

Savior of the Nations, Come

Advent Devotions for 2018 (Year C)

Introduction

adventus

Latin; noun
declension: 4th declension
gender: masculine
Definitions:
arrival, approach
invasion, incursion
ripening
visit, appearance, advent

παρουσία [parousia], ἡ

Greek; noun
1. presence
2. coming, advent as the first stage in presence

The season of Advent is a time of expectant waiting. As Christians, during the season of Advent, we engage in expectant waiting for two reasons. First, we wait to *celebrate* the first coming of Christ, as a babe born in a manger in Bethlehem. Second, we wait for the imminent and eventual return of Christ—Jesus’ “Second Coming,” to judge the living and the dead and to set the world to rights.

In that way, the season of Advent reminds us that we inhabit the already-but-not-yet, the time between Jesus’ first and second comings. A time between the “surely the days are coming” anguished reminders of the prophet Jeremiah and the “even so, Lord Jesus” hope-filled pleas of the church in Revelation.

Chances are that you find yourself somewhere in the in-between this Advent season. In-between relationships. In-between jobs. In-between where you are and where you would like to be. In-between the person you were and the person you would like to be.

My prayer for you this Advent is that you would experience the grace of God deeply in the in-between times of life. Grace in the difficult, overwhelming times. God's presence in the oh-so-mundane ordinary times. The invading presence of Christ as you find yourself living and laboring between the first and second comings of our Savior.

Blessings!

Rev. Joshua Rhone



ADVENT: WEEK 1

Sunday, December 2, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Jeremiah 33:14-16](#); [Psalm 25:1-10](#); [1 Thessalonians 3:9-13](#); [Luke 21:25-36](#)

Jeremiah was tasked by God with proclaiming an often-ominous message, one of warning for the people of Judah. Indeed, Judah would feel the full-weight of God's judgment. The capital, Jerusalem, would be destroyed. God's people would endure captivity in a foreign land.

Things appeared bleak for God's people and things would actually get *much* worse before they would get better. Wrestling with pain, loss, and displacement God's people wondered: Had God abandoned His people? Would things ever improve? Would life ever be redeemed?

In today's Old Testament text, Jeremiah has an important message for God's people. Judgment while imminent and very real reality *will not* have the final word! Pain, sorrow, and displacement *do not* win! God will provide for His people. He will provide a Savior.

Today, on the first Sunday of Advent, we remember that although things may seem chaotic and out-of-control; although, situations and circumstances may be beyond what we are capable of handling, we serve a God of promise. A God who gives us hope when everything seems rather hopeless. A Savior who will make good upon His promise to never leave or forsake us.

Prayer: God of Hope, thank you for your Son, and our Savior, Jesus. Thank you for the prophet Jeremiah and his reminder that You alone are our source of hope. Help us to live each day, so as to partner with You in Your work of bringing hope to the hopeless, light in the darkness. Help those around us to see Christ in us, the hope of glory. Amen.

Monday, December 3, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 90](#); [Numbers 17:1-11](#); [2 Peter 3:1-18](#)

In the second of the New Testament epistles attributed to Peter, the author is writing to the church, turning their collective attention to two main topics: false teachers and the *parousia* (the second coming of Christ).

In today's New Testament text, the author is encouraging God's people to remain faithful as they *wait* for Jesus' return. As was the case in Jeremiah's day, and for the people of Judah, things were not easy for God's people. False prophets were on the scene proclaiming lies—leading people astray. Scoffers were living sinful, self-indulgent lives, encouraging people to question God's promises.

2 Peter reminds us that in every age, those who seek to follow Christ and live holy lives devoted wholly to God face challenges and opposition. Yet, God's promises remain the same, as does the God who made the promises. God is faithful and He will keep His Word.

For that reason, as we *wait* in *hope* and with *expectation* for the Second Coming of Christ, this Advent season becomes for us a time to renew our commitment to live godly lives—lives characterized by holiness of heart and life.

Prayer: God of Hope, we are a people prone to anxiousness and worry. We struggle with waiting patiently. We like immediate results. Help us, this Advent season, to learn to wait patiently. Teach us to wait in such a way that Your plans and purposes are accomplished in us, as we await Christ's return. Amen.

Tuesday, December 4, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 90](#); [2 Samuel 7:18-29](#); [Revelation 22:12-16](#)

Today's Psalm, which is described as "a prayer of Moses," reminds us of two things. First, our existence as humans is finite. It has a beginning and an end, and in-between, there is a mix of joy and sorrow, hope and despair, work and play, and excitement and frustration.

Life, and the days and things of our lives, when viewed from the finite human vantage point, can seem daunting, exhausting, overwhelming, and futile. This helps to explain why people like Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Friedrich Nietzsche became with Existentialism and a view of life characterized by confusion, fear, and/or dread in face of an absurd, meaningless world and existence.

Life can sometimes feel like that. Like pushing a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down, and then we have to begin pushing all-over again.

Yet, as followers of Christ, we must situate ourselves and our lives within a wider, eternal view of things. Yes, there is toil and trouble; and, yes, life is short, fleeting, and then it is gone (Ps. 90.10). However, we serve an everlasting God, Who predates the earth and formed the mountains.

He is our dwelling place.

He teaches us to number our days.

Prayer: God of Hope, life is not always easy. In fact, sometimes it is really difficult. When difficulty comes, and when heartache seeks to overwhelm, help us to remember that You and You alone are our hope! Amen.

Wednesday, December 5, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 90](#); [Isaiah 1:24-31](#); [Luke 11:29-32](#)

Each of today's scriptures speak of something that is unavoidable: *judgment*.

The prophets of old looked forward to and often spoke to their audiences about the "Day of the Lord" —a time of judgment when God would set things right once and for all. It is a time that sounds good, if you are the oppressed and you believe that your oppressor(s) will be on the receiving end of God's judgment. It is a day that sounds wonderful, if you think it means that your enemies will be thwarted, and you will be rewarded.

Yet, judgment, in each of our text is not confined to the "other" or those whom we deem our "oppressor" or "enemy." God's justice applies across the board—to all peoples, of all nations.

Judgment, however, does not have to be a fearful, terrible thing. God's judgment is *just*. For those who are in relationship with Him and strive to live Christlike lives—treating others justly, with mercy, and extending grace; judgment is nothing to be feared.

May this Advent season be a time when we renew our commitment to love the Lord our God with every fiber of our being and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves!

Prayer: God of Hope, help us so to love You and live for You in this life, that we have nothing to fear in the life that is to come. Amen.

Thursday, December 6, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Luke 1:68-79](#); [Malachi 3:5-12](#); [Philippians 1:12-18a](#)

In the past God made some promises to His children. His children have eagerly waited for those promises to be fulfilled. But like a child on Christmas morning, His children have patiently waited, only to be disappointed year after year.

Zechariah's message to God's children is one of hope and salvation. He's saying that the wait is over. Things are going to be different this year. No more disappointment. No more getting a gift that you don't want. This year, yea, even now, God is doing what He has promised. Right now, in the person of Jesus Christ, this baby who is still in the womb, He has come, and he has redeemed his people. He has brought salvation.

Likewise, the message to us that we don't have to be disappointed any more. Zechariah's saying that more clutter is not the answer to our disappointment.

God's message to us this Advent is that He has the answer. He has the gift that we've always wanted, the gift that we've always needed.

But that's not the good news. The good news isn't that God has it. The good news is that He wants to give us these things. He wants to save us. He wants to give us peace and rest.

The good news is not a message, rather it's the person of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: God of Hope, thank you for Jesus. Help me to receive the gift of Your Son gladly and with joy in my heart. Amen.

Friday, December 7, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Luke 1:68-79](#); [Malachi 3:13-18](#); [Philippians 1:18b-26](#)

As children, many of us dreaded traveling from point A to point B. We may have liked the end result, the final destination, but we did not care much for the journey between the two.

Are we there yet? How much longer?

The in-between is hard for us as human beings. It is hard for a number of reasons. We can lose sight of where we are headed—the ultimate destination. We experience the grind of the current reality. There can also be a lot of unknowns.

Often, we try to convince ourselves to move forward. We prod ourselves and say, “Just a little further.” Or we urge ourselves on with these words: “Just one foot in front of the other,” or, “This too shall pass.”

Many times we attempt to survive the in-between. The Apostle Paul, however, offers another approach: that of *rejoicing* and *thriving*. “Yes, I will continue to rejoice (Phil. 1.18b),” he contends. I will persist and remain with you, “so that I can share *abundantly* in your boasting in Christ Jesus (Phil. 1.26a),” Paul asserts.

May we, this Advent season, not lament the in-between. Rather, may we encounter Christ and, like Paul, learn to thrive and experience abundant joy, as we await Christ’s return!

Prayer: God of Hope, today we recognize that You are with us as we wait. You transform and give meaning to the in-between. Help us recognize that this time of waiting is a time to serve You with joy and gladness. Take us and use our lives for Your glory! Amen.

Saturday, December 8, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Luke 1:68-79](#); [Malachi 4:1-6](#); [Luke 9:1-6](#)

“[T]he day is coming..., says the Lord of hosts.”

Malachi sure does know how to capture his audience’s attention. Chapter 4, of the book that bears his name, begins in foreboding fashion.

Is it a good thing that this day is coming? Or is it something that should be feared?

It seems that judgment cannot be avoided. It is part-and-parcel of the end-of-days, the fearful and terrible Day of the Lord, the Second Coming of Christ. But, again, we must ask: Is judgment something that should induce dread?

According to Malachi that answer is: *maybe*.

If you are among the arrogant and evildoers, yes. The Day of the Lord is to be feared, for it will result in judgment that leads to devastation, eternally.

However, for those who *revere* God, it is a glorious day. The Day of the Lord is a day in which “the sun of righteousness shall rise, with *healing* in his wings (Malachi 4.2a).” A day that will cause us to leap like “calves from the stall (Mal 4.2b).”

Take a moment to consider what it means to revere God and examine your life, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to see if there is the fruit of reverence.

Prayer: God of Hope, help us to revere You with all of our lives. Amen.



ADVENT: WEEK 2

Sunday, December 9, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Malachi 3:1-4](#); [Luke 1:68-79](#); [Philippians 1:3-11](#);
[Luke 3:1-6](#)

This passage of Scripture comes from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians. In this section, Paul tells the church at Philippi that he regularly thinks of them and prays for them. He even takes the time to tell them of some of the specific things that he prays for with regard to them. Among my favorite is what the Apostle says in verse 9: "And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight..."

You see, we believe that God is a God of love. He has revealed and made known that love to us as He sent His one and only Son. And, as people of faith, as part of the Body of Christ, we are a people called to love God and to love others because of God's love for us.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Lord, we thank you for Your son, our Savior, Jesus. Thank you for revealing Your love to us, as You sent Your son. Thank You for Your Word, which helps us remember your love and care. We ask that you help us share Your love, with those that we meet today. Amen.

Monday, December 10, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 126](#); [Isaiah 40:1-11](#); [Romans 8:22-25](#)

Labor pains. Groaning. These are terms employed by the Apostle Paul to describe the manner in which all of creation is *waiting*. Waiting for Christ to return, for Him to set the world to rights.

It would be easy to look at these terms and think that waiting is a punishment. Something to be avoided at all cost. But these things are not to be avoided. They are reminders of the glory of that which is to be; the splendor that awaits. Renewed bodies. A redeemed creation.

The season of Advent is a time for us to lean into the discomfort, to embrace the labor pains and remember that what shall be revealed is worth it.

So we *wait*. We wait *patiently*. We wait with *hope*.

Where are you experiencing discomfort this Advent? In your relationships? In your career? Or, in some other area?

What would it mean for you to wait patiently and with hope, in that area, during the season of Advent?

Prayer: Gracious and loving Lord, there are many things in life that we do not understand. Many things, in which Your timing does not always make sense to us. Help us to trust you, and wait patiently with hope, trusting that Your way is good, and Your timing is perfect. Amen.

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 126](#); [Isaiah 19:18-25](#); [2 Peter 1:2-15](#)

The prophet Isaiah foresees a day of peace and blessings. It all sounds rather serene and wonderful. God will bless His people Israel, so that they can be a blessing to the peoples of the earth. Joining them will be Egypt and Assyria, who will experience God's salvation, healing, and blessing.

It sounds oh-so-good. Or does it?

Put yourself in Israel's shoes. Consider Isaiah's prophecy from the perspective of God's chosen people. Egypt and Assyria are enemies. They have served as oppressors. They have mistreated God's people, benefited from the hard, forced labor that they imposed upon God's people.

Is Isaiah's proclamation of healing, redemption, and blessing really good news?

This Advent season, as we consider the birth of Christ and His eventual return to judge the quick and the dead, we are confronted by the fact that the gospel is good news for all people. Not just our family or friends. Not just those with whom we share similar beliefs. Not just those who have been good, respectable, contributing members of society. Rather, anyone and everyone who confesses with their mouth and believes in their heart that Jesus is Lord. God's grace is scandalous in that way.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Lord, help us to see the good news for what it is: good news for all people, everywhere. And help us to live and love in such a way that the good news of Jesus Christ continues to spread. Amen.

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 126](#); [Isaiah 35:3-7](#); [Luke 7:18-30](#)

The psalmist envisions a future day when the fortunes of God's people will be restored. A day when joy and laughter shall be restored. A day of great rejoicing, in which God's name will be praised far and wide.

However, God's people, and even the psalmist, are not living in that reality now. The present reality is far different. There are tears and weeping, hardships and difficulties.

Yet, the psalmist remains convinced that God is at work. The psalmist doggedly asserts that God's people have reason to remain hopeful, although the restoration of Zion feels like it is a long way off.

Psalm 126 and the hope that characterizes it is undoubtedly born out of the psalmist's previous experience(s) with God. The psalmist is well-aware of God's character, God's faithfulness, and for that reason the psalmist can hold on to hope and continue to live with hope amid difficult times.

Take a few moments to consider God's past faithfulness to you. How might God's past faithfulness help you to remain hopeful as you endure a difficult season of life?

Prayer: Gracious and loving Lord, thank you for never leaving us or forsaking us. We confess that many times we give up or are ready to give up, when things do not go our way, or when things become difficult. Help us not to despair, but instead, to trust you and live hope-filled lives even in the most difficult of times. Amen.

Thursday, December 13, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 12:2-6](#); [Amos 6:1-8](#); [2 Corinthians 8:1-15](#)

Hope cannot be contained. Hopeful people overflow with hope—what God has done and is doing in their lives spilling over into and impacting the lives of those around them.

In the case of Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians, the church in Macedonia had been enduring a difficult time—Paul indicates that they suffered “a severe ordeal of affliction (2 Cor. 8.2).” Needless to say, they were overwhelmed and likely exhausted.

However, they experienced God's grace in a powerful way. So much so, in fact, that they could not help but be gracious, sharing *generously* in “the ministry to the saints (2 Cor. 8.4).”

How can an impoverished, beleaguered, afflicted people give so generously? Why not keep what they have for themselves?

Hope.

God's gracious activity in their lives gave them a perspective (an eternal perspective), which enabled and even empowered to do the unthinkable. To give freely; to share generously, with the hope that others might also experience God's grace and hope in life-changing ways.

Prayer: Gracious and loving Lord, Your mercies are new every morning. Oftentimes we look at what we lack, or what others have that we do not, which causes us to live with closed hands—keeping what we have for ourselves. This Advent season cultivate within us a generous heart, that we might be generous and gracious toward others, just as you have been generous and gracious toward us. Amen.

Friday, December 14, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 12:2-6; Amos 8:4-12; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15](#)

The season of Advent is a time for self-examination, with the help of the Holy Spirit. We engage in the work of self-examination because, as we affirm in the Apostles' Creed, we believe that God is going to return to "judge the quick and the dead."

As we mentioned before, judgment does not have to be something that we fear or dread. God freely offers salvation to any and all who will embrace Him as Lord.

However, as the texts from Amos and 2 Corinthians remind us, embracing Christ as Lord entails more than just a verbal proclamation. As God's grace is at work in our lives, our lives should be changing and transforming, as we become more like Christ. We should want to be gracious and generous (2 Cor. 9.1-15), because that is how God has been with us.

Yet, each of us knows, that those changes do not necessarily happen overnight. The Holy Spirit is constantly at work, bringing to light areas of our lives that our not yet in conformity to God's will and way. The Amos text reminds us that an unwillingness to change and an unwillingness to live godly, Christlike lives—choosing instead to continue in the old way of living—will result in judgment.

What areas of your life is God speaking to you about today? In what ways do those areas need to come into conformity with His will and way?

Prayer: Gracious and loving Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit, convict us of sin and help us to pursue new and different life in You. Amen.

Saturday, December 15, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 12:2-6](#); [Amos 9:8-15](#); [Luke 1:57-66](#)

Yesterday, I wrote about the need for self-examination. Indeed, self-examination important. That said, this Advent season we are reminded that we do not engage in this self-examination and introspection alone or in isolation. Rather, we engage in these practices with the help and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The journey of faith is not a journey of self-help. It is a journey to God the Father, through God the Son, with the help of God the Holy Spirit.

As Isaiah reminds us, “God is our salvation (Isa. 12.2).” He is our strength and might (Isa. 12.3).

Throughout the season of Advent, we are reminded of the myriad of ways in which we are utterly unable to help ourselves. Left to our own devices we can, and often do, make a rather big mess of things, not only for ourselves but for those around us!

Consequently, we must pause this Advent season to remember that we are desperately in need of Christ and His redeeming work. We cannot live a Christlike life apart from Christ and the help of the Holy Spirit.

Today, take a moment to reflect on your need of Christ. Where do you see and/or where are you experiencing the greatest need in your life at this moment?

Prayer: Gracious and loving Lord, we need You. From the depths our hearts cry out to You. You and You alone are our hope, our help and salvation. Help us to cling to You and draw our strength from You. Amen.



ADVENT: WEEK 3

Sunday, December 16, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Zephaniah 3:14-20](#); [Isaiah 12:2-6](#); [Philippians 4:4-7](#); [Luke 3:7-18](#)

Worry. Anxiety. Stress.

As human beings we are well acquainted with these things. In fact, they can easily become defaults, so that we cannot imagine a way of life not characterized by them.

However, the Apostle Paul suggests that life, for the Christian, should be different, marked by the hallmarks of rejoicing, gentleness, and peace.

Often, we are quick to look at a situation or circumstance and recognize what is wrong, that which is not right. Imagine living in such a way that instead of recognizing what is wrong, we intentionally look for reasons to rejoice. What might happen? How might your attitude change? How would it impact those around you?

Similarly, when we identify that which is wrong, we often experience anxiety. Anxiety that stems from not knowing what to do, or from not being able to do anything. What if instead of becoming anxious about the things beyond your control, you instead took the time to pray and “make your requests known to God”? What if instead of worrying, you let God take care of things?

Prayer: Merciful and loving Lord, sometimes we forget that we do not have all the answers and that we cannot solve every problem. Often, when we come to that realization, we end up worried, stressed, and anxious. Help us, instead, to trust You. Help us to give our problems over to You, so that we can learn to rejoice, even in difficult situations. Amen.

Monday, December 17, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 11:1-9](#); [Numbers 16:1-19](#); [Hebrews 13:7-17](#)

I love how the author of Hebrews describes our posture as Christians: “we are looking for the city that is to come (Heb. 13.14).”

Consider, for a moment, the cities of today.

For example, we live less than an hour from the city of Baltimore. There is much about the city that is beautiful and good. Our family loves to go to the Inner Harbor and take in the beauty of the area, the talent and creativity of the buskers, and the delicious seafood. Yet, life in the city is not always picturesque and wonderful. Crime rates are high. Human trafficking is a reality. Addiction and homelessness are very real concerns. In 2015, the city made the national news because of the death of Freddie Gray, and the protests and riots that ensued. In the fray, police officers were injured, two hundred and fifty people were arrested, in excess of three hundred businesses were damaged, and numerous buildings and vehicles set on fire.

In that way, the cities of today are very much unlike the city that is to come. The heavenly city will be a place without pain or suffering. It will be a place of justice and mercy. Corruption will not exist. Addictions will be no more. Homeless will no longer be a reality.

So, like the author of Hebrews, we look forward to that day, and we long for that city that is to come. But, in the meantime, we do what good we can do and we share what possessions God has blessed us with, because these are some small, but important ways that we can please God, as we wait for the city that is to come.

Prayer: Merciful and loving Lord, help us to be ambassadors of Your Kingdom, while we wait for the city that is to come. Amen.

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 11:1-9; Numbers 16:20-35; Acts 28:23-31](#)

Love is never satisfied with things “as-is.” Love always desires what is best for the other person. That is what Isaiah’s vision is about.

It is a vision of the future, a snapshot of things as they will one day be when God in love sets all things right once again. And, it is a beautiful picture.

In love, God will judge with righteousness and justice. The wicked will be no more.

The wolf will live with the lamb. The leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf, the yearling, and the lion will all live side-by-side in harmony. A little child will be their leader.

It is a vision of peace, of harmony, of things as God intended them to be.

Cows will have dinner together with the bears, the lion will eat the grass of the field with the ox, little babies will play near the holes of poisonous snakes, but they will not be harmed.

What Isaiah prophesies is inevitable, but it is not yet here. It has not yet become reality.

This Advent season may we not just celebrate the birth of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, and the new life that is found in Him; but may we also strive to give the world a glimpse of the world that God will eventually usher in!

Prayer: Merciful and loving Lord, we look forward to that day when everything will be set right, when Your kingdom has come and Your will is done. Until that day comes, give us the strength and courage to live in such a way that the world gets a glimpse of the life that is to come. Amen.

Wednesday, December 19, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 11:1-9](#); [Micah 4:8-13](#); [Luke 7:31-35](#)

God is up to something. He is doing a new thing—changing hearts and transforming lives.

This Advent season we are inundated with this good news on all sides. As we light the Advent candles of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love we herald the ways in which Jesus gives meaning and purpose to our lives and world. As we listen to and sing Christmas carols we testify to the good news of great joy that is for all people. As we exchange gifts we are reminded of God's great gift of salvation, God freely giving His one and only Son.

But, are we truly grateful for the good news? Do we always hear and receive it with delight?

In today's text from Luke, Jesus compares those of the current generation to children who are sitting in the marketplace. They are not satisfied. The solemn message of repentance preached by John, they did not appreciate. The warm embrace of Jesus, who spent his time with sinners and tax collectors, sharing meals with gluttons and drunkards, they did not appreciate.

The people were confronted by the good news that God was up to something, but they did not like and could not appreciate what God was doing.

Take some time to consider what God might be doing in your life or in the lives of those around you. Are you grateful for what He is doing? Or does it make you a little uncomfortable?

Prayer: Merciful and loving Lord, give us eyes to see what You are doing and thankful hearts that allow us to partner with You in Your work.
Amen.

Thursday, December 20, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 80:1-7](#); [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#); [Hebrews 10:10-18](#)

“The days are surely coming (Jer. 31.31)...”

Jeremiah envisions a future day when God—who is the same yesterday, today, and forever—makes a new covenant with His people. In many ways, it will be like the covenant of old. God will be their God and they will be His people. The covenant will ensure that relationship and it will explain both the roles of God and the people within that relationship.

However, unlike the old covenant, which was written on tablets of stone and prescribed a particular way of life for God’s chosen people, the new covenant will be written upon their hearts. It will be a delight. No sacrifices will be needed, because God “will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer. 31.34).”

In Christ, God has established that covenant. In Christ, God has invited people of all nations to be part of that special relationship, where God is our God and we are His people.

Have you accepted God’s invitation to relationship? Have you embraced Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If not, today can be the day when God begins His work in Your heart and life.

Prayer: Merciful and loving Lord, we thank You for Jesus and the new life that can be ours in Him. Write Your law upon our hearts and help us to live in such a way that we honor You with our lives. Amen.

Friday, December 21, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 80:1-7](#); [Isaiah 42:10-18](#); [Hebrews 10:32-39](#)

Confidence and endurance.

The author of Hebrews is writing to a group of Hebrew Christians who are facing severe persecution. Life for them is not easy. Being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ when you are pressed on every side presents its challenges.

Yet, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is convinced that these Christians can endure. They can, with confidence, continue to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, even in the midst of great trials.

While we are not faced with the persecutions of these early followers of Jesus Christ, we do have our challenges. We may not have the support of our spouse, as we strive to follow Christ. Our children may not understand why we prioritize God and the things of God, when none of their friends' families do the same. Our employer may not understand why we stand our ground and will not work on Sundays.

What challenges do you face, as you strive to live for Christ? What would it look like for you to live with confidence and endurance, as you walk with Christ?

Prayer: Merciful and loving Lord, at times we care a lot about what others think. Especially those who are closest to us. We confess that sometimes we allow what others think about us, or what they say about our relationship with You, to discourage us. Help us to follow You with confidence, as we run with endurance the race that You have marked out for us. Amen.

Saturday, December 22, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Psalm 80:1-7](#); [Isaiah 66:7-11](#); [Luke 13:31-35](#)

Waiting can be difficult.

Waiting patiently can be a real challenge.

Waiting can be particularly difficult when we *know* that things will improve, but when we do not know how long we will have to endure the present reality.

In Psalm 80, the psalmist, on behalf of God's chosen people, expresses the difficulties of waiting, while at the same time pleading for God to act. To act sooner than later—"Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved (Ps. 80.3, 7)."

As you look at your life, what are you waiting for? What are you waiting for God to do?

As you wait, what is happening? Are you growing angry, frustrated, and impatient? Or, are you continuing to trust that God is at work and that God's timing is perfect?

Prayer: Merciful and loving Lord, waiting is hard. We like things now. We like when we get what we want, when we want it. This Advent season teach us to be patient. Help us to trust in You and in Your timing. Amen.



ADVENT: WEEK 4

Sunday, December 23, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Micah 5:2-5a](#); [Luke 1:46b-55](#); [Psalm 80:1-7](#);
[Hebrews 10:5-10](#); [Luke 1:39-55](#)

A young virgin receives an unexpected visit from an angel. That angel came with life-changing, life-altering news. It was news that would have turned the young Mary's life upside-down. News that upon sharing, Mary could not quite be sure how people would respond.

Mary responds to the news by visiting her cousin Elizabeth and breaking out in song. That song is the Magnificat—a song that bears witness to the strong faith and joy with which Mary responds to the unexpected situation she now finds herself in.

In the face of uncertainty, how will you respond? When life changes and you are not quite sure what the outcome will be, will you respond in faith and with joy? Or will you respond with anxiety, dwelling on the unknown and fretting over “what may be”?

As followers of Jesus Christ, may we follow the example of Mary and respond in faith and trust God, even in those moments when we are not sure of what the outcome will be. May we rejoice in God our Savior. May we find comfort in His mercy. And may we remember that no matter how out-of-control things seems, that we serve a God who is faithful and true— Who is merciful from generation to generation.

Prayer: Dear Lord, our world is filled with plenty of unexpected things. Things that are beyond my control. When I start to become anxious, grant me peace. When I start to worry, grant me the ability to be still and know that You are God. Amen.

Monday, December 24, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 9:2-7](#); [Psalm 96](#); [Titus 2:11-14](#); [Luke 2:1-20](#)

During this, the fourth week of Advent, we remember God's promise of peace. We hear afresh and anew the words of Jesus in John 14.27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you (NRSV)."

In times such as these, when it seems we are surrounded by hatred and fighting, it can be difficult and challenging to remember that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. We are not the first to face this struggle. It's quite likely that the shepherds, who were living in the fields and keeping watch o're their flocks by night, may have not felt very peaceful when they first heard the angelic proclamation. In fact, they were probably scared and maybe more than a little confused. Yet, in faith, they heeded the angelic proclamation.

Today, as you look around you, you may see and hear a message that is quite different from the message of peace that was proclaimed by the multitude of the heavenly host. Yet we, like the shepherds, can take God at His word and trust in His promises.

Prayer: Our Father who art in heaven, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for the Prince of Peace. May the peace of God prevail in my heart and life. Amen.



CHRISTMAS DAY

Tuesday, December 25, 2018

Scripture Readings: [Isaiah 62:6-12](#); [Psalm 97](#); [Titus 3:4-7](#); [Luke 2:1-20](#)

This Christmas season many of us have shared the common experience of waking up, looking at the calendar, and gasping in horror as yet another day has come and gone.

Hurting toward Christmas, cookies needed to be baked, decorations needed to be hung, dinner arrangements needed to be made, presents were still in need of purchasing...

Yet, trying to squeeze an extra five minutes out of the day to accomplish these things is like us trying to squeeze a dime and thereby make a nickel.

There are things in life that seem to come when the timing couldn't be any worse. But there are those instances where it seems that the timing could not have been any better.

In the pages of Scripture, we encounter a couple who, I'm sure, were experiencing some of the emotions and feelings regarding timing that we just spoke of.

According to Luke, the young Mary is about to give birth. She's approaching the end of her pregnancy, and the last thing that she, a pregnant woman who is about to give birth, probably wants to do is travel the distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem on the back of a donkey.

Augustus' timing couldn't have been worse, from the perspective of the pregnant Mary.

What is more, this has already been a challenging and mind-blowing pregnancy. It began with the angel Gabriel telling both her and Joseph, the man whom she was engaged to, that she was pregnant and was going to give birth to a son, who they were to name Jesus, because He was the Savior of the world.

Not exactly a well-timed message when you live in a culture in which you can be stoned to death for having a child outside of marriage.

So, they made the trip and...

6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son...

The King James Version translates things this way: ***And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished...***

I like this rendering and translation. I like it because it captures the idea that time was pregnant and ripe, ready to burst: just like Mary's womb.

The time towards which all of history had been moving; the time when God's salvation plan would burst forth onto the screen of human history had come.

Everything was accomplished.

What was is about this time that made it "the time"? Why was this time in history the ideal time? Why now? Why not earlier? Why not later?

The young Mary and the man to whom she is engaged, Joseph, must be wondering the same thing. Why now? Why does this census have to come right now, when Mary is so close to giving birth? Why does this

amazing moment, a reason for celebration, have to take place away from family and friends?

And, what's even worse, we are told that Mary...

...wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The time had come. It's time for Mary to give birth.

They are in a foreign place.

They know no one.

God's glorious plan of salvation is about to break forth into human history.

Yet, there is no room. There is no room for them in the inn.

Why now? Why is the inn so full? Can God possibly know what He is doing?

The resounding answer to that question is "yes." God knows exactly what He is doing.

Even though there is no room for the soon-to-be-born Jesus in the inn, God's plan of salvation will dawn.

What makes this time so right? Why is this time more apt for the birth of Jesus than any time in history, either before or since?

Looking back, as we look at Scripture and as we study history, we can understand some of the reasons why God's timing was ideal, even though it may not have seemed so at the time.

The decision of Augustus to take a census, which caused the virgin Mary and the man to whom she was engaged, caused the couple to be in Bethlehem at the time when Jesus was born, which fulfilled the prophecy of Micah, who years before had declared that the coming Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2)

And that's just for starters.

There was also the fact that the political climate of the day provided the ideal environment for the good news of Jesus Christ to spread throughout the known world.

There was the fact that this was a unique time in which the Romans allowed religious pluralism and diversity to the extent that the Christian faith was able to become established and grow. The *Pax Romana*, or the "peace of Rome", meant that this was a time of peace in which Rome was able to cultivate an infrastructure (roads, trading routes, etc.) which made it possible for the good news of Jesus Christ to travel at a rate and to places that would have never before been possible.

In other words, the time was right. The time had come. This was the ideal time.

It was the ideal time, although it may not have seemed so ideal to Mary and Joseph. It was the ideal time, although there was no room in the inn.

God's timing, as Scripture reminds us and as the Christmas story illustrates, is always perfect.

However, God's perfect timing may or may not be convenient for us. The question for us is how will we respond to God and what He wants to do?

Will we, like Mary and Joseph, although we may not fully understand what God is up to- say "yes," open ourselves up to Him and His will for our lives, and then hang on for the ride of our lives?

Or will we, like the inn-keepers, turn Jesus away because the timing doesn't seem right?

Or because to allow Him to take up residence in our lives would require us to be inconvenienced?

God's plan of salvation is perfect.

Yet, the possibility of salvation rarely comes at a time that is convenient. Instead, following the example of Mary and Joseph, we must rather cling to God and submit to His will, thereby allowing Him to accomplish in us and through us that which He desires to accomplish in and through our lives.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank You for Jesus. Through Him, we experience Your love. Because of Him, our sins are forgiven. In Him, we have hope. Help us to trust You and Your timing, even when we do not understand. Amen.