submitted by Trish Dowd Kelne*

# Wednesday **DECEMBER 4**

## Compassion

Compassion. Such a simple word with such a complex meaning. Compassion: (n) concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. The holiday season is peppered with stories of the wealthy giving to the poor, of those-less-fortunate receiving a gift they never could have expected. Within this season, hearts are opened, generosity spills over, and love is shown to all of God's children.

"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." – Isaiah 1:17

Time and time again, scripture speaks to the defense of the poor and needy. The Bible constantly commands His people to come to the aide of those who need it most. As children of the Lord, we are called to be different, to live within this world, but above it; we are called to rid ourselves of our attachments to transient things and to joyfully give to others.

Mainstream Christmas is a depiction of gift-giving and receiving, buying things for people we love, receiving gifts we've been asking for. We seldom go out of our way to give to those who need it most, deciding, instead, to spend money on toys and clothes and things that will be used for only moments before they are forgotten. Christmas is a beautiful time of generosity, of presenting our love to those closest to us, but it's called to be so much more.

The holiday season is a celebration of our most generous Savior, Jesus Christ, who was given by God as a gift to His children. His sacrifice is a perfect sacrifice, a gift devoid of selfishness, provided to those who need it most: us.

This holiday season, make it a point to go into all the world and spread peace and love. Make it a point to donate and volunteer selflessly to those who need it the most. Make it a point to act as your Savior did, freely, boldly giving gifts that can never be repaid. Merry Christmas

**ISAIAH 1:17**

*submitted by a Sydney Shrimpton*

## Conquering Your Sin

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.” Romans 7:14-17

People feel as if their sin controls their life. They think that no matter what they do, they can never get away from their past. But do you not believe in a God that is almighty and powerful? A higher being that loves and cares for you no matter your background. God knows each one of us inside and out. Each thought, experience, idea that we have-God knows before we do. God created us each in our unique way. He knows that we are going to go through sin and misunderstandings. These struggles make us believe more and more. Lean on Him when you feel no one will hold you up. Cry to him when you feel pain. Talk to him when you are struggling with human problems. He is always listening.

God guides people that struggle with sin. Take Paul for example who is writing this scripture. Before Paul, he was Saul, a crusader whose only intention was to stop the mission of Christians. God used Paul to reshape the world we live in. He showed Paul that he is more than just a human being, but one created by him, a human being with an abundance to give the world. We are all living a life like Paul, looking for our purpose in this crazy world around us. Today ask God, what are my next steps? Where do you want me to serve in your world?

**PRAYER:** God open our hearts to you. Hear our problems again and teach us our next steps. God let us learn from our sins so we can grow closer to you. Show us that you are always listening and holding us in our times of need. Let us feel your presence around us as we come to you in our struggle. Thank you, God, for always picking us up as we look to you. You are an amazing God, one beyond our imagination. We thank you today, and every day, Amen.

*submitted by Kurt Hamilton*

## Holiday Babble

"Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." Genesis 11:1-9

We are in the thick of the 'holiday season'. The time of the year when we should be most connected and aligned. Towering in the unity of common good and the harmony of manifested promises. Yet the barrage of must-have marketing and competitive politics overrides seasonal meanings and erodes Agape connecting. We have progressed so much as a global society and share the common language of the internet. Yet we remain so frequently distracted, easily divided and prone to complain more than solve.

When I was a younger me, I remember wishing that God would have let us build that tower! Yes, I got that it was a rather pointless endeavor, steeped in vanity and pride. Still, what could have been the harm in the project if it kept people same paged and working in a similar direction?

The older me falls into the same drama pit as my brethren--avoiding the concept of conjoined parts of the body of Christ for a preference towards likeminded friends and non-confrontational acquaintances. With minimal thought of prayers towards perceived persecutors, I choose not to play and pray with those whose views make me uncomfortable. No "Christmas Blessing" posts from me to your Facebook page, oh crabby ones... and no Christmas letter either. We are clearly worlds apart and I will choose to insulate with those whose views are closer to mine! And then, it hits me. I am lost in the very babble that Christ's birth was intended to absolve and cure.

Thralled at watching lines of folk competing to get the limited supplies of this year's 'must-have' gift and annoyed past offering the blessing of the season to those I deem unpleasant. And so, I pray deep and reflect on God's hope for us all. In the redemptive promise of His word made flesh, may I better anticipate the Christmas miracle and the understanding it offers us all!

**PRAYER:** Lord and Savior, help me better learn your language that I might best represent you with everyone I encounter. Grant me perspective and empathy, as I reflect on the anniversary of your incarnation and its miraculous promise to all humankind.

**GENESIS 11:1-9**

*submitted by a Chaplain John Holzhueter*

# Saturday **DECEMBER 7**

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JOHN 16:33

## Mid-winter Hope

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

Medical Center Clinical Pastoral Education reflection:

As I reflected on my generally somber affect, I wondered what it would take for me to feel more upbeat. I began imagining or picturing in my mind the environment I would drive through on the way to work. I thought of the trees standing bare without leaves—appearing dead. I remembered the leaves fall off, in part, because the tree sap goes down into the roots and that the sap going down into the roots helps the tree to survive through the hard freezes of the winter. However, the trees are not dead. The processes of life are still going on within the trees.

I realized I was, in some ways, going through a “winter” in my life. I had left behind a warm and nurturing church, community and family home. I was focusing a lot of my energy on establishing another home and on accomplishing the tasks of a new ministry in a new setting. The vital “sap” of my life had gone down to establish and maintain these basic “roots.” I realized I was not “dead or dying” and that the processes of life were still going on within me. Spring would come for the trees and spring would come for me, as well.

I was excited to realize that I was still connected to and participating in the processes of life, and, thus, connected with and living with the Source. I felt energized by this. I was excited about going to work and I had a different outlook on the hospital setting. I realized that people in the hospital—patients, families, and staff—were also participating in the processes of life. Many, especially some seriously ill or injured patients and their families, were going through a “winter” phase in their lives. They might appear to be “dead or dying” but the processes of life were still going on within them. Spring would come for them, from the Source of life, too.

**PRAYER:** Source of life, thank you for renewing souls in the winter times of life. Thank you for the living hope we have in your unseen, yet eternal, processes of life. In your holy name we pray, amen.

*submitted by John Grummon, MDiv, Association of Professional Chaplains, retired*

# Sunday **DECEMBER 8**

## Christmas is About Cradle

“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 (NIV)

That the King of the universe would come as a baby is overwhelming. The great I AM present in the child placed in a manger (Luke 2:7), a sign to the shepherds that God had come to earth to redeem His people (2:10-12). Because of His inconceivable grace, the Father became flesh and lived among humanity (John 1:14); the child was called Immanuel, for God was living among His people (Matthew 1:23).

The manger reminds us that Jesus was fully human and a person whose home was not in this world. He had no place to lay His head as an adult (Matthew 8:20) and both His first crib and His final resting place were borrowed (John 19:41). His creation would reject Him (John 1:10-11) and His opponents would seek to kill Him, both as an infant (Matthew 2) and as an adult (John 11:49-53). Yet His death on the cross was the reason He was placed in a manger: He was sent to redeem us!

We fail to see the Christ of Christmas if we do not see the manger at the foot of the cross. Christmas was always in God's heart! Although we don't know the exact day Jesus was born, the Father had circled a date long before Jesus slept in a manger. We are told that Jesus “was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20). So that Jesus could save us from our sins, He had to enter the human race and live a sinless life in order to die on the cross for our salvation.

The manger is all about a loving Savior, whose head was cradled in His mother's arms at birth and held the same way at His death. The Bethlehem cradle testifies to the presence of God, for He came to earth to be with us, the same One who is in our midst (Matthew 18:20) and will be with us forever (28:20). Once in Sunday school we discussed a way to remember Christmas all year round. It was suggested that when we pack away our nativity set, we keep the manger on our mantle. This is a great reminder of what Christmas is all about.

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord, may our remembering Your birth be more than simply a time of enjoying the holidays; may it be an acknowledgment of the amazing fact that we are known and loved by You. Thank you, Jesus, for it is in Your Name we pray, amen.

**GALATIANS 4:4-5**

*submitted by Dr. Rich Menninger, retired Andrew B. Martin Professor of Religion*

# Monday **DECEMBER 9**

## Understand

ISAIAH 9:6

“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

My child is yet a child, though it is the tween years and suddenly, “No one understands me,” is heard with great passion. While our adult voices may not speak these words, so often, we feel we lack understanding. No one gets us; we are unknowable- mostly to ourselves and moreover to our inability (or refusal) to come to terms with our desires, to express our wants, to acknowledge our needs. We mope in misunderstood, when God’s grace calls us to draw near to each other and to reach through our humanness toward Spirit.

And so it is St. Francis’s prayer that comes to mind and is tender in heart; through others- we know ourselves, through experience by way of the gift of our neighbors. We are not the point—being understood does little; it is understanding.

In this season of preparation and waiting for the Prince of Peace, may we take heart in each other and give full voice to prayer and act so as to become an instrument of Christ.

### The Prayer of St. Francis

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy;*

*O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

submitted by Trish Dowd Keirne



# Tuesday **DECEMBER 10**

## Bear Love

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Ephesians 4:2

One of the reasons I enjoy reading the book of Ephesians is the charge it gives to the body of Christ, the church. Paul explains that the church is no longer just Jews but instead made up of Jews and Gentiles alike. So, when Paul is in prison writing to Ephesus, he is also writing to all of those who make up the church, including us today. He starts this charge with the verse above, showing us practical ways we can please God with our actions. This verse reminds me of the Advent season as we are to be patient with one another, but also patient for Christ. With patience, we must also bear love, as we have been loved so dearly by our Lord and Savior. This time of the year can be hectic for many, with busy schedules taking place during the holiday season. We must remember to be gentle, humble, patient and most importantly, loving to those around us during this Advent season.

**PRAYER:** Dear Heavenly Father, I am thankful that you have included me in the body of Christ. Thank you for bringing your Son to this earth and for the sacrifice that He made. When my world seems to be spinning during these busy times, please remind me to stay humble, gentle, patient and loving to those around me. Let your love shine through my actions so that others may come to know you. I pray all this in your Son's holy name, Amen.

**EPHESIANS 4:2**

*submitted by Ryland Miller*

# Wednesday **DECEMBER 11**

## Today is the Tomorrow You Spoke of Yesterday

“Then he added, “Son of man, let all my words sink deep into your own heart first. Listen to them carefully for yourself. Then go to your people in exile and say to them ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says!’ Do this whether they listen to you or not”.” Ezekiel 3: 10-11

As we see with the prophet Ezekiel, God often has a plan for us to become His active hands and feet in this world. In this case, God commands Ezekiel to accuse the nation of Israel of their years of sin and disobedience, and to warn Israel of the second part of a Babylonian invasion. Before Ezekiel begins his work as a prophet to the people of Israel, God warns Ezekiel to first prepare himself through the study of his word, and to “let all my words sink deep into your own heart first.”

Without rigorous and thoughtful preparation, we as God's followers can take on the appearances of false prophets and unintentionally lead people astray through our words. In order for us to be prepared for the work God has laid out in front of us, we must stay vigilant, and we must remain proactive. It would be impossible for us to identify or understand our callings properly without intentional preparation.

So why put off finding the calling for your life? Why remain in darkness and fear when it comes to becoming an advocate for your Good and Gracious Lord? Begin your preparation today, for truly today is the tomorrow you spoke of yesterday. If too many tomorrows are missed, you could find yourself unprepared for the work God has laid out for you to fulfill.

**EZEKIEL 3: 10-11**

*submitted by William Wallace*

## Instructions

“As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

I am eager to put together my new bookshelf in my house. I start to take all the pieces and lay them out one by one and start to figure out how they are all going to fit together. I see this small white sheet of paper pop out full of instructions. I set that off to the side as I begin to put pieces together. Thirty minutes in, I look at my bookshelf and see that it is leaning to the left, badly. Not only is it leaning, it is barley holding DVD's that I put on the top shelf. Finally, in desperation, I turn to the instruction manual to guide me to my solution. Instruction sheets are a great tool when starting a new project.

How many of you look at the instruction sheet when you don't know how to do something? I don't feel like I am the only one that says, “I can figure this out on my own.” As Christians, we don't have to go down this journey by ourselves. We have the best instruction sheet, The Bible, to help guide us on our journey. A lot of the time, we think that we can go and figure out life on our own. Instead we should be diving into scripture to help lead us toward living a life more like Christ. It takes time to sit down and plan through the steps. However, when we dig into scripture, we find so many answers that were right in front of us. It is one of the best tools that is underused by Christians today. So use Paul's words from years ago to start shaping your instruction manual today.

**PRAYER:** Lord we thank you for your instructions. Your wise words constructed many years ago still shaping and applying to our lives today. Teach us to understand your manual and show us how it fits into our life. Lead us to you with your words. Let us learn more about how we can live our lives like you. Lord thank you for letting us all have a little bit of a lean. The lean reminds us that we are not complete and to always come running back to your instructions. Let us figure the rest of the bookshelf together. We say these things in your son's great name, Amen.

submitted by Kurt Hamilton

## Recalcitrant Son

I have not bought the turkey, nor the ham; no stuffing, potatoes, green beans or yams... not one item purchased for the looming, traditional meal. Maybe I will just get one of those grocery store 'kits' that has everything loaded and ready to warm?! I have not yet started my Christmas gift shopping; feeling neither vaguely festive nor juicily creative enough to contemplate the 'perfect gifts' for those I love. Maybe I will just do gift cards and let all figure out something they want, need or desire?! This year, I fear I have grooved to the vineyard-weary, recalcitrant son!

Matthew 21:28-32, The Parable of the Two Sons

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

"I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

I understand the emotions of this parable so much more in the later chapters of my life. Sandwich-generational in duty and obligations. My plate overfull with civic, social and church commitments and my patience thinned by divisive politics, rampant commercialism and territorial skirmishes. Surely it is someone else's turn this year; to cook for the family, help the poor and make merry the home and hearth? I am tired of critical deadlines, unavoidable commitments and last-minute miracles. I WILL NOT GO TO THE VINEYARD!!

Sigh! My flesh is so weak. I am in love with a God who never takes His eye off me or withholds help or assurance, who constantly showers me with love and grace. Yet here I resentfully stew; recalcitrant in the blessing of serving as Christ's ambassador and tangible assistant-- in times set aside and marked to celebrate the many God-granted gifts my life is steeped in.

And so, I pray, as I know He is always on call for me; I pray asking for perspective and better mirroring of the God I serve and the flock he asks me to meander with. "Here I am, Lord." I will go.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, I am assured that Your yoke is light. Fuel my desire to serve Your plan, always. May I hunger for Your callings and lavish in the privilege to do Your will; because you allow me and have confidence that I can truly mirror Your grace to others.

**MATTHEW 21:28-32**

*submitted by a Chaplain John Holzner*

## Giving Jesus the Perfect Gift for His Birthday

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God this is your true and proper worship.” Romans 12:1 NIV

Well, it is that time of year again, and you are planning your Christmas list. Remember whose birthday it is. It is Jesus’ birthday that we are celebrating, not yours or mine. So, what are you planning to give Jesus? This is a very hard thing, to give a present to a person who has everything. Psalm 24:1, NIV, tells us, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” Seeing this confirms that Jesus has everything. The only thing we have to give Him is ourself: body, soul and mind. If you want to give Jesus the perfect gift this year, give Him ALL of you, nothing reserved, no thing held back. Then, you can truly say, “Happy Birthday, Jesus.”

**PRAYER:** Lord God, I come to you acknowledging that all I am and have belongs to you. Therefore, I am coming to you with open empty hands offering you, me. This is all I have to give you. Please, accept my gift and use me in your service. May I be a sweet pleasing sound in your ear and a pleasant aroma in your nostrils. It is in Jesus name and for His sake I pray, Amen.

*submitted by the Reverend Dr. Dorothy L. Smith*

## Christmas Is About a Cross

“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 (NIV)

Without the manger there is no cross, and without the cross there is no salvation. His birth is the beginning of His journey to Calvary. The cross was no accident, for the manger anticipates the cross: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Even the name Jesus designates His vocation; Jesus is equivalent to the term Joshua, meaning “God saves” (Matthew 1:21). The cross was our NO! to God yet it was His YES! to us. Most people believe Jesus was born and even believe He died on the cross. But that is of no benefit unless one accepts the message of the gospel that Jesus died for our sins and there is no other way to God except the way Jesus provided for us (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; John 3:16; 14:6).

To faithfully celebrate Christmas, we must be mindful that His birth points to the cross and all that it entails. We have eternal life and victory that only comes from Christ and His death (1 John 5:5). But to see victory in the humiliating death of Jesus is counterintuitive to today's thinking. Martin Luther reminds us that we will find the essence of who God is in the death of His Son—not the grandeur of nature. We can easily satisfy ourselves by thinking that Christmas is all about the birth of a baby, all the while avoiding the sobering truth that the little hands which would have grasped Mary's finger would someday be the hands that took the nails for our sin.

Although the title “redeemer” is never used directly of Jesus in the New Testament, redemption is what He accomplished on the cross. He purchased our freedom from sin and God's wrath, and purified us so that we would be His “very own” (Titus 2:14). In God's sovereignty He sent His Son into the world, born of woman, growing and learning for thirty some years, only to die on a cross as a common criminal. The marvelous grace lavished upon those who call on the Name of Christ should come to mind when we celebrate Advent and the reality of our salvation.

**PRAYER:** Dear Lord, may our prayer reflect the words of a favorite Christmas hymn: “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.” Amen and amen!

# Monday **DECEMBER 16**

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ISAIAH 58:11

## **Come Home**

“The LORD will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.” Isaiah 58:11

Our chickens enjoyed a time of free range, until the coyote took three for a late supper, leaving only feathers and my daughter’s whispers of their names: Lois, Ginger and Stripe. They only range now when one of us is in the yard and when the time comes, we must chase them to return them to the coop.

We have a speedy one, my daughter laughs as it requires me to run circles round a tree and dart about to the music of her laughter. To add to the frolic, I find myself negotiating and convincing, as I cluck and puff about, telling the chicken of the safety of the coop and the wily hunger of coyotes. Yet, once in arm, the feathers tuck in and the bird is calm.

We—in all our humanness—are quick ones too, in our running about in all directions, unaware of the dark to come and the hunger seeking us; distracted by newly found treats, scents and shadows—fearful of what protects us and welcoming to what hurts.

Advent comes as the days grow dark and nights long, as if we are being shown the time to turn ourselves toward home, the place of quiet and restoration. Will we return with a gentle guide or will we run and squawk?

Guiding God, bring us to you; give us thirst that we seek your refreshment; give us work that we are readied for rest; may we find ourselves home, restored and ever flowing with grace for all.

*submitted by Trish Dowd Kelne*

## Blessings and Challenges

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10

**PSALM 46:10**

Life is a journey that has many twists and turns—hills and valleys—and a variety of choices to make along the way. Each day of that journey we are faced with choices—sometimes they are easy and other times there are obstacles in the road and we must decide if we are going to go around them, through them or turn around.

When we reach those decisions, we are faced with an even larger decision—will we be thankful for the challenge?

Thankful for a challenge—it sounds crazy, I know. Hear me out . . .

Each choice that we make shapes us into the person that we are becoming—either we are growing in Christ or away from Him. Obstacles and events—even people—all help to shape us into the person that we are becoming on this journey of life. Each mistake and success is strategically adding aspects to our life that will be part of who we are in the future.

We can always look back on the journey we have taken so far. The photos and memories all flood back with song, saying, feeling, and more. They remind us of where we came from and in some cases, where we don’t want to return.

While we can remember the journey, but can’t go back and make changes. We can strive to be better than we were yesterday and we can learn and grow along the way. We can strive to learn as we move forward—but move forward we must.

This holiday season, find thankfulness in the blessings and the challenges and give God the thanks for all He has and continues to do for you.

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank you for all the blessings and challenges you have provided for me. While some of those experiences were difficult to endure, I know that you are there with me each step of the way. You guide me and mold me to be better than I was the day before. You walk with me in the valleys and rejoice with me on the mountain tops. I give You the praise for all You do in my life. I pray that You will continue to work in me to walk closer with You, to seek You for all my needs and to rely on Your molding me to be better. Thank you for sending Your son, Jesus Christ, so that I might have the choice to follow You and spend eternity in heaven. I pray that I will take time this season to be still and just rejoice in Your precious name. Amen.

*submitted by Lara Boyd*

## An Advent Examination

“Test yourselves and find out if you really are true to your faith. If you pass the test, you will discover that Christ is living in you. But if Christ isn’t living in you, you have failed.”

2 Corinthians 13: 5

*Advent is the perfect time to clear and prepare the Way. Advent is a winter training camp for those who desire peace. By reflection and prayer, by reading and meditation, we can make our hearts a place where a blessing of peace would desire to abide and where the birth of the Prince of Peace might take place.*

*Daily we can make an Advent examination. Are there any feelings of discrimination toward race, sex, or religion? Is there a lingering resentment, an unforgiven injury living in our hearts? Do we look down upon others of lesser social standing or educational achievement? Are we generous with the gifts that have been given to us, seeing ourselves as their stewards and not their owners? Are we reverent of others, their ideas and needs, and of creation? These and other questions become Advent lights by which we may search the deep, dark corners of our hearts.*

By Edward Hays from [A Pilgrim’s Almanac](#)

**PRAYER:** Give us ears to hear, O God, and eyes to watch as we examine ourselves, that we may know your presence in our midst during this holy season of joy as we anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ. Amen.

submitted by Jan Lee



## Strive for the Future

“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead” Philippians 3:13

As a cheerleader who flips around and gets thrown in the air, I often get asked if I am scared when I'm doing these skills. To be honest, there's usually a small part of me that is a little scared, but after years of practice, I know that if I commit to the skill I will most likely remain safe and succeed. My secret is to think about the end result. I envision myself doing the skill perfectly, and allow the feeling of success to wash over me. Have I been dropped before? Have I hurt myself before? Have I failed before? The answer is yes, yes, and absolutely yes, but I try not to think about those times. I know thinking about it will only hinder me and increase my chances of repeating those undesired results. Instead of reminiscing on my failures, I focus my mind on the future. In Philippians, Paul touches on this idea. God does not expect us to be perfect after we commit our lives to following him, but he does call us to forget the past and strive toward a brighter future. God is calling us to commitment. He longs for us to burn what is holding us back, so we can grow in our relationship with him. He wants us to stop hiding in the shadows behind our sin, and, instead, bask in his warm and complete goodness. Today, I challenge you to contemplate what are you hiding behind? What can you let go that will draw you closer to God?

**PRAYER:** Dear Heavenly Father, Open my eyes to what is holding me back from you. Give me the strength to cut ties with what does not align with your will. I don't want to be angry, feel ashamed, or worry. I want to be encompassed by your peace. Help me understand that relationships take time, and one with you is no different. Show me what concrete steps I can take to move forward with my relationship with you. I want to be committed to you above all else. In your name, we pray, Amen.

**PHILIPPIANS 3:13**

*submitted by Nicole Brey*

## Only One True King

“But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super-apostles.” I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.” 2 Corinthians 11:3-6

Paul is writing to the Corinthians explaining his viewpoint of speaking about Christ. He is warning the people about “super-apostles” and explaining how he has taken the time to study, teach, and share the message of Christ around the world. I love this message as it reminds us that there is only one Lord and Savior to guide us all. The world is full of people and distractions to divert our attention. During the holiday season, we are reminded more than ever of Jesus. Sometimes the message of the holidays makes us think of presents, decorations, or even Santa Claus. Nothing is wrong with this, as long as we are reminded of why we celebrate the day. We celebrate not to think about human ideas but to remind us that Jesus Christ was born. Christmas starts the adventure that Jesus leads to guide his people into following him back to God. God gave us all a second chance to follow him as he sent his one and only son as a messenger of his faith. The message in these lines of scripture reminds us that Jesus is the only messenger that we need to follow. Distractions are always going to be around us. Messages are always going to be delivered to try to divert our attention to human ideas. However, Christ knows us better than anyone else. He knows our heart and how to speak to us in a way that we understand. Let your mind be open this holiday season to hear the words that are being spoken to you from God.

**PRAYER:** Lord open our minds to you. Let us understand the message that you are trying to teach us as we go through our routine. Show us how to come closer to you in everything that we do. Help us set aside the distractions that take us away from you. Lord wrap us up with your holiness and let us feel your warmth. Let us cling to you during this wonderful holiday season. We say these things in your son’s great name, Amen.

submitted by Kurt Hamilton

# Saturday **DECEMBER 21**

## Imperfect

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be....?"

The angel said to her... "For nothing will be impossible with God."

(Luke 1:34a, 35a, 37)

None of it made sense. Mary was unmarried, not powerful, poor. As a choice for the mother of a Savior, she was, in a word, *imperfect*.

On a recent sabbatical, I read about the concept of photography as a spiritual discipline. I discovered several authors who wrote about the idea of imperfection, especially about the artistic practice of Wabi Sabi, a tradition that explores the nature of imperfection, death, impermanence, and brokenness. These artists take pictures of dead flowers and rotten fruits, things not usually considered beautiful, pretty, or "perfect." As a way of inviting their readers to explore the concept, these authors asked us to make a list of all of the photography "rules," (i.e. what a photograph is "supposed" to look like.) Then, break them. Go out and intentionally take photos the opposite of "perfect." At first, I felt like I was doing something wrong. But I began to see that there was beauty even in the brokenness. Eventually, I got the point of the exercise, not to encourage brokenness or revel in imperfection, but instead to realize:

**When we can see the imperfect world as still God's holy world, then we can see ourselves and our imperfection belonging in God's story of grace.**

The story that includes the broken and the weak and the hurting and the imperfect. Just like Mary. Just like all of God's children, fearfully and wonderfully made. Like you and me. I hope you know that somewhere, on God's mantle, there is a photograph of you. And when someone comes over to God's house for tea and cookies, God points to that photograph and says, "that one's mine." Not perfect. But mine.

God teach us through the imperfection of the world that your grace covers our imperfection, as well.

**LUKE 1:34A, 35A, 37**

*submitted by the Reverend Matt Sturtevant*

# Sunday **DECEMBER 22**

## REVELATION 19:12

### Christmas Is About a Crown

“His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.” Revelation 19:12 (NIV)

When we examine Jesus' life, we come to what has been called the “defining moment” in His life, simply the cross (David Mathis). But it should be apparent that if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, we would never hear about the cross. And why should we! Thousands of Jews were crucified, and their names remain unknown to us. But this humble carpenter's birthday divides our calendar, for He returned from the grave to show that life doesn't end at death. The resurrection of Jesus changed everything...forever!

The resurrection of Christ is the fundamental belief of Christianity, for if it is false, Christians are to be most pitied for believing in a hoax (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). But it is the “best-attested fact in human history” (Thomas Arnold of Rugby): Christ is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). We can begin with Christ's birth and draw a straight line through His life, death, resurrection, ascension and beyond. He is returning and we long for His triumphant return so that we may enjoy our eternal reign with Him.

The crown of kingship is what the message of Christmas points to:

“As a crown is the fitting symbol of authority, pre-eminence and distinction, the Lord Jesus Christ, once crowned with thorns and now crowned with glory and honor will then hold every crown of authority by right and title. He will have won every crown of pre-eminence and distinction that can ever be in heaven above or earth beneath. It will be our unspeakable joy to cast our crowns at His feet and to join with the angelic host in the coronation hymn” (Lewis S. Chafer).

The resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 1:4), our sins are forgiven, (2 Corinthians 5:21), Jesus lives forever (Revelation 1:17-18), we will live forever (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), and all things will be made new (Revelation 21:1-4). We needed our God to come in the flesh, in order to die on the cross, so He could rise from the dead in anticipation of His return and reign with a crown on His head (Matthew 24:30-31; Revelation 14:14). This is the whole story of Christmas. Praise be to God!

The question for you is, “Who will I be after Advent?” Will I return to seeing Advent season as a special time of fellowship and celebration only to be compartmentalized until next year? Or will it be a catalyst for turning the meaning of Christmas into a permanent lifestyle and not simply a cheerful attitude reserved for December? The infant Jesus was recognized by the Wisemen as a King (Matthew 2). Will our witness and actions do likewise?

**PRAYER:** O Lord of Lords and King of Kings, may our lives reflect your grace all year round and may one and all “Bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of all.”

In Jesus' Name, amen.

*submitted by Dr. Rich Menninger, retired Andrew B. Martin Professor of Religion*

## Thank You

"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.  
Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.  
Know that the Lord is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his[a];  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.  
Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.  
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations."  
Psalm 100

Sing praise as we come to the week of the birth of our Lord. Sing praise and offer thanks with hearts and hands raised. A dear friend gives without asking or seeking thanks—in fact, the praise received can be unnerving. Yet, I am compelled to offer thanks. The gratitude changes me; calls me to recognize the goodness and gift of another. So too our gratitude to our Lord changes us; shifts our vision to that of the goodness and grace constantly given.

**PRAYER:** As the holiest of nights draws near, let us reflect on the gratitude in our hearts and sing out.

Ever-giving God, we thank you, with all our hearts we sing praise. Amen

# Tuesday **DECEMBER 24**

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JOHN 1:9-14

## A Very Full Evening!

Christmas Eve is surely my family's most frenzied day of the year and, in its wind down, the time we seem most surrounded by 'full'. Full bellies, full fridge, full hearts; empty under the tree, but a floor full of goodies and trash bins crammed full of the wrap we decided was too tired to reuse. Reminding us that we are fully 'in the world'; earthly anticipations of Traditional German food, well repeated prayers and the turn-taking of gift giving and receiving have been well met and exceeded. Church services, on this day and tomorrow, remind us of Heaven's fulfilled promises; well met and exceeded.

"The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 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 1:9-14 (NIV)

The world was made through Him and I am joyously immersed in its celebration. Still, is it possible to be too full of the secular celebration to fully appreciate the miracle of the sacred? To become so sated with the birthday celebration that we emerge less mindful of the wonder of the birthday guest of honor? Do we 'truly recognize Him' for the what and who He is? It is so easy to spend more focus on the cleanup of the house than the required cleanup of our hearts, as we receive such a guest. Maybe it is more sensical to move our New Year's resolutioning to our Christmas Eve prayers. To commit to fully receive Him, believe in His name and embrace the brokered opportunity to become children of God—on this night and for always.

**PRAYER:** Savior Jesus, you are the gift that most matters. Help me to appreciate your fullness, as it manifests in my heart, mind and soul—now and forever, Amen.

*submitted by a Chaplain John Holzhüter*

## **Wishing You Peace**

It is that wonderous day! The time to mark and celebrate the tangible word made flesh of our Lord and Savior. In Christmas we celebrate the seemingly impossible. The promise of salvation, previously denied has been tangibly restored through God's grace. Yet still the world is not at peace.

"Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Luke 2:12-14 (NIV)

At the time of his birth there was drama and strife and, despite the miracle of his birth and the many years since, it seems that the peace the angels foretold is still searching for faithful hearts and fertile minds in which to root and flourish.

On us His favor rests and peace, lost through willful disobedience, is miraculously restored to our reach. This year, can it find a home in your home; sacred space to fully bloom into the promised fruit manifested by His incarnation?

God has fierce faith in us and our capacity, despite the odds and proofs of human failings. Happy Christmas then, and may His peace claim you; may your heart be open and bold enough to receive it and give it the space to grow.

**LUKE 2:12-14**

*submitted by the Fredrikson Center Team*

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May our great God and Savior use these devotionals to minister to one and all.

Dr. Richard Menninger

*Retired Andrew B. Martin Professor of Religion*

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