

Fincastle Presbyterian  
Church

Advent Devotions

December 8-14, 2024

## December 8

John 7:42 “Doesn't the scripture say that the Messiah comes from David's offspring and from the town of Bethlehem where David lived?”

This brings instantly to my mind The Christmas hymn, “*O Little Town of Bethlehem*”.

O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight

For Christ is born of Mary  
And gathered all above  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love

O morning stars together  
Proclaim thy holy birth  
And praises sing to God the King  
And peace to men on earth

O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight

I love this Acapella version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItTciLbsT0Y>

Danette Heinlein

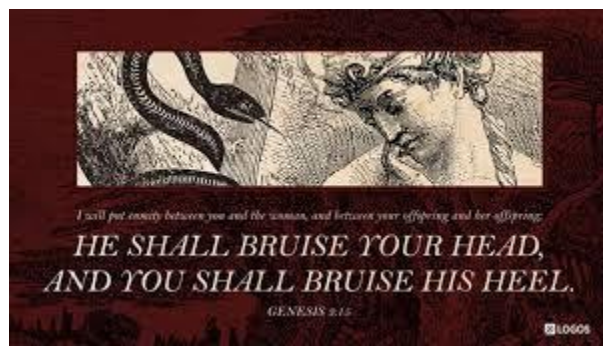
## December 9

Genesis 3:14-15 <sup>14</sup> *So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Perhaps you find this scripture, like I do, a little unexpected when included in Advent devotions. But Biblical scholars explain that it's actually most appropriate as we approach Christmas because it's considered the protoevangelium—the first proclamation of the gospel in the Bible. God curses the serpent and foretells that a descendent of the woman, Jesus, will someday crush the serpent's head, sin, ultimately defeating evil. But the proclamation also clearly forewarns that sin and evil will be realities confronting humankind, and will bruise the woman's offspring, us, and even Jesus when he dies on the cross.

In this Advent season, when we joyfully celebrate Jesus' birth, it's sometimes hard to remember that the beautiful little baby in the manger actually came with a mission and a specific purpose, to do battle and ultimately defeat sin, death, and the devil. Sobering. As we light Advent candles and prepare our hearts for Christmas, let us joyfully accept the assurance of God's promise that the serpent has been defeated. In Christ, the head of the serpent has been crushed, and eternal life is ours. So, while such words as curse, crush, and bruise are jarring during the Christmas season, our comfort lies in the promise. We celebrate His coming so long ago and await His return with hopeful expectation.

Thoughts by Bill Walker.



## December 10

Isaiah 40:3-5 *“A voice of one calling: “In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”*

Isaiah’s prophecy of a voice crying out in the wilderness may well be foretelling that John the Baptist will one day proclaim Jesus’ appearance, but is he not also calling each of us to prepare for the Lord? Wilderness. Valleys.



Mountains. Everywhere? In this Advent season, we’re reminded that God often meets us in unexpected, sometimes untamed places where we might be especially open to His presence. The wilderness, whether a literal wild space or simply a place of quiet solitude, may allow us to encounter God in simplicity and peace. In quiet places we can realize our need for God’s guidance and strength as we await His coming.

Wilderness can become a space where we may truly let God work in our hearts. I, personally, feel closest to God in such remote and quiet places. But, I think these verses in Isaiah are also reminding us not to forget that each of us must be an active participant, both in our own heart but also out in the world, everywhere, in preparing the way of the Lord.

Bill Walker

## December 11

Isaiah 11: 1-5 *"Then a shoot will grow from the Stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding a spirit of council and strength, a spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord. His delight will be in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, he will not execute justice by what he hears with his ears, but he will judge the poor righteously and execute justice for the oppressed of the land. He will strike the land with a receptor from his mouth, and he will kill the wicked with a command from his lips. Righteousness will be a belt around his hips; faithfulness will be a belt around his waist."*

This description, immediately brings to mind the verses about Christians taking on the full armor of God. Ephesians 6:10-17. *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. "*

And this immediately takes me to the song "Onward Christian Soldiers" a favorite from childhood!!

And here is a version of it that I really enjoy:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhiHoqp0neU>

Some of my thoughts – Danette Heinlein

## December 12

Zechariah 6:12-13 “and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall grow up in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule upon his throne. And there shall be a priest by his throne, and peaceful understanding shall be between them both.””

After reading the context surrounding these verses I find myself thinking of the times in my life when the words “Divine Intervention“ seemed appropriate. These would be times when people come into our lives and make a huge impact on our future life. They could be anyone. Several were pastors but several were random acquaintances, family members or coworkers. This chapter of the Old Testament tells of a turning point for the people who had gone astray. God is sending someone to help his people who have struggled for so long. I think we have all approached turning points in our life when we also struggled with making the right decision and hope for “Divine Intervention”.

Verna Shuey

## December 13

John 1:10-13 *"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."*

These verses follow the good news proclaimed in John 1:1-5, that : God has sent God's "Word" / God's "Light" into our world which by contrast is a world of "darkness". John also proclaims the good news that: "the darkness did not overcome it!". Clearly (to the church) Jesus Christ, Son of God, is this "Word"/"Light" of God who has come into our world to lead us out of our darkness.

Our verses for today, John 1:10-13, confront us with the bad news that: though Jesus, the "Word"/"Light" of God, did come into our world to call us out of our darkness, nevertheless, "the world did not know him"; "his own people did not accept him".

How would any of us react if we walked into a burning building, or into a collapsing mine, in order to lead the people inside to safety, only to hear them say: "Who are you? We don't know you! We're not going to follow you!"; Would we be tempted to say:" Well, ok then; I'm out of here!"; and then turn and run away to save ourselves?

Jesus did not abandon the mission that God had given him: to save those of us "who live in a land of deep darkness" (ref. Isaiah 9:2). Jesus lived out his life and fulfilled his mission so that: "to all who received him, who believed in his name", he might give them "power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God."

Because Christ has been faithful to us, may we be gratefully obedient to him who saved us, not only as we journey toward Christmas Day, but as we journey throughout our lives in this world, living in the Word and the Light who is Jesus.

Blessings upon you in your Advent journey. Your fellow sojourner, David

## December 14

Verse of the day

John 1:14 *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”*



From Jennifer Kincaid.



Fincastle Presbyterian  
Church

Advent Devotions

December 15-21, 2024

## December 15

Luke 1:26-38 “*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, “Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” <sup>29</sup> But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.*

***<sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.”***

*<sup>34</sup> And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” <sup>35</sup> And the angel said to her,*

***“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born[d] will be called holy, the Son of God.***

*<sup>36</sup> And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For with God nothing will be impossible.” <sup>38</sup> And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.”*

I think Mary was very honored that God chose her to bear his son. It also took a lot of courage because a woman pregnant out of wedlock could be stoned to death. She is an inspiration for us all to follow God's commands because we never know what great things he has instore.

## December 16

I like reading this scripture from The Message version:

*Luke 1:39-45 “Mary didn’t waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, straight to Zachariah’s house, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and sang out exuberantly,*

*You’re so blessed among women, and the babe in your womb, also blessed! And why am I so blessed that the mother of my Lord visits me? The moment the sound of your greeting entered my ears, The babe in my womb skipped like a lamb for sheer joy. Blessed woman, who believed what God said, believed every word would come true!”*

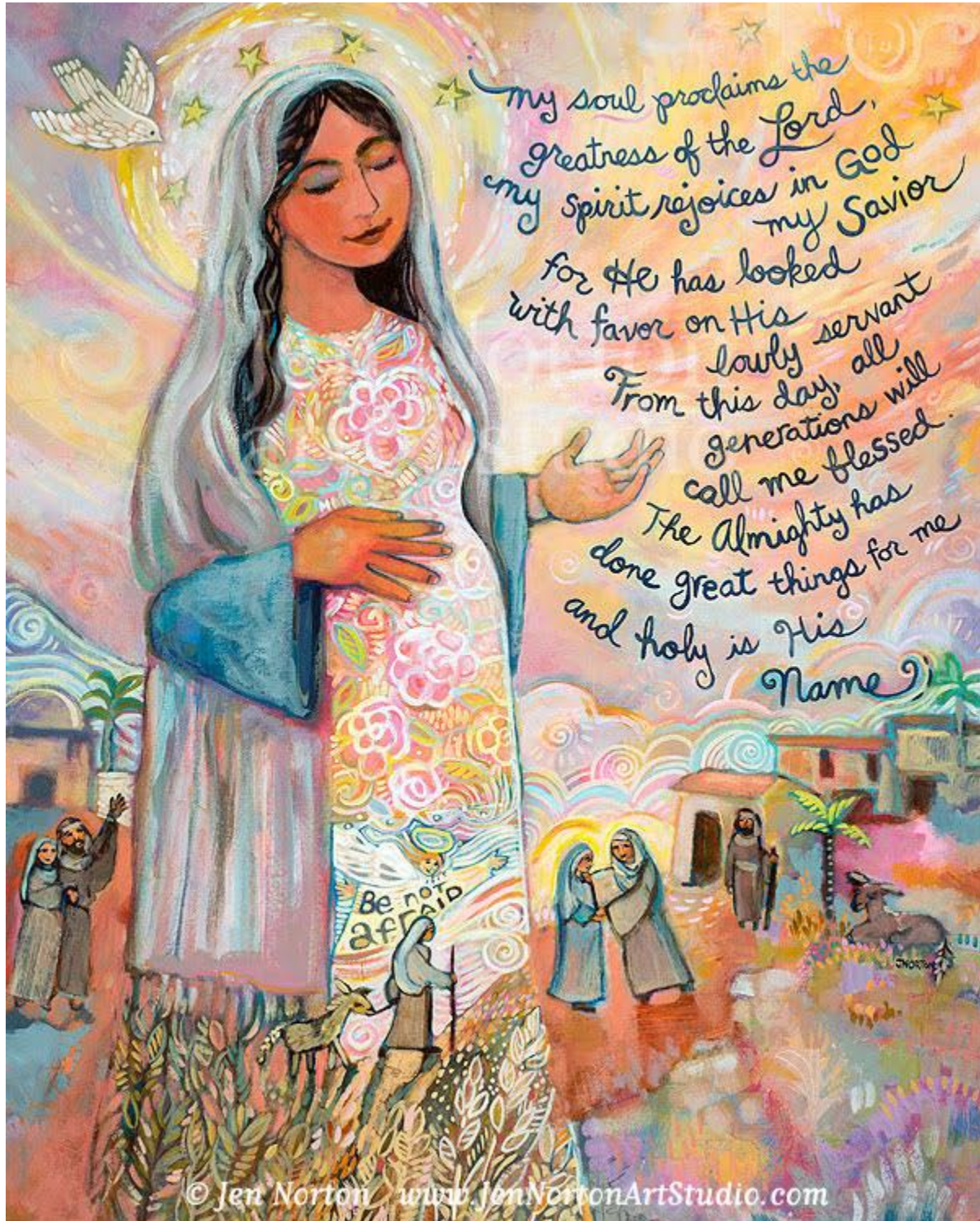
When rereading this passage to think about what I would write, several things immediately came to my mind. Mary didn't wait around but left immediately to take a journey to see her well-loved cousin. I did some research and discovered that it was estimated to be an 82-mile journey. Even though she hurried, it would have taken her days to get there. That's time for Mary to think and feel about the life growing in her and also, I think about my early pregnancies with my daughters and what that time, travelling on foot or donkey would have been like for me. Newly visited by God and his Angel. My mind surely would have been active, while my body was changing and accommodating this new life. Did she have nausea on this journey? Did she go by herself or did others accompany her? She was young. She was only 13,14,15 at the most. She was about to be married, but she wasn't yet. She hadn't even talked to Joseph yet about this pregnancy.

Elisabeth's song is beautiful. But my reflection is more about Mary, the mother, as a mother in those early days of pregnancy, on the start of an amazing journey of life that she could have never predicted for herself.

Danette Heinlein

# December 17

Luke 1:46-56



This scripture passage is often referred to as the Magnificat which is a canticle, or song, that appears in the Gospel of Luke. The word Magnificat is Latin for "my soul magnifies the Lord". Mary's song is considered one of the oldest Christian hymns and it is Mary's expression of praise after receiving the news that she will give birth to Jesus.

As I reflect on these words I am reminded of Pastor David's sermon the 1st Sunday of Advent. He spoke of failed promises and Hope during the Bleak Midwinter of life. Mary's Magnificat proclaims that Hope in God is what makes life bearable. In her song Mary sings about the future when God's justice will be revealed. This is indeed a great song of Hope!

What a beautiful, overwhelming response of Mary's hope, trust and praise for God. She seems to be so overcome with emotion that her heart and lungs are bursting with song and praise! I find it hard to even put into words what Mary was experiencing at that moment. I am reminded of a quote my college choir director, Dr. Charles Davis, used to recite before every concert.

For the common things of every day, God gave us speech in the common way; For the deeper things we think and feel, God gave poets words to reveal; But for the heights and depths no words can reach, God gave us music, the souls own speech." -Anonymous

I can only imagine that music was the highest form of praise Mary could offer to her living God at the moment she became aware that she would give birth to Jesus, the Messiah.

Glory to God in the Highest!

Lori Turne

## December 18

**Luke 1:57-66** (The Passion Translation) *“When Elizabeth’s pregnancy was full term, she gave birth to a son. All her family, friends, and neighbors heard about it, and they too were overjoyed, for they realized that the Lord had showered his wonderful mercy upon her.*

*When the baby was eight days old, according to their custom, all the family and friends came together for the circumcision ceremony. Everyone assumed that the parents would name the baby Zechariah, after his father, but Elizabeth spoke up and said, “No, his name is John!”*

*“What?” they exclaimed. “No one in your family line has that name!” So, they gestured to the baby’s father to ask what to name the child. He motioned for a writing tablet, and to the amazement of all, he wrote, “His name is John.” Instantly Zechariah could speak again. And his first words were praises to the Lord. The fear of God fell on the people of their village, and the news of this astounding event traveled throughout the hill country of Judea. Everyone was in awe over it! All who heard this news were astonished and wondered, **“Since a miracle brought his birth, what on earth will this child become? Clearly, God’s presence is upon this child in a powerful way!”***

From an Advent Study by David Lose:

There is something almost funny about Luke’s description of this scene. Don’t get me wrong, he’s not making fun of Elizabeth or Zechariah or their contemporaries. But he does seem to construct in this scene something of a “comedy of errors.” Eight days after Elizabeth gives birth, it is time in Jewish tradition to name the child. And so friends and neighbors come around and, assuming he will be given the name of his father, prepare to name him “Zechariah.” “No,” his mother interjects. (Curious that they don’t consult her, but just presume....) “He is to be named John.”

Confused silence all around. “Did your father bear this name?” “No.” “A brother?” “No.” “What about an uncle or grandfather?” “No.” “Well, has *anyone* in your family ever borne the name of John?” “No.”

Stunned silence all around. And so, they consult with Zechariah. (Even more curious that they don’t trust the mother’s word....) And Zechariah, who as you remember cannot speak, motions for a writing tablet and scrawls out the

words, “His name is John.” Not “he *should* be named” or “he *will* be called,” but rather, simply and definitively, “His name *is* John.” It’s a settled matter. It was settled, after all, by the angel Gabriel nine months earlier. And Zechariah, it would appear, has learned his lesson.

Their confusion, I think, is understandable. **When God gets involved in our lives things often take turns we hadn’t anticipated.** And though perhaps not all that funny in the moment, our halting, often stumbling attempts to navigate the new terrain God’s promise has laid before us will, at a distance, appear even – and maybe especially – to us as humorous. Zechariah, once he regained his voice, no doubt looked back at his time in silence, shook his head, and chuckled to himself and his bride, “And to think I asked Gabriel how all this could happen.”

There is an ancient Christian hymn – actually, the oldest hymn we know outside the Bible – often sung as part of evening prayer called the *Phos Hilaron*, a transliteration of the Greek often rendered as “gladdening light” or “joyous light.” But the word we translate as “gladdening” or “joyous” is also the root of our word “**hilarious.**” (So also in the Latin version, *Lumen Hilare.*) Which means that we might sing this song of praise to the “**hilarious light of glory.**”

Why did the early Christians choose such a peculiar song with which to end their days? Because they recognized, I think, that along with the wonder and excitement that comes to those who witness God’s activity in their lives always comes a bit of confusion, **as things work out in ways we’d never expected**, and eventually laughter, the hilarious laughter of those who have seen God choose an old woman to bear the herald of the Messiah, a young virgin to give birth to the Son of God, and an executed criminal born in a stable to redeem the world. Hilarious, indeed.

Prayer: *Dear God, never stop surprising us with your grace and mercy. Because while it may confuse us at first, we need the laughter and joy your presence always brings. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

From the Service for Evening Prayer (Vespers), the *Lutheran Book of Worship*:

*Joyous light of glory  
of the immortal Father,  
Heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ,  
We have come to the setting of the Sun*

*And we look to the evening light.  
We sing to God, the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.  
You are worthy of being praised with pure voices forever.  
O Son of God, O Giver of Light,  
The universe proclaims your glory.*

From ...In the Meantime, by David

Lose <https://www.davidlose.net/2012/12/luke-1-57-66/>



## December 19

Matthew 1:18-21 <sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus Christ<sup>[1]</sup> took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; <sup>19</sup> and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. <sup>20</sup> But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; <sup>21</sup> she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Our family has many fond memories growing up in Fincastle. Extra special was the Fincastle Presbyterian Church 1963 Christmas Eve Service!

Our grandmother, Viola Painter or "Little Paint" as the church organist and music director planned a "Live Nativity" Program.

Her eight grandchildren: 12 year old Monty, Patcy 11, Cathy 10, Joe 9, Willie 8, Clemmie 7, Carol 6 and six-week old Connie would be front & center.

Their mothers: Pat and Peggy were busy with costumes for Mary, Joseph, Angels, shepherds and Connie swaddled as "Baby Jesus".

Angel Halos were "itchy", Joe was cold, lots of giggles and wiggles but the show must go on.

Highlights were "O Holy Night" Solo, when Connie raised her little arm and the congregation gasped and the sanctuary filled with candlelight.

How lucky were we to have our grandmother "Little Paint" filling our lives and memories with her musical talents of love.

From:  
Cathy, Joe, Clemmie, Connie  
Peggy, Carol and  
With loving memory of Carol, Monty &  
Little Paint & Aunt Pat

## December 20

### **Matthew 1:22-23**

*All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:*

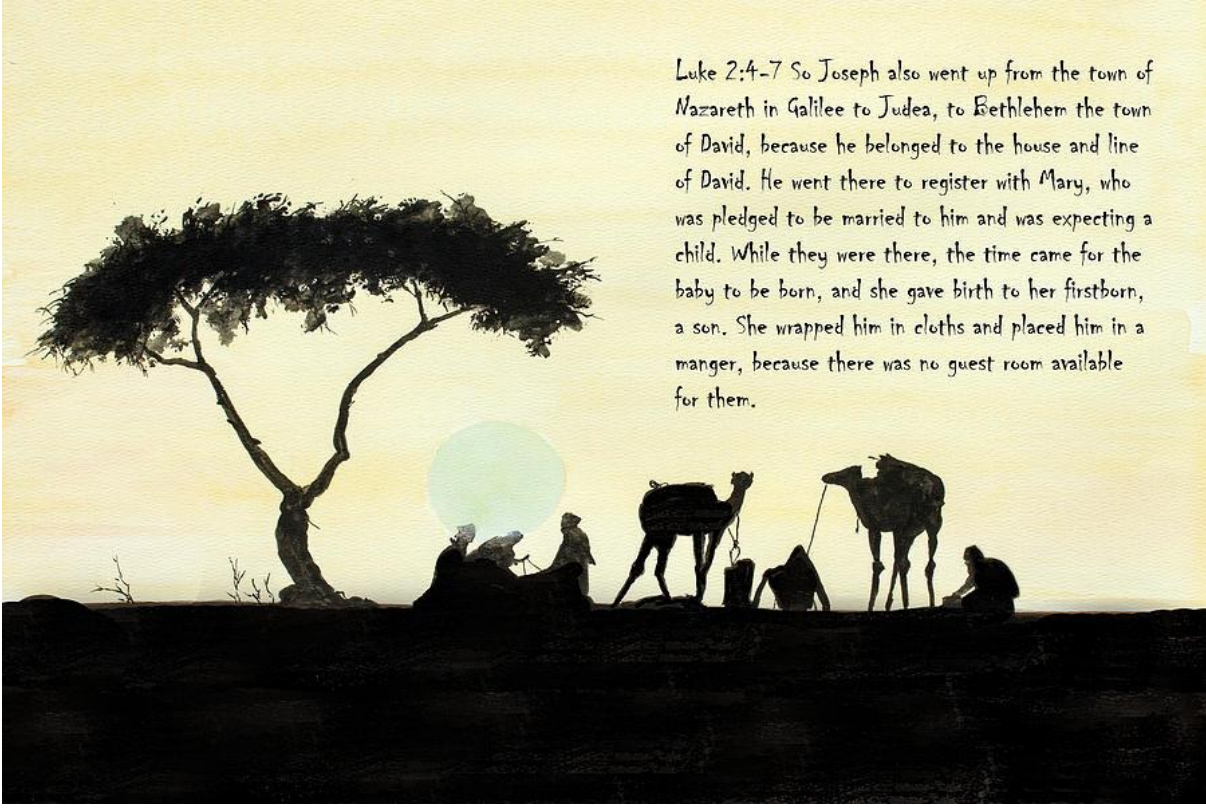
*“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and his name shall be called Emman'u-el”*

The Gospel of Matthew gives us the genealogy of Jesus. He wants to prove to the Jews that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah. It is the fulfilled words of the Jewish prophets that a virgin will bring forth a son and he shall be called Emmanuel. Emmanuel interpreted is God with us! Thanks be to God. We are never alone.

Pat Roberts

## December 21

Luke 2:4-7 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 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.



Fincastle Presbyterian  
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Advent Devotions

December 22-25, 2024

## December 22

**Matthew 2:1-2:**

### **The Visit of the Wise Men**

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.”



Kaycee Weidman

## December 23

### The Waiting is Over

#### Luke 2:25-35 (NSRV)

*25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary under the law, 28 Simeon[c] took him in his arms and praised God, saying,*

*29 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,  
according to your word,  
30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
32 a light for revelation to the gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel."*

*33 And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed 35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul, too."*

The more time I spend reflecting on this passage the more emotionally stirring it becomes to me. Simeon is an elderly man who has been waiting, for much of his life, to see the Messiah face to face. God promised Simeon that this encounter would take place before he dies and Simeon knows his life is coming to an end. He knows something big is going to happen soon. Simeon ends up at the temple where he encounters 40-day old Jesus with his mother and father. This is the moment he has waited for, his whole adult life!!

The EMOTION, the awe, the wonder, the joy that Simeon must have been feeling at that moment!

Then, Simeon offers a blessing and speaks words to Mary that would evoke fear, concern and worry in any new mother.

(NIV) *"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*

The EMOTION, the questions, the confusion, the fear, the worry, the awe that Mary must have been feeling at that moment when her maternal instinct was to nurture and protect her new born child.

A bittersweet moment for Simeon and Mary. This was a moment they had been waiting for; the realization that they were standing in the presence of the Messiah. However, we know the rest of the story. I hope they lingered as long as possible in the JOY, the AWE, the INNOCENCE and BEAUTY of that little baby boy.

I hope time stood still in that temple as the baby sounds and light of Jesus illuminated the darkness!

As you journey through the remaining days of Advent, keep your eyes fixed on "Simeon moments", those moments when God's promises are revealed to us. Linger and be filled with awe! Then go out and share the light!

Lori Turner

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**The Waiting is Over (Luke 2:25-35)**

## December 24

### Isaiah 9:2-7: (Msg)

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light.  
For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—  
light! sunbursts of light!  
You repopulated the nation,  
you expanded its joy.  
Oh, they're so glad in your presence!  
Festival joy!  
The joy of a great celebration,  
sharing rich gifts and warm greetings.  
The abuse of oppressors and cruelty of tyrants—  
all their whips and clubs and curses—  
Is gone, done away with, a deliverance  
as surprising and sudden as Gideon's old victory over Midian.  
The boots of all those invading troops,  
along with their shirts soaked with innocent blood,  
Will be piled in a heap and burned,  
a fire that will burn for days!  
For a child has been born—for us!  
the gift of a son—for us!  
He'll take over  
the running of the world.  
His names will be: Amazing Counselor,  
Strong God,  
Eternal Father,  
Prince of Wholeness.  
His ruling authority will grow,  
and there'll be no limits to the wholeness he brings.  
He'll rule from the historic David throne  
over that promised kingdom.  
He'll put that kingdom on a firm footing*



*and keep it going  
With fair dealing and right living,  
beginning now and lasting always.  
The zeal of God-of-the-Angel-Armies  
will do all this.*

Verse 9, the first verse of this scripture, reminds me of living in the small town of Julian, population 4300, in the mountains of So. California. After we moved there and started making friends, I was invited along with anyone in the community, to sing Handel's Messiah, at a community "sing-along" event that was held every year! How many places do you go to that has a "community sing-along of Handel's Messiah!! This was a first for me, and was done every year.

Song 11, in this great work, comes from Isaiah 9:2.

I love music and all it's different forms: listen if you will:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liLJC6p3sjM>

Danette Heinlein

## December 25

Isaiah 9:6 (NRSV): *For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

In our world titles can serve a very important purpose. If I need to have my appendix removed, it would be in my best interest to go to a board certified surgeon, someone who has a "Dr." ( of medicine and surgery) in front of his/her name. If I want to build a new office building, then it would be in my best interest to go to a company who employs a board-certified architect and a board-certified engineer, and who has the right titles that indicate their training and skill.

In Isaiah 9:6 the great prophet, Isaiah, was anticipating a future day when God would send a new ruler to rule over the Lord's people. Only this new ruler would not be a ruler in the manner of any earthly king / queen who uses his/her power to serve only his / her self-interests. God's new ruler would rule for the deliverance and salvation of the poor, the sick, the forgotten, the imprisoned, the enslaved. Indeed, this new ruler would reflect the very presence of God here on earth, among the people of God, for the people of God, indeed for the saving of all people and of Creation itself. The titles of Isaiah 9:6 reflect who this new ruler would be: "a child born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the New Testament church saw Isaiah 9:6 fulfilled. Jesus was and is the new ruler who came into our world that all of us and any of us might have through faith in Him "life, and that more fully" (John 10:10).

This Christmas may we celebrate the birth of the world's true Ruler, who came into our world "not to be served, but to serve", who came "to save the world from its sin". Our best celebrations will include time with our families and our friends and our neighbors, embracing them in love as God has embraced us. At the same time, we must remember that our "neighbor" is also the neighbor in need both near and far. Our "neighbor" can even be our "enemy". Such is love for those who follow "the Prince of Peace". Amen.

Peace, David Dickerson