



## DEVOTIONALS FOR

# *Advent, Christmastide, & Epiphany*

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*READ REFLECT PRAY*

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**ST. BARNABAS ANGLICAN CHURCH**  
**390 Jackson Street Newnan, GA 30263**  
**770-400-5544**  
[www.barnabasanglican.com](http://www.barnabasanglican.com)

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## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1



### Read Isaiah 40:9-11

#### Reflect

How comforting and challenging are these words from Isaiah. Not only are there rewards for following this guidance for proclaiming “behold your God,” but I was struck by the comment that our recompense awaits us.

Recompense could be compensation, but it can also mean to receive in kind for something done, suffered or given. It could certainly be received as a penalty for not following God’s clear directions to declare God boldly.

It would be my prayer to always be on the receiving end of a reward for holding declaring our God — not receiving recompense for a job poorly done. O God give me the strength to declare you boldly every day.

#### Pray

*Dear God give me the strength to fulfill your expectations in boldly declaring you in every situation that I encounter. Amen.*

Ernest Taylor



Artwork by Grace Davenport

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 2



### Read John 1:9

### Reflect

The announcement of Jesus coming into the world is at the heart of the Good News (gospel). Whenever and to wherever Jesus goes, he brings all of himself there. He brings all of his peace which reorders the chaos. He brings all his joy which uplifts the most downcast soul. He brings all his life which resurrects the dead soul. He brings his light to illuminate the darkest of valleys. And those valleys can be very dark. So often we find ourselves in the dark ditch along with others whose blindness has also led them there. (see Matthew 15:14)

I want to put before you two simple thoughts. The first is that Jesus is the true light who illuminates God to us. This is good news. In Jesus, we see him who is the hope of our salvation—Him who is the visible image of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15) He is the light which penetrates and consumes the darkness. In Advent, we see the light at the end of the tunnel. But more than that, the Light is moving toward us. He graces us with light to see and he then becomes the lamp that illuminates the path forward. The ditch is no longer dark nor is it the destination. He is the true light, and he is coming.

That first thought focuses on the substance of the light; the second on its scope. ‘The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone...’ The true light of Christ is truly good news only if it is true for everyone. And that most certainly is the case. He graciously gives this light to everyone. St. Cyril of Alexandria was a Bishop of the Church in the fifth century and was later named one of the Doctors of the Church. I trust his Christology more than my own, so I want to close this devotional by putting before you his words on John 1:9. Listen for how he describes the substance of the true light as well as its scope.

*He fills all things with the unspeakable power of his divinity. He is present with the angels in heaven. He is with those on earth. And he does not even leave hell itself empty of his divinity. Since he dwells everywhere with everyone, he departs from no one. So, it is quite reasonable for the psalmist in his wisdom to marvel at this and say, “Where can I go from your Spirit, and where can I flee from your face? If I go up to heaven, you are there. If I go down to hell, you are there. If I take up my wings towards the dawn and dwell at the ends of the sea, even there your hand will lead me, and your right hand will uphold me.” The divine hand grasps every place and every creature. It keeps creatures in existence. It takes those things that lack life and binds them tightly together with life. It shows the light of intelligence in those capable of understanding. It is not in a place, as we said before, nor does it undergo motion from one place to another since this is proper to bodies; rather, it fills all things as God.*  
- Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on John, section 113

### Pray

*Almighty and Glorious Light, we pray as those blind in the ditch. Apart from your grace, there is no light to illuminate our path. Much more, apart from your grace, we are blind to our own misguided steps which lead us to the dark places. Come Lord Jesus, the True Light, and illuminate the path which, with you, by you, and in you, we find eternal hope. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Take heart, friends. The True Light, who gives light to everyone, is coming.*

Bennett Ellison

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 3



### Read Isaiah 7:14

#### Reflect

When I was a child, this was a story that was often told, the virgin conceiving and giving birth to Jesus. It made me happy because it was part of Christmas and, let's face it, Christmas is great when you are a kid.

Over time I became a parent myself, and this story hit me very differently. Having a child is wonderful, but it is also very, very hard. Today we have hospitals and doctors that do so much to ease the child into the world. Mary was young by our standards. Mary was very poor by our standards. Mixed with her joy, there must have been the fear and uncertainty that all new parents faced.

I must remember, however, that also Mary had great faith and knew that she was chosen by God. Surely this calmed her fears and concerns and opened her up to experience the joy of this new life.

We are all Mary. We are all the precious children of God, and we need not fear or be uncertain about our future.

#### Pray

*We thank you, Lord, that you are our father and that we need not be afraid or anxious about our future. Like Mary, we are safe in your arms. Amen.*

Paul Burke

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 4



### Read Numbers 24:17

#### Reflect

This passage is part of the prophecy of Balaam, who, in previous verses says that his eye is opened, that he hears the words of God, that he knows the knowledge of the Most High, and that as he falls and his eyes are uncovered, he sees a vision of the Almighty. If we read Balaam's ancient promise in context, we see it is "concerning Him who should be the crown and glory of his people Israel; who is David in the type." (Matthew Henry, Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible.)

If we stop our contemplation here, we are left with just a small bit of historical fact. However, Saint Augustine wrote, "The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed." When read in this light, we understand that Balaam's prophecy foretells the advent of Jesus Christ. He shall come out of Jacob and Israel as a star and a scepter. The star image denotes his glory and luster, the scepter his power and authority. Christ shall rule as King of the whole world. "For unto us a Child is born. Unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder." Isaiah 9: 6

Balaam's vision is of the Star of Bethlehem, which appeared over the manger at Christ's birth and guided the Magi on their journey, their Advent journey. During each Advent season, the Star of Bethlehem still shines on us today, leading us and guiding us on our journey toward the wondrous hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ Jesus, who is the light of the world and the shining hope to mankind.

#### Pray

*Our Father, thank you for causing all Holy Scriptures to be written, that we may study them and learn those things that are eternal and those things that hold us fast in Christ. Thank you for raising your prophets and speaking through them of repentance and salvation. And most of all, Father, thank you for sending us your Son, Jesus, whose birth cast off the works of darkness and brought light into the world. Give us grace to cast off sin and walk in light, and we ask you to watch over us and guide us as we wait and journey toward His coming again. Amen.*

Gary Brown

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5



### Read 1 Peter 1:18-20

#### Reflect

In this passage, Peter writes to the people in 1st century Asia Minor—the people of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, modern-day Turkey. The church is being persecuted and scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Peter finds himself writing words of encouragement to the scattered church. He had been beaten and jailed and was familiar with persecution. Yet, Peter’s faith in Christ could not be shaken.

Peter wants to remind the people that they were purchased (ransomed) for a price. Gold and silver were a common form of currency to pay for slaves’ freedom. However, we were purchased to rescue us from our futile, or sinful ways with something far more valuable: the blood of Christ, a perfect lamb, paid the price for our souls.

In verse 19, Peter refers to Jesus as the “lamb without defect or blemish,” echoing the Passover lamb from Exodus 12. This connection is significant, as just as the blood of the unblemished lamb protected the Israelites from judgment in Egypt, Christ’s blood offers salvation from sin and death. This imagery highlights the continuity of God’s redemptive plan from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

The sacrificial system established in the Old Testament reflects a consistent theme in God’s relationship with humanity, where the lamb symbolizes innocence and the cost of redemption. John the Baptist reinforces this when he identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God”; (John 1:29). By portraying Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the lamb sacrifice, Peter assures believers that God’s plan for redemption was intentional and offered profound hope amidst their trials.

This connection illustrates a powerful link between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. This was God’s plan before the creation of the world; it was not an afterthought when Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world, God knew that was going to happen. He planned for Jesus to enter this world, not as a mighty warrior, but as an innocent child. He would live his life without sin, without blemish, and out of love for the whole world, He would lay down his life to pay the ransom for our freedom from sin and our eternal life.

#### Pray

*Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us hope. No matter the trials we face today, we are merely passing through; our hope is in the life promised beyond. Amen.*

Kim Duncan

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6



### Read Galatians 4:4-5

4 Ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν Υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον, 5 ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον ἐξαγοράσῃ, ἵνα τὴν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπολάβωμεν.

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5, NASB)

### Reflect

We all have quirks. Some people fixate on the sound of chewing gum from across the room. Some people load a dishwasher like it’s a national Jenga championship. Some people wash their car several times a week. Want to know my quirk? It’s a little odd, if I do say so myself. My quirk is that my brain literally jolts when I hear someone begin a sentence with a qualifier. Qualifiers are those specific words that prelude the main idea. Speakers and authors use qualifiers to set the perfect stage for the listener.

As a teacher, I hear the-thing-before-the-thing quite often, particularly when it relates to a student trying to achieve something that they really want, whether it’s an audition or a grade they think they deserve. During a round of recent auditions, I noticed that at least one third of my students began their audition with qualifiers. “My allergies were bothering me, so I messed up the high part” or “My wifí is acting up, which is why my voice sounds raspy.” It has become commonplace for many young people to use qualifiers to control more positive opinions or outcomes. What they don’t know is how much qualifiers absolutely irritate people who deal with auditions, which I’ve done for the duration of my career. As a result, noticing qualifiers is one of my quirks. I encourage my students to never use qualifiers prior to auditioning, whether it’s for me or anyone else. It’s a waste of time, erodes any perception of confidence, and often just sounds like an excuse to the person listening. Efficiency is gold, so just get to the point.

When Pam asked me to write a devotion based on Galatians 4:4-5, the first thing I did was look up this Scripture in the original language: Koine Greek, and that translation is above. And what was the first thing I noticed? A qualifier. Of all the Scriptural possibilities, I am assigned the one with a bright and bold qualifier. (God, You certainly have a sense of humor sometimes.) However, there is a remarkable and unmistakable difference between teenage audition qualifiers versus this incredibly specific qualifier that Paul wrote in Galatians in this unedited verse contained within the inerrant Word of God for thousands of years.

This Scriptural qualifier states “But when the fullness of the time came...” With all due respect, Paul, why didn’t you just get to the point? What is the point of the qualifier when the quintessential inarguable truth immediately follows: “God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

After all, that’s the part you want us to understand, right? As I stare at my laptop screen, I wonder why my brain is designed to work in a way that I would focus on the presence and meaning of Paul’s eight-word qualifier, rather than the obvious and significantly more important main idea that follows. And how is my quirky perspective on Scripture ever going to evolve into an Advent reflection worth someone else’s time in my attempt to provide any refreshing perspective to this annual season?

Paul left it there for a reason. And after much reflection and prayer, I know that this, along with the other words in our Bible, is never a mistake. God specifically communicated that not only did Jesus' birth have a specific and restorative purpose, but there is a significant importance to the timing of that event. Paul's words tell us that God ordained a specific waiting season that occurred before the accumulation of time, and that waiting season has now culminated to fullness and completion. This beautifully intentional eight-word qualifier makes it abundantly clear that Jesus' birth was divinely synchronized to when Mary would be physically able to deliver God's child, and also to when everything else in the natural, including the King and census takers, the anonymous shepherds and unnamed stable workers, the star in the sky, and an entire ancient city were also perfectly aligned to God's timing. God precisely planned and coordinated literally every detail leading to His Son's birth. But when the fullness of the time came declares God's sovereignty, His majesty, and His intention.

Today's worldly and commercialized holiday seasons remind us of how much time we don't have. We don't have time to notice any fullness of the time because we are far too preoccupied with the fullness of stress and a general sense of feeling overwhelmed. We feel compelled to write too many lists with far too many tasks, and then attempt to complete them all before midnight on December 24. Exhaustion typically follows this level of Herculean productivity and many of us discover that we are void of any spare moments to enjoy the true purpose of Christmas.

This is when God's Holy Word, specifically an eight-word qualifier, has the power to call us to reverent patience, and invites us to the most sacred of expectations. God's timing is perfect, indeed.

God's timing is infallible, always. And more than that, God's timing is reliable and impeccable. Eight simple and well-crafted words jolt my quirky mind, but this jolt causes my spirit to yearn for God's timing in my life and in my Advent tasks. Looking above at the stars, I commit to waiting on God's assurance of the fullness of the time, making it easier to remain focused on His will, and not my own. Our modern-day Christmas hustle-and-bustle is not unique. Most of Bethlehem's citizens were also far too preoccupied with government business to even notice that God's fullness of time had arrived, that there was a star above a manger, and that the physical world had just welcomed the Divine in the form of a newborn baby. It was this fullness of time that was unlike any other, and yet still went woefully unnoticed. And the only thing that could ever be more perfect than God's will and timing is the gift of His perfect Son Jesus Christ.

### **Pray**

*Dear Father God, your timing is always perfect, always flawless, always impeccable. Lord, I am prone to a proactivity that is often disconnected from Your anointed tempo. Let me be patient enough to wait on the fullness of your time, and to welcome Your rhythms and Your pace in this bustling season. Help me to be obedient enough to look toward your stars, to follow where you lead, and to walk in gratitude on the pathways You have prepared for me. You are Lord and Father of all, and I humbly praise You for sending your Son Jesus Christ to earth to redeem me when I fall short of glory. I rejoice and give thanks for your perfect timing, selah.*

Dana Lamb



## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7



### Read Micah 5:2

#### Reflect

In verse 2 of Micah, we hear of the promise of the coming of the Messiah out of Bethlehem. But in verse 1, the focus is on upcoming troubles for the Jewish nation. Before captivity, they had fallen into disgrace and a judgement against them is predicted. "...siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek."

So, amid a prediction of destruction (likely the besieging of Israel by the Chaldeans) and indignities against their judge (probably Zedekiah), we have the promise of a Messiah. And furthermore, He will come not just from anywhere but from Bethlehem – where David was. Ephrathah is another name for the same city. Bethlehem, 'the city of bread' which is an appropriate name as Jesus Christ is the bread of life.

This reminds us of the upside-down world of the Gospel. The messiah does not come from some great and important metropolis but a small place. And the prediction of His coming is in the same breath as a prediction of destruction and judgement on Israel. God's ways are not our ways. And the way of the Gospel is not the way of the world.

#### Pray

*Almighty Father, we thank you for sending us your Son. In this season of preparation, help me to examine my heart. Help me to look at my life and to remove the things that are keeping me from you. You have implanted the Holy Spirit in me. Spirit, please move and do your work. Remove and mortify indwelling sin. Let me draw closer to you in all things. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Deacon Jeff Lamb

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8



### Read John 7:42

#### Reflect

This scripture is part of an inquiry by unidentified people who have heard Christ speak and are questioning his credentials. While the crowds knew he was from Galilee; most did not realize that he had been born in Bethlehem. Even the Pharisees and rulers of the day did not recognize that he did fulfill the scripture that said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2). Why is this important? Jesus fulfilled over 300 prophecies related to the Messiah. This is part of God's message to us – what he says, he will do (Numbers 23:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:24). But we are invited to know what he says through the bible.

The people in Jesus' day who listened to the Pharisees missed the Messiah. Of course, we are more sophisticated than they are; we would never miss the Messiah. But it is easy to miss him every day in the awkward bag boy who packed canned goods on top of the bread, the crazy driver that cut us off at the stop light, the homeless man who sits on the bench outside Starbucks, the neighbor who voted differently from us.

We do not always love people who are different from us or who irritate us, but could it be that those are the people God has put in our path to ask us, "Do you see me when you look at them? Because they are created in my image and are important to and loved by me." Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Let us pray that we do not miss seeing and loving those whom God loves. What would happen if we replaced animosity with curiosity?

What if we looked into the eyes of the unlovely in the hopes of seeing the image and eyes of Christ?

#### Pray

*Lord, as we enter this advent season prepare our hearts for your coming. Let us be ever sensitive to those around us who point us toward the coming Messiah. Let us love with full hearts.*

Cynda Pierce

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 9



### Read Genesis 3:15

#### Reflect

The immediate, natural response to a nearby poisonous snake is driven by enmity or intense hostility to strike and destroy it. It is awesome that this human reaction is proclaimed by God in Genesis, as Adam and Eve were first waking in the garden of Eden. And so, it should be today, when the serpent (a.k.a. satan) slithers up to tempt us to disobey God, to be selfish, to be worldly, or other vice that separates us from the love of God that we would naturally, instinctively with enmity strike against the dangerous evil.

Oh, that we would have such awareness and resistance to evil. But we inherited a rebellious weakness from Adam and Eve. Praise the Father that His Son knows our weaknesses and covers our failures and sent the Holy Spirit to help us grow our awareness and resistance to evil.

#### Pray

*Oh, Heavenly Father, develop our enmity against evil that we may more fully live in faith, hope and love and grow apart from the serpent's temptations that we might better demonstrate fruits of the spirit. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Steve Davis

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10



### Read Isaiah 40:3–5

#### Reflect

The “wilderness” doesn’t have to be a dry, parched, withered place. It, unfortunately, can be a temporary wilderness within our souls, our hearts, our lives, our spirit. I read this once, the wilderness can be “a particular time or place between where you are and where God wants you to be.” But you and I can move through this. or any wilderness with the quenching power of prayer, with Scripture reading and study, with Christian fellowship, with mentoring and, of course, with Worship. And, we can always turn to our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sustainer.

God’s Word is our guide through periods in the wilderness. Psalm 43: 3 says, “Send Your light and Your truth; let them lead me.” Frankly, time in the wilderness will change us. So, our ministries may be completely different, once we leave a wilderness experience, than they were before we got there. Remember: God doesn’t just have just one assignment for us in life; He gives us different ones during different seasons, in different times, and towards different places

When the rough terrain becomes smooth again, we need to appreciate where we are, which is, in fact, not in the wilderness, but on a highway to our God.

#### Pray

*Father, send your light and your truth and lead us when we are in the wilderness. Bless our journey and lead us where you want us to be.*

Father Cass Daly

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11



### Read Isaiah 11:1-5

#### Reflect

Advent is the season of waiting, of anticipation. It's where we look at our surroundings and long for a day where things will be made new. In these cold and dark winter nights, the plants do not have the same vibrancy of Spring. Things seem dead and dormant. We wait for spring to come where life emerges into full bloom. Yet even now, if we have eyes to see it, the seemingly deadness of plants is in the patient process of being transformed. Something new is coming. Out of the stumps, a new shoot is preparing to birth.

Jesus is this new budding Branch coming from Israel's stump. Rooted in the old, yet bringing newness of life. This new Branch will bear new fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit. Fruit of justice for the poor and oppressed. Fruit of the Spirit which yields love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23) This fruit is modeled in the life of Jesus, empowered by and in partnership with the Holy Spirit. This alone is good news, but the full picture is that we are given this same Spirit of wisdom and understanding. The same Spirit of counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the LORD. We wait for the budding Branch of Jesus who invites us to be grafted into his shoot. (Romans 11:17) We become grafted in so that we may join Christ in becoming fruit-bearing children of God.

The invitation this day is to be patient. It is God who brings the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6) – we must stay patient and abide (John 15) in the budding Branch of Jesus. The testimony of Jesus, and thus our hope, is that the Spirit of the LORD will come to rest on us who are grafted in. The winter is long, but there is a new Branch budding.

#### Pray

*Most glorious God of all grace, we long for your coming. You are faithful to bring newness of life and fresh fruit. You promise to pour out your Spirit upon all flesh. We ask you, dear Lord, to help us stay faithful in patient abiding. As you come to us and graft us in, we ask that you would transform us by the power of your Spirit so that we may become those who, in partnership with you, give justice to the poor; grow in wisdom and fear of the LORD, and delight in obeying you. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the hope of the budding Branch...*

Bennett Ellison

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12



### Read Zechariah 6:12-13

#### Reflect

While other prophets before him may have been viewed as pessimists by the Jewish people (hey, wouldn't you be a little fed up with the guy forewarning impending doom?) Zechariah brought prophecies of hope from the Lord. The Jewish people had been in exile for many years, only to return to Israel without finding much comfort. The Persians, who now occupied the surrounding area, bullied the Israelites and refused to recognize them as an independent nation. Israel was in need of some good news.

One such promise of hope that was given to Zechariah was that of the Crown and the Temple. Zechariah speaks about a Branch who will not only build the Temple of the Lord but shall be both a priest and a king! Throughout the Old Testament, both Jeremiah and Isaiah prophesied about a future King, who will be much like a branch, stemming from King David's lineage. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah are all prophesying about Jesus here! Zechariah takes it a step further in this passage, declaring that this Branch will serve as a king and a priest. In Israel this was unprecedented as a King could not become a priest, nor could a priest serve as a king. For one man to possess both positions was unthinkable for the Israelites (kind of like dual-threat quarterbacks for Americans), though undoubtedly Zechariah was speaking about the Messiah and not Patrick Mahomes.

Jesus transcends earthly concepts. That means He is bigger than our worries, He is bigger than the presents we get on Christmas morning, He is bigger than any earthly positions and possessions we may place value on, but most importantly He is bigger than any man. As we go through this Christmas season, remember the gift of having a priest AND a king as our Lord. Jesus rules with a firm and righteous hand, but his grace branches out to all of us.

#### Pray

*Jesus, thank you for being our King and our Priest. Thank you for being both the one who sacrifices, and the sacrifice itself. Thank you for gracing your presence on this earth and bringing your spirit with you. Help us to grow closer to you over this season as we eagerly await your arrival, and let us see you in mighty ways. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Sam Fitzgerald

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13



**Read John 1:10-13**

### **Reflect**

As we prepare our hearts and minds for the coming of the Christ child let us remember and reflect on the man that child became and more importantly, the reason He came and to always remember that we are His.

### **Pray**

*Lord Jesus, please forgive us for all our selfish and short-sighted behaviors. I pray that you will open our hearts and minds to receive you without hesitation. In this season, let us make a conscious effort to slow down, be quiet and listen to your voice. Give us the ability to share the joy that comes from being born again in you.*

Susan Lingo



Artwork by Apple Lightsey

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14



### Read John 1:14

### Reflect

Being an English teacher, I cherish words more than numbers. But this word is THE Word. The only word that really matters. God used THE WORD as a collective noun to create. He uses THE WORD to communicate. He seeks in every single way to be in a loving relationship through THE WORD.

THE Word:  
THE lamp unto my feet,  
THE light unto my path. (Psalm 119:105)

THE word that creates. (Genesis 1)

THE truth (John 17:17)

Rebirth through THE word (James 1:8)

Salvation through THE word (John 5:24)

ALL the answers...ALL the solutions...ALL...came and lived with us. He came to show us the mind of the Father and when God's mind was shown...glory (great, deep beauty) radiated. THAT word...THAT life...JESUS...proved Him as the begotten (God from God) direct heir of the Father. That inheritance bequeathed to the Son was full of grace (unmerited divine assistance) and truth (the actuality of facts). This advent, as hectic events swirl around us like a mighty storm, we can rest in knowing THE WORD is the end of our finite search for truth. HE dwells in us and THE WORD gives us a lamp unto our feet and a light to our paths. THE WORD DWELLS IN US.

### Pray

*Jesus, THE WORD, I exalt You in my heart and mind as THE One who lights my path and displays the truth. You are the Lamb who was slain for my sin, and I repent of that sin. Shine Your light in the dark places within me and eradicate them by Your blood. I am so sorry for those dark places. Forgive me. You are full of grace and full of truth. All glory be to Your Name. Light in me the lamp of love that I might shine in the darkness ALWAYS pointing to You. In that Name, I pray.*

Jan Taylor



## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15



### Read Luke 1:26-38

#### Reflect

This passage from Luke turns on the proof and witness of the reality of divine miracles, both within the story through its tale of two unlikely mothers, and without it through the readers' relationship with the holy scripture. Through it, the awesome scope of divine purpose is rendered understandable through that loveliest miracle of human existence: the birth of children.

Within the story, Mary is visited by the archangel Gabriel. He delivers word of the incarnation of Jesus, who as man must be born of a woman into the temporal world. Gabriel makes his announcement with the full authority of his role as the conveyor of God's message, but the tone of the passage shifts as young Mary wonderingly queries: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" Here the reader, situated without the text, also wonders at this impossibility, and the story fosters a sympathy between the reader and this long-ago girl Mary, who share in wonder and confusion at the awesome news that a virgin will carry God the Father's child into the world.

The reader then shares Mary's relief from this unease as the angel takes up a kind explanation at a level young Mary can understand. It is a very human explanation: her cousin Elizabeth is already six months—to the human eye, visibly—pregnant with a babe who will become John the Baptist. Thus, already there is proof of the ultimate human miracle, manifested by God in a barren mother's body. And so, Mary, and with her the reader, can accept the great truth at the root of all holy scripture: "no word shall be impossible with God."

#### Pray

*Holy Father, we pray to you in the earnest belief that so much of what we take for granted—that in our hubris we declare truth or impossibility—may be overturned in an instant, and Truth proved only on your authority, as creator and arbiter of all things in heaven and earth. The final truth is always, "no word shall be impossible with God."*

Scott Lightsey

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 16



**Read Luke 1:39-45**

### **Reflect**

Here we find the unborn baby John cloistered in darkness, nestled inside his mother's womb. The child had never seen sunshine, flowers, or his mother's face. But He knew Your presence; felt Your love. At Mary's voice, sensing your nearness, He leapt for joy.

Sometimes the darkness of the world is so suffocating that joy seems hardly an option. But where your presence is, Your Spirit, we can't help but know your joy.

### **Pray**

*Sweet Jesus, would You roll away the stone that is our calloused hearts? Give us a new heart, fresh, like a baby waiting in the womb. When we hear your voice, enter your presence, let us leap for joy. You said we will rejoice when we see you again, and no one will take away our joy (John 16:22). But Lord, we tend to cling to our worries and strife so closely, that joy is far from us. Would you unclench our fist? Would you slip Your hand into ours? You would have us to know Your joy, Your rest. I believe, Lord. Help me in my unbelief. When the night is like a tomb, help me remember it is more like a womb, with joy waiting for me on the other side.*

Kristin Davenport

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17



Read Luke 1:46-56

### Reflect

I love the curriculum we use for children's chapel- it is rich in theology! It is called *God's Big Story* and I reiterate to the children continually, we all have a role to play in God's Big Story. One of the holiest participants in God's Big Story is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her obedient response was - "I am the Lord's servant" - saying yes to God Almighty to carry the Son of God in her womb. She trusted God regardless of circumstances, she celebrated the promises of God - not just the outcome of the promise - *but the promise itself*. She responded to God in complete, submissive obedience to God, without hesitation, recognizing the God of all creation was using her in His Big Story to redeem all of creation.

For many years I have read this beautiful song of Mary as if it was just her song, not fully seeing the richness the Word had for me. Through reflection and prayer, I realize how incredibly short-sighted I was. The Spirit has poured out into my heart that this song is indeed for *ALL of us*. We, the church, are also blessed among generations, for we too carry the Spirit of the Living God individually and collectively in our hearts because of the Holy Spirit the Christ child gave us. Mary's proclamation of this is indeed revealing her blessedness, her holiness, and her sanctity as the mother of God yet here she points us to join her in proclaiming His greatness and rejoicing in Him for looking with favor on us (redeeming us from our sin).

As we anticipate and celebrate God's promises fulfilled in the Christ Child, that Mary bore in her womb, may our proclamation come forth with Mary, "*Our soul proclaims the greatness of our Lord, our spirit rejoices in God our savior for He has looked with favor on us His lowly servants! The Almighty has done great things for us, Holy is His name.*" May we look to her example of incredible trust and obedience to God and with the help of the presence of the Holy Spirit in and around us, each live out our role in God's Big Story such that those who haven't heard, those who haven't seen, those who live in darkness, will see the *Great Light He bears in us*.

Blessed are ALL who trust that He will fulfill His promises! The Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is His name!

### Pray

*O Great and Loving God, thank you for the gift of your Son and for Mary that willingly bore Him for us. Pour out your Spirit on us, your lowly servants, that we may proclaim your greatness through our daily lives and live in a manner of rejoicing continually for saving us from our sin. May we recognize more fully all the great things you have done for us. We are your servants to Lord and Holy is Your Name.*

Pam Davis

For an added source of inspiration, query Liturgical Folk's rendition of Song of Mary (Magnificat).  
I sing it in my head continually!

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18



**Read: Luke 1:57-66**

### Reflect

In Luke 1:57-66, we see the miraculous birth of John the Baptist. His parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, not unlike Abraham and Ruth, were well beyond the typical age to be having children, but God fulfilled His promise to them made through an angel, rendering Zachariah unable to speak: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard.” Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.” (Luke 1:13, NIV)

I remember the birth of our first child, Maggie, who arrived 7 years after we were married. It’s not that we had trouble conceiving, but more because we both had a wander lust and wanted to travel before having a family. We knew we would one day have a child, but we weren’t waiting on God as Zachariah and Elizabeth were. I would say for one time in our lives, we were patient. Even though it was His timing, God seemed to be waiting on us! When Maggie finally arrived, I was 34, which seemed like an ancient age to be a parent - I was 36 when we had James! I was the oldest dad at the soccer game, and was afraid people would think I was their grandfather at their college graduation! If we hadn’t waited, what would these two children turn out to be?

In our modern world, we don’t want to wait for anything, or anyone. We just want immediate gratification. We want whatever we want, and we want it now. We get impatient at the traffic light as if two minutes of waiting will ruin our day. Watch out if the car ahead of you doesn’t jump off the start immediately, or if they are on their cell phone! Ten minutes for your food to come out at a restaurant feels like 10 years, when what we should be doing is sitting back and enjoying good conversation.

Debra and I were engaged 6 months after we met and married 5 months after that – less than a year! We did not – could not - want to wait. This passage speaks not only of the birth of a child but of the fulfillment of God’s faithfulness and the joy that comes from trusting in His timing. So, I can relate to Zachariah and Elizabeth on two levels – they were older parents, and they had to wait on God’s timing. But they were blessed in the end with a child who would grow up to baptize Jesus! How cool is that. When Zachariah named the baby John as the angel foretold and God restored his voice, the people rejoiced in their happiness. They knew that this child was preordained by God to be someone who would do great things one day. They could see that God’s hand was upon John from the very beginning. This reminds us that God’s plans for our lives often unfold in ways that surprise and challenge us, but they are always good.

Are there areas in your life where you need to trust God’s timing and promises? How can you share the joy of God’s blessings with those around you? Are you willing to be obedient even when it goes against common expectations?

### Pray

*Our heavenly Father, your plans for us are greater than anything we could ever imagine. You have preordained us for a special purpose. Please give us the patience to wait for your timing and the wisdom to discern your will in our lives. Also, help us to wait for you during life’s challenges. Help us to trust in your timing, walk in obedience and share in your goodness with others, In your holy name we pray. Amen.*

Dave Macdonald

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19



### Read Matthew 1:18-21

#### Reflect

*“...was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”*

Each week we recite these words from the Nicene Creed during our service here at St. Barnabas.

As we journey through the season of Advent, a time of anticipation and hope for the coming Savior, it is an appropriate time for us to reflect on the words from Matthew 1:18-21: The virgin birth is a tenet of the Christian faith, one that stands alongside the resurrection in its importance. God’s plan for the restoration of harmony and peace, lost through the introduction of sin, required divine intervention. After Adam’s sin corrupted human nature, only a divine intervention beyond human understanding could bring forth a savior untainted by original sin. About 700 years before His arrival, Isaiah the prophet foretold of this child that would restore peace to His creation, Isaiah 9:6, “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.”

The divine plan is revealed in Matthew 1:20 where the angel uses titles to elevate the significance of the moment. First, the angel calls Joseph, “son of David,” a royal title that connects Joseph and Jesus to the Davidic line established in Matthew 1:16. Second, the angel declares that the child conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit, a divine agent responsible for the miraculous conception. This reveals the mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus is fully divine and fully human, a central pillar of our faith.

#### Pray

*Heavenly Father, we reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation—the virgin birth of Jesus—and we give thanks for the depths of God’s love and His plan for redemption. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus entered our world as both fully divine and fully human, bridging the gap caused by sin and offering the hope of salvation. Amen.*

Kim Duncan

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20



### Read Matthew 1:23

#### Reflect

Immanuel, God with us. *Oh my.* What an amazing breath prayer.

After years of infertility, countless medical procedures (some bordering on science fiction), tests, pills, shots, and an incredibly devastating miscarriage, I received a call from my obstetrician saying that I was pregnant. An ultrasound several weeks later showed two babies. *Immanuel, God with us.*

I was cautiously settling into the process of being pregnant when, at 20 weeks gestation, I felt something weird. David was on a plane back from Germany and I was supposed to pick him up at the airport that afternoon. But, first, I drove to my doctor's office, near Northside Hospital, to have this *weird feeling* checked out. After a couple of hours of monitoring, my doctor came into the room and announced, "You are in labor, and you need to get to the hospital...immediately." *Immanuel, God with us.*

I drove myself to the hospital and checked myself in. My sweet mother-in-law picked up David from the airport and they rushed to Northside. I was placed on strict bedrest in the hospital. I was given medication to stop labor. It worked until it didn't. Five weeks later, I woke up early one Saturday morning with that same *weird feeling*. *Immanuel, God with us.*

Two of my obstetricians sat at the end of my bed that morning, debating whether or not I should deliver naturally, or should they perform a C-section. Because this was most likely not going to end well, I said to them, "Please. Just take my babies." In their mercy, they immediately called a *Code Something* to the NICU and I was wheeled into an operating room. *Immanuel, God with us.*

Suzy weighed 1 lb. 10 oz. Mimi weighed 1 lb. 11 oz. They were so small. But...they were alive. But just barely. *Immanuel, God with us.*

"*Immanuel, God with us*" is not only a prayer of thanksgiving, but it is also a prayer of assurance. Many times, for me, this prayer has been said in times of distress, especially when our two babies were in Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for three (Suzy) and four months (Mimi).

Our daughters' discharge papers from Northside Hospital would take your breath away. In the weeks and months and years following there have been countless procedures, surgeries on one brain, two hearts, four eyes, two legs, one foot, Botox injections (for Suzy, not me!), physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, aquatic therapy, and hippo therapy. You name it – we've "therapied" it. *Immanuel, God with us.*

#### Pray

*Gracious and Loving Father,*

*Immanuel, God with us. What more could we ask? Thank you for making a way when there is no way. Thank you that you never leave us or forsake us. Thank you for your abiding presence.*

Beth Royal

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21



**Read Luke 2:4-7**

### **Reflect**

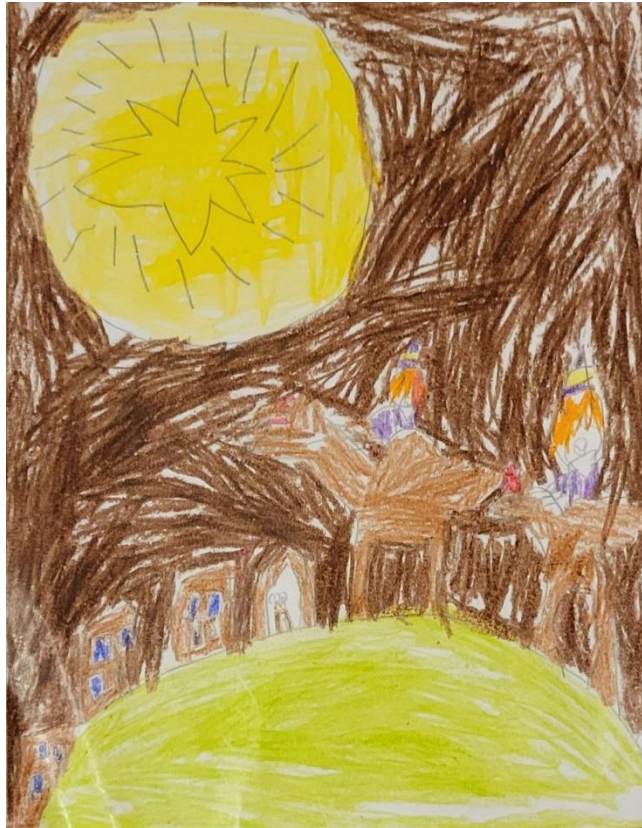
When I read this, I'm struck by Joseph and Mary's obedience to God that they should listen to the local government and be counted in the census in Bethlehem. This was an uncertain time for them as the birth of their son, our Savior, was upon them. I can only wonder about Mary feeling anxious leaving her home so close to her due date. This shows that what was told to us in Micah was true, that God's son was of the lineage of David.

Mary gave birth in a stable since Bethlehem was so crowded. It wasn't fancy but I imagine she and Joseph liked the quiet and the intimacy of the two of them being alone when Jesus was born. The simplicity of His birth is beautiful to me. I remember when our children were born. Just like Mary, I wrapped our babies in a blanket to keep them warm and safe. It also foretells the humility of Jesus as he grows up and leads his people by example. Jesus was born to walk among everyday men and women, not kings and queens.

### **Pray**

*Dear God, Thank you for the birth of your son, Jesus. Please keep our hearts pure and humble this Advent season. Amen.*

Debra Macdonald



Artwork by Conner Ellerbee

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22



### Read Mathew 2:1-2

#### Reflect

This Christmas, we are travelling to California to visit our family and friends there. It's been three years since our last visit, so we are very excited to see everyone after such a long time away. To get to California, we will fly 1,906 miles in about five hours from Atlanta to Los Angeles. We will travel comfortably, with food, snacks, and entertainment on demand.

Matthew does not give us much information about the "wise men," but some speculate that they were from northwest Persia (present-day Iran). If this is true, they possibly travelled between 1,000 and 1,200 miles to find Jesus and worship Him with nothing but a star to guide them. By camel, this could have taken more than two months of arduous travel through the desert. When I imagine their journey, I can't help but contrast it with the comfort of our flight to California for Christmas.

Like our comfortable Christmas flight, some people are privileged to find Jesus with relative ease. Growing up in a Christian family, that was my initial experience, having accepted Christ when I was in elementary school. For others, finding Him is a longer journey down the many winding roads of life. As is the case with many young adults, my faith also waivered in my youth until God blessed me with a loving wife and family. Funny how becoming a father has a way of putting things in the right perspective.

Whatever your personal journey to Christ looks like, just like the wise men, you have picked up unique gifts along the way. These gifts are different for each of us, just as the gold, frankincense, and myrrh were unique to each of the of the wise men. Do you have regrets? Maybe that has provided you with empathy for those currently struggling. Were there moments that you felt God abandoned you, but He ultimately came through? Maybe that experience gifted you a stronger faith in God. For each gift of experience God has given you in your life's journey, there will be opportunities to use them to point others to the saving grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And for that reason, I say thank you, Lord for the gift of every twist and turn of my life's journey to find You.

#### Pray

*Dear Lord, thank you for Your infinite blessings, including each gift of experience God has given us in our life's journey. During this time when we celebrate the coming of Your Son to save us from our sins and remember the arduous journey of the wise men in search of a King to worship, we pray for the wisdom to use our gifts of experience to be like His star in the east and guide all who are searching to Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Darren Enns



## MONDAY, DECEMBER 23



**Read Luke 2:25–35**

### **Reflect**

As we read this passage we learn about a servant of God, Simeon, who was a devout Jew. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Lord's Messiah. Now, being prompted by the Holy Spirit, he goes to the temple as Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the temple to fulfill the custom of the law.

Simeon takes the infant, Jesus, in his arms and proclaims that he has now seen the salvation of God and God's promise to him has been fulfilled. Simeon also declares that this child will bring the light of revelation to the Gentiles and will be the glory of the people of Israel. As we observe this season of Advent, we too have heard, seen, looked upon, and our hands have handled, the words of life, Christ Jesus. (I John I: I) And we too have a promise that He is coming again. (Mark 13: 26) Let us prepare our hearts and minds, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be ready for his return.

### **Pray**

*Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who came, lived among us, sacrificed himself for us, and has victory over death through His resurrection. Thank you, Jesus, that you are seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding on our behalf. Holy Spirit, may we be ever more mindful of Your Presence as we faithfully await the return of our Savior. We ask all of this in His Holy Name. Amen.*

Carla Brown

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24



### Read Isaiah 9:2-4

#### Reflect

Verse 2 of this Scripture says, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a light.” A few months ago, I had cataract surgery. It was miraculously, at least to me, successful. I can now see baseball statistics on the TV screen (without squinting). I can see the tiniest, beginning curve of a smile in conversation. I can even see a twinkle, a sparkle, in your eye. And I feel like I can “see” in my mind’s eye what the people “saw” as Jesus taught them on the Mount of the Beatitudes; that they are all blessed in many, many ways.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8. The greater the Faith we have, the greater we will see what God wants us to see. Your Savior wants you see love; His love.

Helen Keller, who was blind, wrote, “Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light.” And we can shout about our faith from the roof tops, bellow about our faith on the corner on the square, or we can smile at a stranger, hug a sad friend, show love to child, listen to a friend, tell someone about your faith in Jesus, gently.

Matthew 5:16a - In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light. Dwight L. Moody wrote, Lighthouses don’t fire cannons to call attention to their shining - they just ...shine. John 8:12 says, Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” Try it and “see” what He means.

#### Pray

*Open my eyes, that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me. Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me free. Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see. Open my eyes; illumine me, Spirit divine! Amen.*

Father Cass Daly



Artwork by Ryen Ellerbee

## CHRISTMAS DAY - DECEMBER 25



### Read Isaiah 9:6

### Reflect

Merry Christmas! Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, God the Son, who loved us so much that he humbled himself and was born as a baby. Do you know just how absolutely astonishing this is? J.I. Packer was an Anglican priest, writer, and theologian. I love the way he thought about the idea that God became a baby: “The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation.”

God the Son, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, made the oceans, mountains, stars, the sun, trees, bananas, llamas... EVERYTHING..., decided that he loved His people so much that he needed to become like us. And he wanted to make sure that we knew he didn't just come for the sake of the rich and the powerful. He wasn't born in a fancy palace, or a nice, clean hospital. He was born in a stable to a young mother who wrapped him up and laid him in the trough used to feed animals. Shepherds came to visit him on the night he was born. Sometime later foreign kings came to worship him as well. The Bible makes it very, very clear. Jesus came to save everyone, rich and poor, men and women, from every tribe and nation in the world!

Since Jesus was God, he was without sin. You, me, and everyone else that has ever lived have sin deep in our hearts. We do things all the time that God has told us not to do. But not Jesus. The whole reason that Jesus was born was so that he could take our sin away from us, and make sure we were in a right relationship with God! After he grew up, he died on the cross, and he took all our sins onto himself as he died. But after three days, he conquered death, rose from the dead, threw our sins far, far away, and then ascended into Heaven to be with God the Father!

Now in Heaven, Jesus rules the whole world! He truly is our Wonderful Counselor, our Mighty God, our Everlasting Father, and our Prince of Peace! So, this Christmas morning, let's celebrate the baby Jesus and praise him as our savior and as our everlasting King!

### Pray

*Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son, Jesus Christ, to be born for us. We thank you that he was born to take away the sins of the whole world, and we ask that with the help of the Holy Spirit, we could trust him as our savior and our King in all that we do. In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.*

Father Joey Fitzgerald

## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26



### Read Matthew 23:29-39

#### Reflect

Hypocrite is defined as “a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion, a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings.”

Do you know a few hypocrites? Can you sometimes be a hypocrite?

In this passage the leaders of the church were so focused on prophets from the past and following rules that they missed the greatest prophet of all. Their hearts were not in a place where they could see Jesus coming. Some antonyms of the word hypocrite include words like sincerity, truthfulness, honesty, genuine, plainspoken, and forthright.

When someone describes who you are, do they say those things, or do they say you are fake? All those words describe Jesus because he is LOVE.

#### Pray

*Jesus, keep us from being like the Pharisees. Open our eyes so that we will know who LOVE is and who is a viper. Help us to not be unkind, hypocritical, judgmental, and complain all the time. Help us to be more like you and to keep our eyes focused so that we see you coming. Just like a hen gathers her brood under her wings, help us to always remember that he who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Amen.*

Brandie Fitzgerald

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 27



### Read John 21:9-25

#### Reflect

John tells us about a third time Jesus appears to a group of the disciples post-resurrection. They fail to recognize Jesus, who is standing on the shore, as they are returning from a long night of unproductive fishing. He directs them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat and their nets are filled with fish. They reunite with Jesus on shore over a full breakfast...then Jesus appears to be recommissioning Simon Peter for the three denials of Christ just before Crucifixion. He turns to Peter and three times asks him “Do you love me?” Each time Peter responds “Yes, Lord: you know I love you.” And as our human nature might lead us all to respond in similar fashion, the third time Peter is asked he gets somewhat annoyed and punctuates his response with, “Lord, you know everything...” Jesus then gives him his marching orders... “Follow me.”

Now it’s hard to tell how long this breakfast lasted and what various topics were discussed, but it seems the talk at some point mentioned something about some disciples being around until Jesus made his return. Here is where human nature takes over, Peter is assessing the group wondering whom will be around until Jesus returns. He is looking around and apparently sees John, then says to Jesus, “... What about this man?” Jesus responds, “What is that to you?” Then with emphasis “You follow me!” Wow, this had to sting a bit for Peter. This reminds me of the old saying “Rule 1: Follow Christ. Rule #2: See Rule #1.”

Christ’s direction is quite simple—follow me and don’t worry about what others may or may not be doing, what they may or may not have, or how come them and not me?

#### Pray

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. Let us take time to absorb the miracle of His birth, the journey of his escape and survival to Egypt. For the life he lived on earth, showing us how we should live our lives. For the temptations he faced and defeated, for the pain and suffering and death he endured that our sins are washed away. We humbly thank you for your most gracious love that we cannot comprehend here on earth. Amen.*

Gibson Houser

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 28



### Read Matthew 2:13-18

#### Reflect

This scripture is one of those that makes you go, “*Wait. What?*”

I doubt that Mary had the audacity to say this, but if I were her, I would have said, “*Good Lord! What in the world? You want me to get on this donkey and ride to Egypt? That’s 429 miles (according to Google.) I have just given birth in a cold stable with smelly animals. I just want to go home to my mother and aunts so they can cook casseroles for me and Joe, and feed and rock Baby Jesus, and I can get a shower and take a nap! I’m hungry and tired.*” Yep...I doubt Mary said that, but I would be hard pressed not to have said that.

Sometimes God calls us to places that do not quite look so inviting. But God is omniscient and those “callings” certainly mean something to those of us who put our trust in him. We must listen and discern. We must pay attention. Looking back, there is no way Joseph and Mary could have known what was about to happen to the children of that region, at the cruel hands of an evil king.

As we are coming off the *high* of Christmas and embarking on 2025, let’s be intentional about listening to God’s call. Let’s trust that call. Let’s walk in faith and by faith.

#### Pray

*Gracious and loving God,  
We’re tired and in the letdown of Christmas. We’re tired of shopping, eating, family, and of returning mis-gifts (No...I didn’t ask for a cordless vacuum). Advent and Christmas are fun and all, but we just want to take down the tree, put away the decorations, go on a cruise, or to the beach, or to the mountains. We don’t want to go to Egypt. But maybe – just maybe – Egypt is part of your plan for us. Give us strength and courage to arise and go with you.*

Beth Royal

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29



### Read Galatians 3:23-4:7

#### Reflect

If you were to ask a non-believer to define Christianity, I would imagine that the words “religion” and “rules” or “laws” might be mentioned. Many people view religion as not much more than a set of rules that someone following any specific religion must live by. I speak from past personal experience when I say that some people view God as an authoritarian figure with a list of rules, taking notes as we break those rules, and constantly shaking His head in disappointment. Of course, God did in fact appoint specific laws for His chosen people to follow, and there were, in many cases, serious consequences when those rules were broken. Then He sent Jesus to walk among us.

Jesus, both fully God and fully man, was born to a Jewish family and was to live according to Jewish law. When Jesus began his ministry, he was quickly hated by many teachers of Jewish law because he was breaking some of these rules they were to live by - laws appointed by God’s word. To the Pharisees, it seemed as though Jesus was leading a rebellion, violating laws and blaspheming. They hated him so much that they demanded he be crucified. Jesus, God’s word made flesh, was killed because he “broke the law.”

As humans, it can be easy to get our minds set on rules, looking down upon or even disliking those who do not follow them. This can apply to both the laws set in place for our country, as well as what may be considered our religious rules. We can also end up projecting our thoughts and feelings onto God, therefore making Him out to be that authoritarian figure I described earlier. But yet, God knows us far better than we know ourselves. We quickly forget that we are all sinful by nature, and that we fail to obey God’s commands on a regular basis. For that exact reason, God sent Jesus, His only begotten son, to this earth, not to break or abolish His laws, but to fulfill them.

The difference between Christianity and any other religion is Jesus. Jesus redeemed us. Through Him, we are free, no longer bound to the laws. Our salvation no longer depends on how well we can follow God’s rules. As we grow in our relationship with, knowledge of, and love for Jesus, the Holy Spirit will naturally lead our hearts to desire to follow God’s commands. Yet even when we fail, God still declares us righteous. In addition, there is no one God looks down on as less worthy than another. There is no human on earth God doesn’t want to claim as his own, and so He made it possible for all of us to be His. As Paul states, “there is neither Jew nor gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” All of us who believe in Jesus Christ, through our faith, have been adopted as children of God. We are all heirs of His eternal promise, and He never revokes that title no matter how many mistakes He watches us make. Thank you, Lord, for your mercy and grace!

#### Pray

*Heavenly father, we thank you for your son, Jesus. Thank you for sending Him for our sake, that we may have the promise of everlasting life with you. Thank you, that, no matter how many times we fail or how far we fall, you never see us as anything less than worthy of your love and forgiveness. Lord, we thank you for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Strengthen us all, that we may go out into the world and boldly proclaim your truth in love, bringing others to know who you truly are and how much you love them. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.*

Ashlyn Ellerbee

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 30



### Read Psalm 146

#### Reflect

In my experience with teaching God's Word to children, I sensed that while they could give all the right answers, God's Word was not in their hearts. As their teacher, what was I missing? I was at a loss. God knew what was lacking. One day in the grocery store, I crossed paths with an acquaintance with whom I had participated in several Bible Studies. Knowing her to be a wise woman who loved Jesus and with a powerful nudge from the Holy Spirit, I asked her, "How do you enable children to live out their faith?" In other words, "to be doers of the Word and not hearers only." Her answer was simple, but profound. TEACH GOD'S ATTRIBUTES. Of course! We grow in our knowledge of God through his attributes. Love for God comes from knowing him. Consequently, out of that love is born a desire to serve him. Not service out of duty or guilt, but service out of love. KNOW – LOVE – SERVE became my motto. The next week our classroom prayer time opened with praise. For several weeks, the children progressed from being handed a notecard with an attribute to praying God's character from their hearts. With every story our priority was to identify at least one characteristic of God.

Psalm 146 begins with praise. God's character or attributes in these ten verses are numerous. "Do not put your trust in human beings, who cannot save." (Savior), "Blessed are those whose help is in the God of Jacob, whose hope is in Lord" (Helper, Hope)," He is the maker of heaven and earth ... he remains faithful forever." (Creator, Faithful One) "Upholds the cause of the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoner free" (Just, Provider, Liberator), "gives sight to the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down, loves the righteous" (Healer, Sustainer, Lover)" watches over the foreigner, sustains the fatherless and the widow,"(Watchman, Sustainer, Protector), " frustrates the ways of the wicked" (Protector). "The Lord reigns forever for all generations." (Immortal) God's Word reveals the beautiful perfect character of the Trinity. The One who waits for us to join him in a rich love relationship. What the Bible speaks of as the abundant life.

#### Pray

*Oh, Lord Jesus, your love is so grand. You revealed yourself to us. When the world paints a negative picture of you, we can say with authority this is not who you are. We know because we know you. Your attributes are endless. You are infinite. While we can never know everything about you, we ask for more and more knowledge. Teach us, Jesus. May we revere and love you increasingly, every minute, every hour, every day. In Your Precious Name we pray. Amen.*

Margaret McKenzie



## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 31



### Read John 1:1-18

#### Reflect

As most of us have turned off and packed away the Christmas lights and may be wearing or returning gifts from loved ones, may we all be forever illuminated by the gift of light, Jesus, from our greatest Loved One, the Father. How awesome and mysterious is this scripture of the Word was God, the Word becoming flesh, being the life and light of men. The power of light that drew the wise men to behold Jesus, also draws us out of dark nights into light for security, clarity, vision (faith, hope, love). By faith we can have this light that gives us life.

Life is illuminated by hearing and reading the Word, prayer and reflection to draw us out of a dark world to know Him and be transformed by His gift, the Counselor or Holy Spirit, to more fully grow into His loving image. So don't pack away the light that is within you, empowered by dwelling in the Word or abiding in Him, so that you may be a beacon to draw others out of darkness.

#### Pray

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the Word that became flesh, your son, Jesus, who through our faith illuminates and guides us out of darkness. Please come Holy Spirit and burn brighter and brighter within us. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.*

Steve Davis

## WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1



### Read Luke 2:15-21

#### Reflect

Imagine you are a shepherd on the side of a hill on a still, peaceful night. You're pleasantly attending to your duties along with your close friends. You are watching your flocks and having a good conversation. Then, suddenly the sky is filled with something you've never seen before. "9 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." Great fear indeed! I imagine it would have been terrifying. These are men that are used to being outdoors. Men who live close to nature, who can read the wind and the skies. Who know the stars, the seasons and are intimately close to nature. They are simple men, earthy and wise in the way of the land. And suddenly they see something they cannot possibly begin to take in.

From the angel, they get specific information and instructions. They are told to go and find Christ the Lord who has just been born. We can speculate that they are given more specific instructions than are recorded here regarding the location. At the end of these instructions, the angel is joined by a heavenly host, and they sing their hymn of joy. Then they depart. This is the pattern for angels, once their business is complete, they depart. There is no lollygagging around.

And what of the reaction of the shepherds? Note that they don't say: "Let's go see if this is true." They say, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." Their belief is put immediately into action. And here is a lesson for us: If we believe in the Gospel, let us show our faith practically (Spurgeon & Thompson, 1883).

Imagine the conversation once they arrive at the manger. They are the most unlikely of visitors. I doubt most mothers of newborns would place itinerant shepherd men at the top of their list for desired company. The shepherds don't seem shocked by the meager accommodations because they are men who are used to communing with God in poor circumstances. Speculation once again, but we can imagine they shared the vision they had seen, and it is likely Mary and Joseph shared their own visions they had concerning Jesus. By this communication, they greatly strengthened each other. (Henry, 1996)

Then the shepherds go on to share widely what they had seen and experienced. And the reaction is interesting. Some 'wondered' at what they said. But they stopped wondering. They did not inquire any further. And yet Mary "...treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart." She had already seen how God had seen her through the crisis of her virtue being challenged as she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. "The truths of Christ are worth keeping; and the way to keep them safe is to ponder them." (Henry, 1996).

#### Pray

*Almighty Father, help us to be like the shepherds. Help us to put our faith into action. Help us to be obedient. Help us to spread the good news as they did. Help us to prepare our hearts for your coming again. May you find us like you found the shepherds, quietly attending to our duties, obedient and faithful and in fellowship. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Deacon Jeff Lamb

#### Works Cited

Henry, M. (1996, March 1). Commentary on Luke 2. Retrieved from Blue Letter Bible:

[https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Luk/Luk\\_002.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Luk/Luk_002.cfm) Spurgeon, C. H., & Thompson, J. P. (1883). Home Worship, A Comprehensive System of Bible readings and Study. New York: A.C. Armstrong & Son.

## THURSDAY, JANUARY 2



**Read John 1:29-51**

### **Reflect**

The incarnation, God becoming man, is enough to blow our minds. But You descended further; You became the Lamb of God, the sacrifice that would take away our sin, our death, our misery. And in place of these You give us the greatest gift of all. No Christmas present can match the gift that is ours through Christ's sacrifice. You give us Yourself. You knew what you came here to do. And for the joy set before you, You endured the cross. You became not just a man. You became the Lamb of God. Because of Your agony, Your brutal death; because You were victorious and conquered the grave, we get to be with You. To be one with you, as You and the Father are One.

### **Pray**

*Lord Jesus, the intimacy we all long for is here. Past the torn curtain, into the holy of holies, we dare to enter Your presence, because of what You've done. Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin. I ask that you make us stand in awe of your sacrifice, your mercy, your great love for us each day. May we not have glossed over eyes or numb hearts. Like a lightning flash, would you enliven our hearts with wonder at the wild, passionate love of our God. Amen.*

Kristin Davenport

## FRIDAY, JANUARY 3



### Read John 2:1-11

#### Reflect

The story begins with an invitation: “Come, Jesus.” At the height of the celebration comes a plea: “Help, Jesus!” This is followed by an exhortation: “Do whatever he tells you.” His invited presence, a plea for His help, and a willingness to obey Him... This is the recipe for transformation. The simplest ingredient, in vessels that are made to serve and to purify, becomes a new creation. The world marvels in surprise at the quality of this substance.

#### Pray

*Heavenly Father, we invite your son our Savior Jesus Christ, not only to our celebrations, but also to our trials, our tragedies, and into our everyday lives. We ask for His intervention and protection in every moment. We hold one another up in faith of your promise to be “formed through water by your Word”. We make ourselves available to your divine will to do the work you have given us to do, so that the whole world may marvel at one taste and thirst to be invited to your feast. Come now Jesus, transform us now Jesus, don't save us to the end. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.*

Joe Mendez

## SATURDAY, JANUARY 4



### Read John 3:1-21

#### Reflect

Come into the Light. As children we are afraid of the dark. We imagine harmful and monstrous things to live there. As adults we still look for light to cancel the darkness. Our childlike nightlights are replaced with the knowledge of good and evil. We discount the dark as simply part of the day and live with it.

I believe we should be like "little children" again (Matt 18:2-5) and fear the dark. Jesus asks us in John 3: 1-21 to be born again in the Spirit and is yet another passage about the view and willingness of children. He directs us to accept the Son and come into the Light. We should believe and accept the Spirit as we accept the wind. We "don't know where it comes from or where it goes" (John 3:8) but we know that it is real, unlike the monsters we imagined under the bed. The Spirit is our nightlight and will illuminate our hearts and way if we let it.

#### Pray

*Lord Jesus, show us the Light of your Spirit. May we follow you like little children and know that you are Lord. As our ultimate Father who sacrificed His own Son for our salvation, please give us the grace to see your Light this and every season. Amen.*

Amy Leonard

## SUNDAY, JANUARY 5



### Read John 3:22-36

#### Reflect

Today's passage ends with the verse, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them." What does it mean to believe in something? I love to watch college football, and most Saturday's I believe that my favorite team will win. I believe in our coach, meaning that I think he is a good coach and will do his best to help the team win. I also believe that the moon is real, even if I have never stepped foot on it. I believe the history books that I read that told me George Washington was the first President of the United States of America, even though I wasn't there to see his inauguration.

Is this what the Bible means when it says we must believe in Jesus? Do we just have to believe that he existed, like we believe that George Washington existed? NO! When the Bible talks about believing, it means more than just agreeing in your mind that something exists or is true. To believe in Jesus means we must trust him. To believe in Jesus means that we follow him, no matter how hard it may be! It means we obey his commands, that we trust him with our lives, and that we agree to follow him in all that we do.

So, what are some ways that we can believe in Jesus? I've got four ideas to help us get started:

1. We pray! God speaks to us in prayer. As we pray to the Father, we ask him to show us Jesus, and to help us know Jesus better. And God will answer that prayer!
2. We get baptized, and we take Holy Communion. Jesus told his apostles to go and baptize everyone and teach them to follow his commands. After we're baptized, we need to take Communion together. Jesus says that he feeds us with the bread and the wine, and that he is present with us when we take Communion!
3. We read the Bible. The Bible is God's word. It tells us all about Jesus, it tells us what he taught, and it shows us how to be obedient to him.
4. We surround ourselves with other Christians who can help us follow Jesus. We do that by going to church and getting to know other people who want to follow Jesus. God made us to have friends, and he wants these friends to help each other to know Jesus more!

As we finish the Christmas season, I hope and pray that you truly believe in Jesus, and trust him with your heart, soul, and mind. In him, you have an eternal and abundant life!

#### Pray

*Dear Father, we pray that you would help us believe in Jesus, trusting him with everything. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may have the strength to obey you in everything we do. Amen.*

Father Joey Fitzgerald

## MONDAY, JANUARY 6



### Read Matthew 2:1-12

#### Reflect

In the Scripture about the Visit of the Wise men, we see an example of how a temporary stopover can provide a powerful, permanent truth. For our purposes, it can be a moment of realization; a moment of understanding; a moment of fulfillment. I have been blessed to see many such moments; moments of true beauty; moments of love. Leading different renewal retreats and weekends, I have been blessed with a front row seat to witness some self-proclaimed agnostics; some doubters, some sincere believing voyagers, follow the Light to Jesus the Christ and His love for us. Some big burley men have fallen to their knees. Many folks have cried tears of joy, delight, acknowledgement, and thankfulness. Many life-long Christian believers have simply been recharged and re-invigorated. You see, these folks have also had a 'visit' with Christ the Lord.

As Saint Matthew wrote about the Wise Men in Verses 10 & 11, when they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him.

Be wise at church and seek out those who have wisdom; those who are loving, genuine, honest, sincere, open and loving examples of Christ. In short, be one of those who are wise in the purest, and simplest of ways.

Proverbs 1:5 Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance. C.S. Lewis wrote, "The next best thing to being wise oneself is to live in a circle of those who are." Be with a circle of wise Christians.

#### Pray

*O Jesus, while the star of grace impels us on to seek your face, let not our slothful hearts refuse the guidance of your light to use. O star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light! Amen*

Father Cass Daly

*This Advent Season, join us for Worship & Holy Communion  
Sunday mornings at 10:00 am.  
Sunday School begins at 9:00 am*

## **Upcoming Advent & Christmas Events**

**Family Movie Matinee | Sunday, Dec 1 | Time TBA**  
“Best Christmas Pageant Ever”

**Christmas Bazaar & Rummage Sale | Saturday, Dec 7 | 8:00 am-3:00 pm**

Calling all talented bakers and crafters! Consider donating baked goods or crafts for our Church Bazaar! Calling all hoarders! Clean out basements and closets of *gently used* items and donate them for the Rummage Sale. You may begin bringing sale items and leaving them behind the front counter. All proceeds go toward the Capital Campaign.

**St. Nicholas Sunday | Dec 8 | 10:30 am**

**Barnabelles Christmas Party | Friday Dec 13 | 6:00 pm**

Hosted by Kendra Carbuccia at 50 Duck Pond Way in Senoia. Bring a wrapped gift (\$20 value) to play the gift exchange game. Bring an appetizer or a dessert to share. Carpooling available from the church at 5:30 pm RSVP to Kendra at 901-488-1828 or [kjcarbuccia@gmail.com](mailto:kjcarbuccia@gmail.com) by Dec.6.

**Lessons & Carols | Sunday, Dec 15 | 10:30 am**

**St. Barnabas Christmas Party | Friday, Dec 20 | 5:30 pm**

6:00-7:00 | Bring your favorite appetizer and/or dessert, church will provide smores, mulled wine, and hot chocolate bar

7:00-8:00 | Outdoor Screening of Behold the Lamb Concert on the lawn (bring a blanket or a lawn chair) and Christmas Movies

**Dec 24 | Christmas Eve Services**

5:00 pm Family Christmas Eve Service with Children's Pageant

11:00 pm Christmas Eve Service

**Dec 25 | Christmas Day Service | 10:30 am**

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*



Many thanks to all the contributors of this devotional and for the children who created artwork.

Thank you to Beth Royal for so beautifully formatting and preparing this publication;

to Suzy Royal for editing, and to Debra Macdonald for printing.