

Grace Community Church

Advent Devotional

2026

Thank you to all the contributors from the family of Grace.

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Prepare Him Room

What you hold in your hand is more than a collection of daily readings. It is a gift from people who have shared their hearts, their experiences, and their faith to help us prepare for Christmas.

As we begin this Advent season, I invite you to slow down, open your heart, and make room for Jesus. In the middle of crowded calendars and familiar traditions, these devotions offer an opportunity to pause, listen, and rediscover the wonder of God coming near.

They also invite us to take a look in the mirror—not to focus on our appearance, but to consider what is happening within us. Are we making room for hope? Are we extending peace? Are we sharing joy? Are we reflecting the love of Christ to the people around us? My prayer is that these pages will help us see both where we are and where God is inviting us to grow.

To everyone who contributed to this year's devotional, thank you. Thank you for taking the time to reflect, write, and share a part of your journey with us. Your willingness to offer your words and your stories has made this devotional a gift to our church family.

As you read each day, leave a little room to linger. Consider the Scripture, reflect on the message, jot down a meaningful phrase, and carry a thought or prayer into your day. May this Advent season draw us closer to Jesus—and closer to one another—as we prepare to celebrate His birth.

With gratitude and Christmas hope,

Matthew

Week One – Making Room for Hope

November 29 **Day 1** ***Tanner and Becky Mattson***

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before you according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood, will be used for burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

Isaiah 9:2-7

Make Room for the Light

The day was December 11, 2011 – around 1 o'clock in the morning – when I suddenly lost my father. For the previous three years leading up to my dad's death, I had experienced deep moments of darkness and despair. By God's grace, His Light showed up in His Word. Nothing prepares you for the sudden loss of your father, my best friend, but the Word of God spoke truth in my life leading up to this tragic time.

Isaiah spoke to the people living under the heavy shadow of fear, political turmoil, and spiritual darkness – the kind that makes hope feel distant and peace almost unimaginable. In that darkness God promised a Child whose light would not just shine on the darkness but enter it and overcome it. During His ministry, Jesus explicitly claims He is the Light (John 1:4-5; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

This is the central hope of Advent: The promised Child does not wait for the darkness to lift before He comes. He enters it. And wherever He is welcomed, light follows. After the loss of my father, I had a choice to make. He showed me the only hope for dealing with my sorrow was to welcome Him in. My life radically changed. The Light of the World is continuing His work in our family and seeks us even in our sin and imperfections.

Darkness isn't just present in the despair of tragedy. It can crowd out the light in other life situations. Maybe there is relationship tension we keep avoiding, immense grief still exists; or a busy, distracted pace that leaves little room for anything truly meaningful.

This Advent, as we prepare Him room, let's try one simple practice: Choose an area of struggle and intentionally clear a space for Christ there. Be willing to open it up to Him. Let the promises in Isaiah 9 speak truth in ten minutes of daily quiet time. Making room for Him requires honesty. The *Wonderful Counselor* can soften a tense relationship. The *Mighty God* is stronger than what overwhelms us. If we feel consumed by loneliness this season, the *Everlasting Father* will never abandon us. Name any fear out loud in prayer and invite the *Prince of Peace* to calm the storm inside.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are the light in my deepest darkness. Show me where I have filled every corner of my life with little room left for You. Give me the courage to clear a place and welcome Your presence there. Amen.

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanue *Isaiah 7:14*

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)." *Matthew 1:22-23*

Make Room for God With Us

Certainly this is one of the first prophecies that comes to mind for most people about Jesus' coming to earth (His incarnation). Lo and behold, a virgin will conceive. Talk about a special event! Jesus' birth would be like no other!

An interesting aspect of this special prophecy is that it was first given as a sign – by God Himself – to an untrusting King of Judah (Ahaz) when he was in a really tough spot. It is not stated in the midst of the many chapters of Isaiah's warnings and other prophecies, but given as a sign by God to Ahaz when Ahaz did not want to trust any reassurance from God.

The nation of Judah was about to be attacked by the other ten tribes of Israel and their very significant ally, Syria. These armies were building their forces in preparation for war. Ahaz and the people of Judah feared greatly, for good reason.

The Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to assure Ahaz that He would deliver them if they exercised faith in Him, saying, "Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint." Remarkably, God Himself spoke to Ahaz and told him to ask for some sign that He would deliver. Ahaz refused, likely due to his pride, so God gave to him the sign that He would ultimately deliver His people via His virgin-born Son, whose name means "God with us."

The short version of the story of Ahaz was that he did not trust the Lord, Judah was delivered over to captivity, and "in the time of his (Ahaz's) distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord" (II Chronicles 28:22).

Hundreds of years later, though, another man who heard about this virgin-born baby did exercise faith. Joseph, making plans to marry Mary, was visited by an angel of the Lord. After hearing that her baby would fulfill this prophecy, Joseph "did as the angel of the Lord commanded him." A great choice to trust!

Many years ago, our family found ourselves in a very troublesome situation. After some sleepless nights and then much prayer and good input, we did trust, and our God did prove Himself to be very trustworthy.

Immanuel, "God with us." When we find ourselves in tight spots, do we make room for God and exercise faith and trust – or do we not?

December 1 **Day 3** ***Keith and Angel Williams***

"And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Luke 2:7 NKJV

Make Room for Jesus

It's easy to become so busy with life that we forget to leave room for the One who gives life meaning. Our minds become crowded, and our hearts are occupied with other responsibilities, such as worries and distractions.

Preparing room for Jesus is more than just decorating our homes, attending church, or celebrations. We should all prepare our hearts to welcome His presence. We should make space for His word by praying and putting Him foremost in our lives.

Revelations 3:20 tells us, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hears my voice and opens it, I will come in." Jesus wants to have fellowship with us and wants to be the center of our lives.

As we go through our daily lives, we should make room for Him. Make room in your life so that prayer and worship become your priorities. Matthew 6:33 – "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." If we have a full schedule, our spiritual life can become empty. Jesus deserves our best.

Make room for His presence (Colossians 3:15-16). Receive Him into your daily decisions. Make room for His peace, and don't worry. He will shoulder your burdens. Try to pray and worship Him daily.

When we prepare room for Him, we need to remove things that will make us bitter. Things we should remove would be an unforgiving heart, pride, and anything standing in the way of praising Him.

We can't fully give our lives to Him if we are holding on to burdens that He wants us to release. We don't have to have everything perfect to come to Him. We should simply open the door and invite Him into our hearts.

In the morning, we should take time out and have prayer to seek God's wisdom, His love, and ask for peace and His prevailing will. The one who came to bring us salvation came into a world that had no room for Him.

Reflection:

Is there anything in my life taking up space that should belong to God?
Has my busy life become a distraction and more important than my relationship with Jesus?
What do I need to let go so I can make more room for Him?

Prayer:

Thank You for loving us enough to send Your Son into this world that we might have life through Him. Forgive us for allowing the care of this world to take our eyes off You. Search our hearts and show us what we need to remove, and help us release all things that keep us from experiencing the fullness of You. Teach us how to make room for You in our everyday lives. Let our hearts be a place where You always reside. I love You forever. Amen

Think – As we reflect on Jesus' birth, we should ask ourselves, "Have we made room for Him?"

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from of old,
From everlasting.
Therefore He shall give them up,
Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth;
Then the remnant of His brethren
Shall return to the children of Israel.
And He shall stand and feed His flock
In the strength of the Lord,
In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God;
And they shall abide,
For now He shall be great
To the ends of the earth;
And this One shall be peace." *Micah 5:2-5a*

Make Room in Small Places

Jesus' arrival in Israel was unexpected and unheralded – except to lowly shepherds – who made known the birth of the Savior in the surrounding countryside. Not only was Bethlehem, His birthplace, small and insignificant, but Nazareth, where He lived, was as well.
John 1:46 says, "And Nathaniel said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'"

From small and ordinary beginnings (though to my thinking, the birth of any child is extraordinary) came our Savior, Jesus. He wasn't born in Jerusalem or some other great city. He wasn't born into a prosperous or famous family; everything about His birth was humble.
In verse 4 of our text, we see that Micah was prophesying the Lord's coming and provision: "*And He shall stand and feed His flock In the strength of the Lord, In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth*…"
Jesus was clearly dependent on God the Father and grew in His power through God's provision. As members of His flock, we go to the Lord for our feeding and equipping. Like Jesus, we also might come from overlooked places, and our lives may be filled with ordinary moments. But God encourages us to remember Him, love Him, and have faith in Him – especially in the small and the common – and He promises to do great things through us.

You may feel you are far outside God's gaze – perhaps even insignificant to Him. Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, once felt the same way: Genesis 28:15-16 says, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." Like Jacob, we can forget that God is with us wherever we are – even in those unassuming, overlooked places.

Jesus' humble example should inspire and encourage us to wait patiently and peacefully for God to work in our ordinary moments.

"I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait,
And in His word do I hope.
My soul waits for the Lord
More than the watchmen for the morning;
Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord;
For with the Lord there is lovingkindness,
And with Him is abundant redemption.
And He will redeem Israel
From all his iniquities." *Psalm 130:5-8*

MAKE ROOM IN THE WAITING

The world is filled with waiting rooms: airplane terminals, repair shops, the DMV. How do you feel in the waiting room? Anxious? Angry? Frustrated? Tired? Bored?

As a doctor, all my patients waited for me in the waiting room. Sometimes for a long time! I often tried to greet my patients there and bring them to the office myself. I learned a lot about the patient when doing so. Those who brought a spouse or trusted friend were more likely to be anxious or uncertain about the visit, so I made sure that their fears were addressed and their questions answered. I could also usually identify those who were upset or angry, and I'd attempt to alleviate their concerns before beginning my examination.

In our lives, we often find ourselves waiting for God. When will God heal me and take away my pain? When will He help me with my financial problems? My family problems?
What does the Scripture teach us about waiting? In today's lesson we read, "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His Word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning …" (Psalm 130:5-6). Watchmen in ancient Israel spent the night looking for danger and waited eagerly for the morning to come, when their duties were over.

Similarly, God wants our waiting to be filled with hope. The darkness will recede. The dangers will pass. The morning is coming. When we wait expectantly, with hope and faith in the Lord and His Holy Word, we can experience "the peace of God that passes all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), knowing that "those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31).

Recently, I underwent major neck surgery. As the staff rolled me on the gurney into the operating room, only seconds away from undergoing anesthesia and difficult surgery, I experienced a supernatural burst of calm and peace: I was lying on a raft floating upon the waves of prayer sent on my behalf. As I reflected later upon this extraordinary experience, I realized that at that moment I was completely bereft of any capacity to help myself or influence the outcome. I had placed my trust fully and completely in the hands of the surgeon, the surgical team, and in the guiding hands and protection of the Lord. Waiting on the Lord brought me peace.

Always place your trust and hope in the Lord. The morning is coming. Peace is here!

"Comfort, comfort My people,' says your God. 'Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her that her warfare has ended, that her guilt has been removed, that she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.' The voice of one calling out, 'Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain, and hill be made low; and let the uneven ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain, a broad valley; then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." *Isaiah 40:1-5*

Clear the Way

Before Jesus' first coming, John the Baptist quoted Isaiah 40:3–4 to prepare the people of Israel for His arrival. The first five verses of this Messianic chapter speak of Jesus' arrival as a comfort and a removal of guilt. They also use the analogy of a rough terrain being smoothed to facilitate His entrance. John recognized the obstacles in people's hearts and minds that might stand in the way of their following Him. His message of repentance was his way of "smoothing the terrain" by softening hardened hearts so that they would be receptive to the Gospel.

Suppose a very important person, someone you loved and respected, was coming to your house to visit for a weekend. Would you have dirty dishes in the sink? Piles of dirty laundry that they would have to step over to get into the bedroom? Used towels in the shower and soiled sheets on the bed? Of course not! You would do everything in your power to clean your house and make it comfortable for your guest.

The Bible states that our bodies are the temple of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). His Holy Spirit now resides in you! Are you doing everything in your power to make Him comfortable in your "house"? Do you need to clean up your thought life or "clear the way" by getting rid of piles of disobedience that might be obstacles to true fellowship with God?

Jesus said He is standing at the door and knocking. Are you prepared to receive Him if He came back today?

"And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.
Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost."

Romans 15:12-13

Make Room for Hope to Overflow

There is something really beautiful about learning to trust God. It's easy to trust Him when things are going well and the promotion is announced, goals are achieved, and bonus is secured. But that trust becomes even more meaningful when life takes an unexpected turn, when we face challenges, and when we have no idea what tomorrow will bring.

Trusting our Savior means releasing the things we can't change or control and finding peace in knowing that He is working in our lives—even when we can't see it. It means that we will simply choose faith over worry, hope over discouragement, and forgiveness over ego.

When we receive the unexpected medical diagnosis, the financial downturn, or the betrayal of a friendship, does the world see us rejoicing in the peace of knowing to whom we belong? Do we reflect the grace and confidence of knowing we were created in the image of our Savior? Do others see something different in the way we respond to life's challenges?

The world is searching for a peace that can only be found through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. What a beautiful gift it is to share His joy and hope with those around us, especially as we walk through our own trials and struggles. In those moments we have an opportunity to let others see something different in us, something that can only be explained through the joy of knowing Him.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, as we enter this Advent season, please let us be mindful of the many opportunities we have to share Your peace and love with those around us. When life is difficult, help us remember to lean on you and trust that You are always at work. May others see something different in us, not because we have life under control, but because we have You to lean on. Help us to offer encouragement, hope, and joy to someone who needs it. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Week 2 - Making Room in Our Hearts

December 6 **Day 8** ***Sandi Roach***

"In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Luke 1:5-17

Make Room After Disappointment

Many of us, like Elizabeth and Zacharias, have things that we have prayed long and hard for and it seems like God has not heard our prayers. We may have even given up praying, feeling that the more we pray the more disappointed we feel. I am sure that at the old age that Elizabeth and Zacharias had reached, they had given up hope of having a child. This was compiled by the fact that in their culture the childless were ostracized.

I have two friends who were in similar situations, and both are missionary couples. The first was my former roommate. She had married in her thirties and had always wanted children. She and her husband had prayed that God would bless them, and she did conceive only to miscarry three times. They were devastated but continued to serve the Lord and accepted an overseas assignment, accepting the fact that God wanted to send them without children. The desire for children still filled their life, but they were willing to consider adoption if God opened that door. God had not forgotten them – they remained faithful to the calling that God had given them, and almost as soon as they accepted their Cameroonian assignment, He blessed them and they had a beautiful baby girl, born out of the US and who is now 14 years old and a true gift from God that they celebrate daily. They didn't blame God for their misfortunes but continued to serve the calling that He had given them with joy.

The other couple, now serving in Central America, got pregnant soon after they were married, but received a devastating diagnosis that their baby had a disease that would cause her to die within hours of being born. They did not abort the child as the doctors had advised, and the child was born, but only lived a day. They were not bitter toward God, but they were heart-broken, as they had hopes that their commitment not to abort the baby would somehow spare her life. They didn't let their disappointment drown them in sorrow and continued with their call to the mission field. Today they are blessed with three healthy and happy children.

In both cases, the couples could have given up on God and felt angry for their suffering, but instead, as with Zacharias and Elizabeth, they remained faithful to God. Not every disappointment ends with what we pray for, but it is important that we don't live in the darkness of our disappointments. May we continue to seek the Lord and let His light fill our days.

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, 'Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!' Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. 'Don't be afraid, Mary,' the angel told her, 'For you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

Luke 1:26-33

Make Room for the Unexpected

Imagine being young again. Imagine dreaming about the future. A husband. A family. A loving home. Watching your children grow up to be good productive citizens. I think most of us had similar dreams at some point in our lives.

Notice, none of our dreams focused on making room or managing the unexpected. Mary, a young woman, had entertained such dreams. Especially since Joesph was planning to marry her in the future.

Our scripture shows that Mary had a deep relationship with God. Thru that deep relationship with God, Mary had found God's favor.

Imagine an angel appearing in your life, sharing with you that you will be blessed with a son before you are married. I am sure this was not in Mary's immediate plans for her life.

How would you manage such a situation? Would you choose God to help you make room for the unexpected?

We have a daughter. A bright young energetic daughter. We dreamed of such a bright future for her. She often shared her dreams with us. An automobile accident changed everything. One would say this event was certainly not expected.

Quickly, our dreams were destroyed. Our reliance on God increased. We prayed for wisdom. We prayed for healing. We prayed for strength to help us journey through the unexpected. And our relationship with God deepened.

As you have experienced unexpected opportunities in your life, have they caused you to draw closer to God?

There is another value to dealing with the unexpected. It equips us to better serve those around us who are experiencing unexpected opportunities as well.

Prayer:

Father, today we studied Mary dealing with the unexpected. We pray that in our journey, you would bless us with wisdom and courage as we deal with the unexpected. Amen.

"But Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; for that reason also the holy Child will be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth herself has conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called infertile is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold, the Lord's bond-servant; may it be done to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."

Luke 1:34–38

Make Room for Yes

Mary was just living her life when an angel showed up and told her she was going to give birth to the Messiah. She was getting ready to marry Joseph. Probably pretty excited about what was ahead, making plans, and looking forward to the next season of her life. And right in the middle of everyday life, God interrupted her. And that interruption changed everything. Forever.

I like to have a plan. To know the ending before the story even gets started. I want to account for the unexpected, consider all the possibilities, and have a contingency plan ready just in case things don't go the way I expected.

But one of the things this passage reminds me is that saying 'yes' to God means saying 'yes' to having my plans interrupted. Trusting that walking into the unknown with Him is better than anything I could have planned for myself. And that's a lot easier to say than it is to actually do. Sometimes we get so caught up in what we think our lives are supposed to look like that we forget to leave room for what God might have planned. We get comfortable with our routines, our expectations, and the way we think things should go. And when something comes along that doesn't fit into those plans, saying 'yes' isn't always our first response.

But look at Mary. She didn't have all the answers. She had questions about how any of this was even possible. And I'm sure this wasn't exactly how she pictured her life going. But she didn't need to know how the whole story was going to unfold before she was willing to say 'yes.'

So how do we live a life where we're willing to be interrupted and say 'yes' to God?

I think it starts with holding everything with open hands. Our plans, our expectations, and even the things we're most excited about. Remembering that when we're living for God, our lives are not our own. Being willing to be interrupted, even when it's inconvenient or doesn't make sense to us. And trusting that God sees a much bigger picture than we do.

Mary was preparing to marry Joseph. And spoiler alert, in the end, she didn't just get a husband. She got to bring Jesus into the world. And that's so much better than anything she could have possibly imagined.

We don't have to know how everything is going to work out before we're willing to follow God. Mary didn't. But she trusted Him enough to say 'yes,' even without knowing what would come next. And maybe that's where we need to start, too. Holding our plans a little more loosely, being willing to be interrupted, and making room for whatever God has planned…because the story He is writing is so much better than anything we could write on our own.

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,' which translated means, 'GOD WITH US.' And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus."

Matthew 1:18-25

Make Room When Plans Change

As teenagers or young adults, most of us have plans and dreams about what we think our lives will look like. We imagine the perfect spouse, career, house, children, car, and maybe even a white picket fence. The same was probably true for Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. We know they were betrothed to be married. Betrothal was much more than an engagement by today's standards. It was a legally binding agreement between two families that could only be dissolved through divorce. It was essentially being married without yet living together or consummating the marriage.
All of their plans, hopes, and dreams changed when they discovered that Mary was pregnant. Both Mary and Joseph knew the child was not Joseph's.

When Mary told Joseph about her visit from the angel Gabriel, I imagine he didn't hear much after the words, "I'm pregnant." He didn't immediately jump to conclusions or make a rash decision. Instead, he began considering what his next steps should be. Because Joseph was a righteous man, he wanted to do what was right while also protecting Mary.

Under the Old Testament law, there were provisions for stoning someone caught in adultery. Joseph apparently believed his only other option was to quietly divorce Mary, sparing her as much public humiliation as possible.

But Joseph didn't rush his decision. Matthew tells us that he was considering these things when an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife…" Joseph recognized that this dream was from God. He knew the Scriptures, prayed, and understood God's voice. The angel's message confirmed what Mary had told him and connected to the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14.

What happens next demonstrates just how strong Joseph's faith was. As soon as he woke up, he did exactly what the angel had instructed him to do. He took Mary as his wife.

Think about what Joseph experienced. His plans for his life had completely changed. The future he had imagined was no longer the future he was facing. Yet, rather than allowing fear, uncertainty, or disappointment to control his decisions, he listened for God.

Even when his world was turned upside down, Joseph listened for God's voice, recognized it, and acted in faith.

"Now at this time Mary arose and went in a hurry to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord." *Luke 1:39-45*

Make Room for Encouragement

She came from Nazareth, a young peasant girl, bewildered, unmarried, pregnant, and carrying a promise too magnificent for her understanding. She was to give birth to the Son of God. What a glorious promise, but it presented a real dilemma: She was a virgin!

She traveled into the hill country of Judea to visit her relative Elizabeth. The pilgrim was Mary. She had no gold for the journey, no carefully laid plan, no assurance that Joseph, her betrothed, could ever understand her explanation. Trying to get her friends and family to understand was impossible. And then there was the Thursday afternoon women's discussion of the Talmud that complicated things. Nazareth was infested with gossip, condemnation, and wagging tongues. Trying to claim virginity when your body shows otherwise is quite a stretch. Mary believed God, but Nazareth didn't believe Mary.

If tradition is right her journey was long, perhaps 80 to 100 miles to a little village named Ein Karem, near Jerusalem. She trudged along pregnant, wearing leather sandals (not Skechers). Her mission was not one of escape or avoidance from the probing questions at home. She was going to someone who might understand. Cousin Elizabeth and Zechariah were anxiously waiting for the birth of their own promised child.

Imagine the moment Mary arrived. Elizabeth, already six months pregnant, enjoyed a warm embrace and greeting. Suddenly, the child within her leaped and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and in a loud voice proclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear … Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Mary made that risky, rugged journey seeking understanding, and she received much needed affirmation and encouragement. Elizabeth believed Mary, and what a gift it is to have someone remind us that God keeps His promises.

Perhaps you are the one called to encourage someone else. A welcoming heart can become a sanctuary. A word of faith can provide strength when one is weary. And sometimes, in the simple act of showing up for another person, we become the hands and heart of Jesus.

To all fellow pilgrims we say, "You are not forgotten. You are not alone. Your journey is long; the struggles are real. But the Father's House is just around the next bend."

"My soul exalts the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondslave;
For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed.
For the Mighty One has done great things for me;
And holy is His name.
And His mercy is upon generation after generation
Toward those who fear Him.
He has done mighty deeds with His arm;
He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones,
And has exalted those who were humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things;
And sent away the rich empty-handed.
He has given help to Israel His servant,
In remembrance of His mercy,
As He spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his descendants forever." *Luke 1:46-55*

Make Room for the Humble

Good morning, fellow travelers,

As Jesus gifts me with another day in His awesome creation, I aim to magnify Him as precious Mary did 2000+ years ago … as a humble teenager! Imagine that! In some small way, Lord, help me to notice those You want me to notice and to illuminate some value that shines from them…something to brighten their day with Your light.

This week while enjoying lunch with my son, our waitress was highlighting the specials. As I listened, You helped me to see her as You see her … so You spoke the words through me that touched her heart and brightened her day! Thank you, Jesus, for another chance to be used by You to touch others.

You have graciously left us here to live "abundant lives" as we seek to follow You, to become more like You. What a 'perfect' role model You are! May the love that You so selflessly shower on us, pass through us to love and serve others. Thank you, Jesus, for placing me where You know the talents you've blessed me with, can be useful in your Kingdom. And isn't it wonderful how You show me all the little things that go unnoticed by many … as You are my constant Companion. You call my attention to ways I can bring glory to You! Thank you, Jesus, for the lady pumping gas next to me; for the grumpy store clerk; for the hungry man in the Connections Café; for my dear neighbor needing some help and prayer. You supply so many opportunities to serve and make a small difference for your Kingdom!

Sometimes I need help with my energy, my attitude, my "other plans" that get in the way of Your good purposes. I ask You, Jesus, that You stay close and continually guide me like You did for Brother Lawrence, Virgin Mary, and countless others who were surrendered to You. What do I need to move over in my life, Lord, to make room for You? What's in my way? My will, my ego, my plans, my schedule, my attitude, my friends, my family? Help me to see…

"And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High,
because you will prepare the way for the Lord.
You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.
Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
and to guide us to the path of peace."

Luke 1:76-79 NLT

Make Room for Peace

After John the Baptist was born, his father, Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, praised God! Filled with joy, he offered this prophetic blessing over his son, who would go before the Lord to prepare the way and guide our feet into the path of peace. How do we do this?

The Call to Make Room:

- By preparing our hearts to receive Him, reading and following his Word daily.
- Removing distractions and sin that hinder our walk with God.
- Be ready to share our personal story. The Gospel, God's love, grace, mercy, and salvation.
- Be alert! There are opportunities every day to let God's light shine through us to others. Simple random acts of kindness: open a door, carry a bag, give up your seat, offer prayer in unique situations, smile (like your mother is watching), etc.
- Being aware. Notice others. God tells us to be interested in others. You may become aware of God working in someone else's life, and He may actually be inviting you to join him in that activity. Often, asking to pray for someone can open doors.
- Make room for peace by clearing the things that block God's light.

Where God's Light Guides our Feet to Peace

- According to Luke 1:79, God's light is to "shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."
- "Darkness" symbolizes spiritual death, sin, separation from God.
- "Shadow of death" = fear, hopelessness, mortality that can overshadow life without God.
- "Guides our feet" implies direction, stability, and purpose in all steps of life.
- "Way of peace" = a life aligned with God's will, marked by love, reconciliation, harmony.

Light is the consistent image of God's presence, wisdom, and guidance. We seek Light through prayer, scripture, and the Holy Spirit. Inviting others to come to Jesus, who will seek His ways, love, and salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here's an actual application of God's light and peace: An individual in their community who loves his neighbor by showing kindness. That neighbor became widowed several years ago. The believer checks in regularly, shares cookies from time to time, blows off their driveway, invites them for dinner, takes them occasional meals, helps when an issue or request arises, and also invites them to church. There is joy and peace in being a servant.

How about you?
Are you making room for Jesus and His Word daily?

Are you limiting the distractions of life that rob us of valuable time? (How about that 'ping' on your phone? Busyness that's good, but is it what's best?)

Are you letting God's Light shine through you? Are you at peace?

Prayer:

Gracious Lord, help me make room in my heart for your peace. Remove the obstacles that hinder your light and guide my feet along the path you set. Help me to surrender to you every day. While I make daily plans, would you kindly establish my steps according to your ways? Use me as a vessel of your love and light. Guide me toward the peace that only you can give. Thank you for all that you do every day. What Grace, Mercy and Peace! In the name of Jesus, who will come again, Amen.

Week 3 - Making Room in Everyday Life

December 13 **Day 15** ***Mark and Yvette Askine***

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

Galatians 4:4-7

Make Room to Belong

This passage from Galatians reminds us that God sent His Son Jesus Christ to redeem us from being slaves to the law and instead adopted us as His children. Now, what does it mean to be a slave to the law? It means that no matter how hard we try to do good works, we cannot earn our salvation – because in the end we all violate the law every time we sin. And because the wages of sin is death, we are sentenced to death under the law. But the Word makes crystal clear that God loves us so much that instead of a certain death sentence under the law, we who repent of our sins and proclaim His Son Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, are given by God's grace (and only God's grace) eternal salvation as a member of His family.

Being a child of God brings profound joy to our lives that shapes who we are. It enables us to shine His light to those around us by sharing the good news of the gospel and by encouraging others that they also can be part of God's family. Our words and actions should reflect Christ's love for us – this in turn leads to good works, not a way to earn salvation, but as a way to glorify God and serve as expressions of our faith and evidence of the transformative power of His grace in our lives.
Yes, we can rest assured that our salvation and adoption as children of God are not about checking off items on a good deeds list. As Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 2, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

This truth frees us from any anxiety about not doing enough and instead motivates us to serve others in response to the undeserved grace that we have received. Receiving our place in God's family invites us to actively participate in the wonderful work that He is doing in our lives and the lives of others.

As we prepare this Advent season for the coming of our Lord and Savior, let us grow in faith and shine His light into the world and invite others to find the hope, peace, joy, and love that only comes with being a child of God.

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

Make Room by Taking the Lower Place

Today's Scripture invites us to slow down and consider what Christian humility looks like in our everyday lives. It starts with turning our hearts toward God and making room for the people around us. Jesus shows us the way. Instead of using His position for His own benefit, He emptied Himself and chose humility, service, and obedience. We can follow His example not by drawing attention to ourselves, but instead by showing His love in the way we care for one another. Each day offers us the opportunity to make room for someone else and reflect His goodness.

This way of thinking is in direct contrast to worldly advice. We hear sayings like "be proud of yourself," "you deserve this," and "get everything you can," that focus on putting ourselves first. But Jesus invites us to a different way of living—one shaped by the humility He showed us. His words in Mark 8:36 remind us of what truly matters: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

We're called to bring a mindset of humility into the way we treat one another. Jesus gave Himself for us on the cross, showing us what sacrificial love looks like. As we follow Him, we're invited to spend less time thinking about ourselves and more time caring for others. Rather than trying to be the center of attention, we can put someone else's needs first. In all we do, our hope is to point others toward Jesus and share His goodness.

Reflection:

During this Advent Season, what is a simple, yet meaningful, opportunity you can take to make room for someone else and point others to Jesus?

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Thank You for sending Jesus as our Savior and for the example of humility He gave us. Through Your Holy Spirit, open our hearts to the people around us and help us recognize opportunities to share Your love. As we follow Jesus, may every knee bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, all to Your glory. Amen.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation: for by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross."

Colossians 1:15-20

Give Him First Place

God speaks to each of us as he makes us, intricately weaving the shimmering thread of Himself throughout our tiny hearts and pulling tight so that we will always ache for Him. We are born with a suspicion buried in our blood and in our bones that we live in a reality that is vastly richer and more beautiful than we can possibly imagine. A reality more interconnected than our small minds can comprehend.

These are the words, the faint stirrings of fullness, we dimly hear as we go:

I made you to be sent out beyond your recall. Listen to your longing. It prepares you for my purpose for this particular place, with these particular people, in this perfect timing. I am always near. You will know me by your quickened heartbeat. You will know me in reverberation. One day it will sound like a trumpet. Until then I will hand you the finest wine when the party is winding down, charcoal fish on the beach at sunrise, sleep through shipwrecks, cry at funerals, walk through gardens.

"Human beings vegetables or cosmic dust we all dance to a mysterious tune intoned in the distance by an invisible piper."- Albert Einstein

The most powerful things in existence are invisible. We can't see them or make sense of them, but they profoundly alter us. We know them by the effects they have on us, the way they form our lives. Belief, bacteria, gravity, wind, fear, music, DNA, prayer, and love are all invisible and ever so powerful.

We can't see why galaxies stay in line, why the tide comes in only so far, how the lilies get clothed in splendor, how the sun shines its light in the day and the moon comes along to reflect on it at night, how crickets know when it's time to strike up a chord, or where roots extensively stretch and search underneath the ground soaking up strength to turn a tree into what we behold.

At the end of summer monarchs will pack their little butterfly bags for Mexico with a navigation system they were born with. Bats blindly do their dizzying spin through the night by sound. Birds find their way back every year to their summer homes. Salmon are born with an instinct that rushes them against the current to get to the place where her life will expand and flourish. Something intrinsic in them all engages with unseen things and tells them exactly what they are

meant to do. They are all being wonderfully held together by an invisible thread that the Creator intentioned and wove into everything. “Invisible threads are the strongest ties,” Nietzsche once said. And we are, every day, the stubborn camels being shoved through the eye of His intricate needle.

We are all animated by something unimaginable, bigger than us and not us. We can't see it or touch it. It can't be measured or understood. How, then, do we make room in our littleness for greatness to enter when what we are called to contain is beyond our comprehension? Our understanding, itself, must change to accommodate what is being poured into it.

Approaching Christmas, we could start by considering a meager manger made to hold hay that once upon a time held a baby that was bigger than the whole world. Can’t our straw hearts do the same thing?

In Jesus, God stooped down to spill the secret of Himself to our souls. The same secret He sung in our ear as he formed us. The same one he spoke into the void of the world in the beginning. Life to the fullest, flared up and fleshed out and screaming of His glory. He made sure the door between heaven and earth was flung wide open. Through Jesus, the veil is torn, the dead roam the streets, nothing is scattered. If we try to take it all in we are left gasping for air in reverent wonder. We can't help but utter in stuttered breath at the base of the cross, “Surely, this man was the son of God!” Because things happen in the silence of our hearts we can't explain; expansion, resonance, alignment, peace, stirring. He draws near and our souls vibrate, we walk the road with him and our hearts burn, he passes by the places we are buried and we hear a voice call us forth.

All things arose within Christ. They were first born in Him, especially life. They are being brought back into harmony through him. The one who is greater than everything became part of everything. He is the first and final expression for our aching hearts.

It is an exacting claim on us to have Him “before all things.” It calls us out into vast things and dares us to see what we can't. Embody it. Set free the image within us. Let our eyes fail us so we can really see. Become treasure hunters of the precious unseen. It's where the incredible happens, the impossible is made possible. Trade in these old wine skin heart for ones that won't burst as we go. And whatever we do, dear children, hold on for dear life to the very thing that holds us.

"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." *1 John 4:9-12, NIV*

Make Room for One Another

God loves us so much that He graciously gave us His Son so that we might live through Him!
Praise God!

What an amazing gift—better than any Christmas present that could ever be placed under a tree! How do we respond to this wonderful gift? "Thank you" is definitely not enough for such an extravagant gift! Verse 11 gives us a simple but powerful instruction: "*My dear, dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other" (The Message).* When we truly understand the depth of God's love, it changes us and the way we see and treat the people around us.

Someone has most likely recommended the book *Theo of Golden* to you this year. (It would make a good Christmas gift for someone!) This special and uplifting book is a depiction of the kind of Christ-like love we are called to share with the world. Theo does this by listening, remembering something someone shared, noticing when something is wrong, or simply making another person feel important. Sometimes the most meaningful way we share God's love is through the simple act of paying attention to others.

There is a quote often attributed to Maya Angelou that says, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

God's love is meant to be shared. We are called to make the invisible God visible to a watching world. Do we bear His image in the way we welcome and love others? A warm smile, a listening ear, an encouraging word, or a simple act of generosity can make someone feel seen, valued, and loved. When we treat others in these ways, we reflect the very love God has so generously given us. And in doing so, His love is made complete in us.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the gracious gift of life with You through Your one and only Son. Help me never take You or Your love for granted. Open my heart to see others through Your eyes, and give me the patience, kindness, and compassion to love them as You love me. May my words and actions reflect Your love in all that I do. Amen.

"Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body."

Hebrews 13:1-3

MAKE ROOM AT THE TABLE

This scripture passage instructs us on practical Christian attitudes and behavior. There are many teachings and admonishments on love for your brothers and sisters. One way to exhibit love and hospitality is fellowship around the table.

ALL are welcome to sit at the Lord's table. His table is an abundant table, a forever table. In scripture, some important moments are when people are reclined at a table. It is a place to gather, to be nourished, be nurtured, be heard and seen, to celebrate. It is a place to make room for the lost, weary, the disabled, the neglected, and the lonely.

It is a place to meet Jesus. In Ps 23:1-2 we learn that He prepares a table before us. There are many biblical examples of people coming to the table. In the Old Testament King David welcomes and honors Mephibosheth, Jonathan's disabled son, with kindness and the prestige of sitting at the King's table. Likewise, we are invited to the Banquet table of King Jesus. In the New Testament, room is made for Jesus when He is invited to the home of Zaccheus. Jesus welcomes Mary to the table where she anoints Him with perfume. At the Passover table with Jesus and the disciples, we see communion and the servant leadership of Jesus washing their feet. We should let Jesus be our perfect model of making room and giving the time, attention, and care.

On a personal level, we have a meaningful story from the courtroom when our son and daughter-in-law were near the end of a lengthy fostering situation and hoping for adoption. Normally, foster parents are not invited to speak. However, this day they were called on and felt unprepared. As she rose to speak, in relating how the child was doing, she felt the Lord's leading to say "our foster child has her chair at the table; it's hers, she always sits there. It is because she knows she belongs, is loved, welcomed, comfortable, safe and wanted!" The judge then related a very similar situation in his own home when they fostered children years back. This child, now an adult, still comes back to visit and still sits in HER chair at the table!

Reflection:

Are we consistently making a place for Jesus at our table?
What keeps us from believing we have a place at His?
Since He makes room for us, who might God be asking me to make room for at our table?

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

Titus 2:11-14

Make Room for the Great Gift Exchange

As we celebrate Christmas, the exchanging of gifts has become a festive part of our celebration. My husband asks me each year if I could please give him a Christmas list so that he does not need to figure out what to get me. In other words, so that he will not need to make returns.

Of course, our Heavenly Father figured out exactly what we needed, giving us the greatest gift of all. He gave us his holy son in Jesus coming to earth as a baby. With the thought of exchanging gifts, what gift should we give to our Heavenly Father? Talk about someone who is hard to buy for! We could certainly never come up with a gift that comes anywhere close to the value of the gift He has given us.

In today's scripture, God tells us exactly what He would like from us. This is not your typical advent scripture, but it is rich with application for Christmas and beyond. Read again, Titus 2:11-14 for the implications of God gifting us with Jesus. The scripture opens with the method of giving. It is the grace of God that brings us the gift of salvation. In the same way our gift to God is empowered by His grace in us. Grace gifts in both directions.

In verse 12, God first tells us what not to give Him. We are to renounce "ungodliness and worldly passions." Are there things in our lives to change or remove? Next, God tells us what He wants for Christmas: for us to "live self-controlled, upright and godly lives." Our greatest gift to God is reflecting His character in our lives. He wants a reflection of Himself in us that produces righteous living, demonstrating that we are His people. As verse 14 says, Jesus Christ "gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession." Best gift exchange ever!

The best way to celebrate Christmas and beyond is to live as people purified by God's grace. What a celebration! No matter what our husband or others give us for Christmas, we have already received the best gift ever from our Heavenly Father. Now give God what He desires by living the life He has called us to live. That's for His glory and our good.

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful."
Revelation 21:1–5 NKJV

At Home With God

Wait! What? NO SEA?!?! This is gonna take me a minute to process. One of my favorite things to do is look at the water, and I have always said, "There must be water wherever I go." Hmm.

John must have been a bit surprised by this revelation, as well, since he mentions it to us without being prompted by the Loud Voice from the Throne to write THAT down. Think of it. John was exiled to Patmos, an Island smaller than Hilton Head at 39 sq. miles, compared to our 69 sq. miles. However, we have approximately 13 miles of Atlantic coastline compared to Patmos, at 39 miles of coast. The shape of Patmos with all of the bays, coves, and inlets provided a guarantee that all John saw was water. Until he didn't.

Before he could process any of that newness, there it was. Whether it was the vision or John's focus (like a groom's would be), everything else was completely blocked out and it was glorious … new … adorned … stunningly breathtaking! And if his optical senses were not completely overloaded, he heard The Voice. Loud from the Throne came these words, "Behold, the Tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death, there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

"And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." So, John did. And so did I.

If there were tears about no sea, they would be gently wiped away, instead of daubed with my own wadded tissue. I like that.

"New" can be scary with plenty of skepticism involved. On the other hand, "old" can be comforting, even if it is broken and dangerous. I'm really glad to hear the Voice from the Throne declare, not once but TWICE, that He is going to be with us. He won't be cajoling, bribing, or manipulating us to like the new arrangement. It will, genuinely, be HOME. We will know it.

We will never be afraid again.
Home is really where the Heart is. His Heart.
Father, Thank you that no matter where I am, it will always be at Home with You.

Week 4 – Making Room for His Arrival

December 20 **Day 22** ***Judy and Peter Adams***

"Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all the people were on their way to register for the census, each to his own city. Now Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

Luke 2:1-7

Is There Room?

Imagine the stress Joseph and Mary must have felt when arriving in Bethlehem only to be told, "Sorry folks. No vacancy." Mary must have begun to worry as to where she would give birth to her baby. But then suddenly, a sympathetic innkeeper arrives in the pages of Scripture and offers them a space. We often forget the part the innkeeper played in the Christmas story. While others shut their doors, this man found room for them, even if it meant sharing that space with his animals.

What do we think of when we first wake up in the morning? Is it that project that needed to be done yesterday and remains incomplete? Is it that test at school, the sales meeting at work, or the Dow Jones futures index? Is it fear of sickness, fear for our loved ones who are unsaved? Do we allow these fears to rule our thoughts … hence our actions or inactions? Do we reach for our phone to check social media even before getting out of bed? Do any of these bring us closer to our Saviour? What if we dedicated the first few moments in the morning to give Him the thanks and praise He so richly deserves?

Let's put the worries of the day on the back shelf, spend time in His Word, and allow the peace that surpasses all understanding to calm our hearts and our minds. We all have busy schedules. I know. I get it. But like the innkeeper, we all need to make room for our Savior Jesus. He is where the JOY is.

"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those on whom His favor rests!"

Luke 2:8-14

Make Room for Good News

The good news of the Good Shepherd—the great I AM—coming to earth as a baby to become man so that He might lay down His life for His sheep, this gospel first came to poor and lowly shepherds! How it should encourage our hearts that our God often comes to save the weak and the outcast of the world, and all of us who have come to know how truly poor in spirit we are, unable to save ourselves. *Matt. 5:3—Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

As we consider the lowly shepherds keeping watch over their sheep, how can we become attentive to God in the middle of everyday responsibilities, just as they were?

We must remember that we will never learn to become attentive to the Lord in everyday life if we are not daily carving out time to "linger" in the presence of Jesus through abiding in His Word and prayer. Are we meditating on the good news of great joy in the Scriptures? Do we know that His perfect love casts out fear? Are we daily remembering that our heavenly Father "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14) and that no one can snatch us out of His hand?

Spirit-led meditation on the Word of God is how we learn to become attentive to our Good Shepherd's voice all throughout the day. The more we know how deeply we are loved by the Father in Christ, the more we are empowered by the Spirit to walk in His peace. Today, may we expectantly listen for His voice, asking the Spirit of Jesus to lead us in joyful surrender as He guides our every step.

"When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, 'Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.' So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.
The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them."

Luke 2:15-20

Make Room to Stop and See

So, I'm pondering the question posed, "What might we need to pause or set aside to give Jesus our attention?"

As a mother, grandmother, and newly made great-grandmother, this question hits hard. In the busiest season of the year, when family and friends and service ministries seem to expand in time consumption and the take-over of my thoughts, I can feel squeezed tight with to-dos. Anyone relate?

But as my normal practice of sitting with Jesus to start every day, I welcome the solitude and peace of that time. He is my refuge, my strong tower I can always run into during times of stress and overload. I'm asking my Father for the prompts throughout the busy days to stop and re-focus. Just like the busy Shepherds in the fields busily minding their flocks, they stopped and refocused on the realities of the Presence of God all around them. Then they RESPONDED to that Presence and went to see. Can you even imagine what they experienced as they came to look upon the Christ child? This little One who was born to cleanse us from our sins. Oh, Glory! All the fulfillment of Scripture for centuries lying in a feeding trough. The shepherds responded to all this by telling everyone what had happened!

Let's all take a look at what overfills our days (technology overload, extra activities, etc.) and see how we might be prompted to pause and purposely set aside whatever steals our attention from preparing room in our minds and hearts of the birth of our Savior and the wonderful gift of renewal that God wants to pour out on us. Mostly, let's not miss the experience of a relationship with Himself that God is offering us, and, like Mary, make the time to ponder and simply marinate in these amazing things in our hearts ... enough so that we, like the shepherds, will go and tell others the magnificent news of this Christ child.

Prayer:

Thank you, LORD. Please hear our prayer for our focus on YOU throughout this busy season and draw us in close. Help us respond in obedience to You as You direct us to tell others. In Jesus' Holy Name. Amen

"But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Luke 2:19

Make Room to Ponder

The shepherds came to see the newborn baby Jesus. They told Joseph and Mary of their encounter with the angels proclaiming the Messiah had been born.

Mary "treasured up all these things." That phrase means to guard, preserve, hold close like a valuable treasure. Mary was likely reminded of God's love for her in fulfilling His promise that she would give birth to the Messiah. So Mary "treasured up" all that the shepherds told her.

The scripture continues, "She pondered them in her heart." 'Ponder' means to consider something deeply and thoroughly, to piece together events and truths to understand God's guidance. After Gabriel announced to her that she would give birth to God's Son, she probably pondered the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. During her time with Elizabeth, she likely pondered Elizabeth calling her the mother of my Lord. And she pondered the angel's appearance to Joseph confirming the Immaculate Conception. All these things she pondered, trying to piece together and understand how God was working in her life.

We also need to ponder God's guidance in our lives. We need to treasure up, guard, and store away in our memories the truth of God's Word. Have you ever pondered how amazing it is that God invites us into His presence in prayer? The God who created the universe, who has power and dominion over all things, desires – yes, desires – to meet with us personally.

Can we quiet our busy lives to spend time with the one who gives us life? Are we so engrossed in our hectic pace – bogged down with decorations, lists, and shopping – that we fail to make time for the one we claim to celebrate at Christmas? Are we pondering God's Word and meditating on God's goodness in our lives?

Sometimes we have to be intentional about allocating our limited 24 hours in a day. Sit quietly with the Lord in prayer. Turn off the TV, TikTok, and Facebook. Sit quietly with the God who loves you like no other. Ponder His Word. Ponder His gift of salvation. Ponder His grace and His mercy. Then treasure up all these things in your heart.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.
In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."
John 1:1–5 (NKJV)

Make Room for Light That Lasts

One of my favorite things about Christmas is seeing all the lights. I (Jessica) remember being a little girl, seeing twinkling lights shine through the crack in my bedroom door. There was something magical about that season. Those little lights brought warmth, hope, and wonder to my young heart. Looking back, I realize that the feeling I once associated with the magic of Christmas was only a glimpse of something greater. Today, I know that the love, hope, and peace I once felt during the Christmas season are found in Jesus every day.

Every year, as we put away the Christmas decorations, we are reminded that those lights are temporary. The celebrations end, the decorations come down, and another season passes. But the light of Jesus was never meant to be seasonal. His light is eternal.

John reminds us that Jesus did not begin in Bethlehem. He was there in the beginning, and everything was made through Him. The same Jesus we celebrate at Christmas is the source of our life, hope, and peace.

Even through a lifetime of missteps and heartache, His light continues to shine. Circumstances change, traditions evolve, and things we once considered essential become less important. As our family prepares for Christmas, we are reminded that no amount of decorations, gatherings, or traditions can bring the lasting joy found in Jesus.

It is easy to spend more time preparing our homes for Christmas than preparing our hearts for Christ. Preparing Him room means making space for His presence, trusting His promises, surrendering our worries, and allowing His light to guide us beyond the Christmas season. The lights we hang will eventually be packed away, but the light of Jesus never fades.

Today, read John 1:1–5 and ask yourself: Am I simply celebrating Christmas, or am I making room for Him to lead my life every day?

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.') For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

John 1:14-18 ESV

Prepare Him Room: Welcome, Jesus

Each Christmas morning, we five children would line up by age at the hallway door, waiting for our parents' signal to burst into the family room to see what Santa had left us. This particular Christmas, my oldest brother Dan, then a teenager, had gone ahead of us to set a fire in the fireplace. And as he set the logs in place, he heard little Ned, the youngest, anxiously straining against the hallway door. Dan couldn't resist. In his deepest voice, he leaned back and bellowed, "Ho Ho Ho!" With that, little Ned turned to the stair-stepped lineup of children behind him and with eyes the size of saucers exclaimed, "HE'S STILL HERE!"

Simply put, that is the enduring message of this Christmas and every morning: HE'S STILL HERE! *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us …" (v. 14).* The word "dwelt" means "to spread one's tent over," "to tabernacle." The tabernacle was the temporary tent dwelling of God carried by the Israelites as they sojourned in the desert for 40 years. Here Moses met with God. Here God's manifest presence, referred to as the "Shekinah Glory," appeared in the form of a cloud signifying His constant presence with His people (see Exodus 40:34). For the Israelites, it said: "HE'S STILL HERE!"

"… (A)nd we have seen His glory, glory as of the only [one-of-a-kind] Son from the Father, full of grace and truth …" (v. 15). The WORD, the Divine Expression of God, chose to put on human flesh and dwell amongst His creation, so that we might see, hear, touch and experience the Glory of the invisible God. *"No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known"* (v. 18). HE'S STILL HERE!

"For from His fullness (completeness, perfection) we have all received, grace upon grace" (v.16). The grace of new life, the grace of redemption, the grace of forgiveness, the grace of life eternal. Grace piled up and overflowing. And, MOST IMPORTANTLY, when we place our faith in Jesus, His Holy Spirit comes to dwell, to tabernacle, in the earthly tent of our body (see John 14:15-17 & 1 Corinthians 6:19). HE'S STILL HERE!

Prayer:

This Christmas Day and every day, Jesus, may I make room for you to fill my earthly tent, my body, with Your Holy Spirit. Help me to guard against crowding You out. Fill me with Your grace and truth, piled up to overflowing. May every morning hold that wide-eyed excitement of knowing that YOU'RE STILL HERE!