

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2025

Embracing Hospitality
Welcome to Our World



CHARACTERS OF THE BIBLE
That Teach us to Care

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

- 11/30- First Sunday- John 1:1-5, 10-14-Gen. 1:31 GOD- MADE A HOSPITABLE WORLD
- 12/1- Mt. 1:1,2- Genesis 18:1-10, 13-14 ABRAHAM, The Father of our Faith, Welcomed God
- 12/2- Mt. 1:5- RUTH 1:16,17; 2:8,9; Ruth and Boaz- Remembering Those who help others
- 12/3- Mt. 1:6- Psalm 78:70-72; DAVID God lifts up the Humble
- 12/4- Mt. 1:8-11- 2 Chronicles 20:9, 15 JEHOHOPHAT, Hezekiah, Josiah- Trusting God in our Calling
- 12/5- Mt. 1:16- 21,24- JOSEPH- Welcoming and Adopting Jesus
- 12/6- Luke 1:24-25, 39-45- ELIZABETH- The Favor of God Coming to Us (Lk. 1:43)
- 12/7- Second Sunday- Luke 1:21, 59-66 The PEOPLE around Zechariah
- 12/8- Luke 1:12-22, 62-64 ZECHARIAH- Hospitality as Believing the Impossible Can Happen
- 12/9- John 1:27-30; 3:30 JOHN THE BAPTIST- He Must Increase, I Must Decrease- Humility and Hospitality
- 12/10- Luke 2:1-3 CAESAR Augustus- An Uncaring Fiat Used to Bring Care to the Right Spot
- 12/11- Luke 2:7- The INNKEEPER- No Room- But we Have a Stable
- 12/12- Luke 2:9-13 The ANGELS- The Hospitality of Telling the Good News
- 12/13- Luke 2:8, 15-20 THE SHEPHERDS Welcome the Lamb
- 12/14- Third Sunday- Luke 1:30-37, 46-50 MARY- Hospitality in the Womb- Welcoming the Baby
- 12/15 Luke 2:36-40- ANNA Waits and Welcomes with Thanksgiving
- 12/16- Luke 2:25-35 SIMEON- The Old welcomes the Baby and Sees God at Work for the Future
- 12/17- Matthew 2:3,7,12 HEROD- The Unwelcoming
- 12/18- Mt. 2:1-3. 9-12 THE MAGI- Going Out of their Way to Welcome and Worship
- 12/19- Mt. 2:3-6- Sometimes RELIGIOUS LEADERS do not lead
- 12/20- John 1:10-12 HE CAME TO HIS OWN AND HIS OWN DID NOT RECEIVE HIM
- 12/21- John 1:12; Romans 10:9,10- TO ALL WHO RECEIVE HIM...
- 12/22- Revelation 3:20- JESUS ASKS TO COME INTO US
- 12/23- Fourth Sunday- John 3:16-19 PEOPLE LOVED DARKNESS- But Let's Love Light!
- 12/24- Luke 2- CHOOSING HOSPITALITY- The Contrast of Welcoming and Ignoring



INTRODUCTION:

Christmas, Nativity and Advent plays have been around since the beginning but were made especially popular in the Middle Ages. The characters of these plays are endearing because of that. While there are many stories of people today experiencing anew the Christ behind the stories, there is a certain mysterious attraction and power in the biblical story and characters itself. I write this as a fragile peace hovers over the land where Christ was born. How do these old characters help us today? Certainly the Romans had their own attacks against the Jewish people and the Jewish zealots (including the secarii who sought to expel the Romans by assassination) brought on more brutal tactics by the Romans. Herod's killing all babies under two in fear of a threat to his throne is an example of the brutality and terrorism surrounding the time of Christ's birth and childhood. When we read of the kidnapping of infants, the massacre of civilians, the shooting of teens in our own town- we cannot remove ourselves morally from what happened 2,000 years ago as if we are morally superior now. The need for the Prince of Peace to come into our hearts, and for us to spread His peace to those around us is still so very great.

I grew up in Columbia and have wonderful memories around Christmas in the Presbyterian Church. I remember the Christmas Eve we had flurries in 1989 and again 1998. I remember being an angel in the nativity scene- as we cherubs elbowed each other on top of the roof. The characters of Christmas still speak of our need to welcome the Christ and to spread the news as the angels and shepherds did (even in a brutal time).

Hospitality is one of the most important parts of outreach and mission. If we did not care for others- we would not reach out to them. If we only focused on ourselves and on our own comfort, we might temporarily be more comfortable, but we would slowly shrink until we died out. The only way to survive is to continually strive forward- reaching out with the good news. Hospitality means caring beyond ourselves.

This is not a scholarly devotion, but one that takes the scripture in its plain sense, trusting the witness of the Gospel as true and powerful. While the whole family should be able to get something out of this- and it is written so families may use it for an advent devotion, hopefully there are some thought provoking reminders found in these special characters.

Advent means coming, and the theme of advent is waiting. While it is a bit artificial to wait again on the Christ who has come, it is also true that we should remember, re-live, and re-open our hearts to the coming Christ. To not remember these stories is to forget who we are. But to find ourselves a bit in these characters helps us to find our identity and hopefully the One who both made us and came down to rescue us. God, who made the world hospitable, came down out of hospitality. Some received Him, but many did not. His hospitality is a reminder to us all to be hospitable to others. In the face of the mean-ness of other human beings and in the face of those who do not respect other human beings and their lives, we remember that God is faithful in every generation.

Pastor Ben

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT- 11/30/2025- GOD MADE A HOSPITABLE WORLD

John 1:1-5, 10-14; Gen. 1:31 Activity- Light the First Candle on the Advent Wreath.

THOUGHTS: The first character of Christmas is God. God is the first Actor on the stage who even made the stage. “In the beginning was the Word [Jesus] and the Word [Jesus] was with God and the Word [Jesus] was God...through Him all things were made...in Him was life and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” Here we see Jesus as part of the Trinity, making the world- giving it life and light- but even as He did this some [darkness] did not accept this/understand this/welcome this.

God made a world where we can live. Hospitality is rooted and began in the person and love of God. Hospitality is not just a recent fad or a cultural trend. God made everything we need to survive- gravity, sun/heat, water, habitable temperature (compare Mars or Mercury), our stomachs and then food to fill them. He made our eyes to take in the beauty all around, and to see others. He made our ears to hear the birds, music, and the cry of others for help. Genesis 1 tells us over and over “and it was good” (1:25). The plurality of the godhead- the “Let us” of Genesis 1:26 and the “Word” [Jesus] there in the beginning- point to hospitality- the ability to get along- to abide together with another. There was no argument, no debate only “let us do this.” In the beginning everything was copacetic- fit together- using the fire and water of stuff to make a world designed to welcome the creatures and humans God has created.

My young granddaughter has to have everything just right before she can move ahead. To ride in a car, she needs comfort, maybe something beside her to drink, the seat belt buckled first. She says, “Dotchy, I have to be ‘situated.’” God made everything “situated.” Genesis tells us God placed human beings in a “garden” where their needs are met- and asked us to be stewards of it. We are made to enjoy the great creation God has given and to care for it.

When did Hospitality Start? Is the Same question as- “When Did God start loving us?” Advent and Christmas are a remembering that “God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son.” He created the world, and then He came into it. Both of these are acts of hospitality. Hospitality is simply welcoming, accepting, loving others. Hospitality does not depend on our being perfect, but depends upon our having grace. Jesus said at one point that He came to save sinners (Luke 5:31-32; 1 Tim. 1:15). That is good news because none of us are perfect- all sin and fall short of the glory of God. When we welcome people into our homes at Christmas- or when we go to someone else’s home- we go despite our differences theologically, politically, morally, philosophically. Christian hospitality extends to all- just as Christ came to all who would receive Him (Jn. 1:12). It is possible to deny hospitality. It is possible to not be hospitable. But our call is to show the love of Christ to others.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the world you made that allows me to live. Thank you that you loved this world (and me) and invite me to love others. Give me grace to pass the hospitality you show me to others.

Quote from Open Heart Open Home: “Perichoresis Koinonia” [literally ‘dancing around fellowship’ in Greek] is a description of the Trinity stepping together in endless harmony. It is the Holy! Holy! Holy! In step with each other, within a circle of no beginning and no ending. Hospitality is inviting those standing outside the dance to come join in.

Application: Make general and concrete plans to invite others to join you over advent or Christmas.



[Picture of earth from the moon Christmas Eve 1968]

12/1/25 ABRAHAM

Read Genesis 18:1-10; Matthew 1:1-2

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: ² Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. (Mt. 1:1,2)

Thoughts: Jesus Christ has a genealogy (family) because he was not a made up character but an historical person who walked this earth and breathed our air. The Gospels begin with a family tree of Jesus to remind us that he was truly a human being. Matthew does not begin with Adam, but with Abraham, the father of faith and specifically calls Jesus “The Son of David” which is a kingly title.

Abraham’s nephew, Lot, was captured and he gathered a small group and attacked his nephew’s attackers and rescued them miraculously. Similarly, David’s family was captured by raiders and he chased the raiders down and rescued his family. Both cared for their family and protected them- which is a basic of hospitality.

Jesus, despite calls for him to do otherwise, did not claim kingship until the week before his death- and he claimed a kingdom not of this world. He did not encourage armed rebellion or terrorism against the Romans. Instead, Jesus encouraged trust in God even in the face of the cross and injustice. The non-violence of Jesus stands in sharp contrast to the rebellion against the Romans in AD 70 which led to the destruction of the Temple. Christmas is in some ways about family. Jesus’ family stuck together- Joseph, Mary, and him through it all- through no room at the inn, to being refugees in Egypt- to moving back to Nazareth. Even on the cross he asked John to take care of his mother. This Christmas think of touching base in love for your family- even if they are estranged. Christ extended the family saying “Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister and mother” (Mk: 3:35).

Prayer: Lord, thank you that you walked here among us. Thank you that you put us in families and our church family at Spring Valley Presbyterian. Help me to be a good family member.

Sing: “What Child is this who laid to rest, on Mary’s lap is sleeping, whom angels greet with anthems sweet while shepherds watch are keeping? This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing; haste, haste to bring him laude the babe, the child of Mary.”

(P 145 Glory to God)

Application: Send a card, note, email, or text to some relative (maybe a cousin?) you haven’t touched base with for awhile- (inspired by Christ’s love for family).



Father Abraham

Hortas Dekucuarum
Wikipedia Commons
Hrrad Von Landsberg
CC BY SA -30

Quote from Open Heart, Open Home: “Hospitality like charity, in order to be true, has to begin at home...Did all this [hospitality] count if I acted like a hellion the hour before company arrived?”

EXTRA FOR ADULTS:

EXTRA BIBLICAL SOURCES FOR THE EXISTENCE OF JESUS

Cornelius Tacitus a Roman pagan historian (A.D. 55-120) writes in “The Annals” Nothing could relieve Nero of the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also. (Annals XV, 44)

Lucian of Samasata was a Greek satirist who wrote, “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.” (The Death of Peregrine, 11-13 2nd century)

Suetonius, another Roman historian under Hadrian wrote, “As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.” This refers to the event of 49 AD recorded in Acts 18:2.

Pliny the Younger wrote about 112- “The Christians affirmed, however that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, not to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up.” (Epistles X,96)

Jewish Historians: The Babylonian Talmud refers to Jesus (Yeshu) as being hanged on the eve of Passover (Sanhedrin 43a). Josephus was a contemporary of Jesus in Judea (b. 37 d 100) in his Antiquities “Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man...for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and Gentiles...and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principled men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him... and the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day. (Antiquities XVIII,33).

As one person put it, between the eyewitness accounts in the Bible, the millions who credit his existence passed on from generation to generation, and the extra biblical accounts, there is more evidence for the existence of Jesus than any other person of his time or perhaps of history.



12/2- Mt. 1:5- Rahab, Ruth and Boaz

⁵ Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, (Mt. 1:5)

“Where you go, I will go; where you stay, I will stay; your people will be my people; your God my God.” 1:16

Thoughts: Boaz was an ancestor of Jesus. His mother, Rahab, was a sinful woman of Jericho, who turned her life around by coming to God. Boaz was a wise and rich business man who had pity on this outsider (Ruth) who was so poor she could hardly eat. It is a love story of how God uses all of us- rich, poor, sinner, saint to accomplish His will. The law said that we should leave food for the poor (voluntarily) so they could glean from the fields. Boaz showed that hospitality to the poor and had mercy on Ruth who needed such hospitality and love. Boaz saw through to her heart of loyalty and faith. Jesus would not have been who he was without Rahab and Ruth. But He also would not be who He was without the grace and acceptance of Boaz who no doubt learned such grace and acceptance from his mother who could have been an outcast but ended up a heroine.

One of my early favorite memories was when Presbyterian families signed up to host a child from Thornwell Home for Children at their house for Thanksgiving. We did so for about five years. It was a wonderful gift for me as a child as much as it was for the children who came.

Application: This Christmas, think of those you know who have failed or done bad things. Purposefully do something kind for them in the name of Rahab and Boaz the ancestors of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, thank you that you care about all of us. Thank you that there is room in your family and heart for all kinds of people. Help us to come to you for forgiveness and grace.

Sing “What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to ear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul, to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.” (P. 215 Glory to God)



Ruth in Boaz's field 1828
Julius Schnorr Von Carolsfeld

Quote from OHOH [Open Heart, Open Home]
“In this inhospitable world a Christian home is a miracle to be shared. There isn't one of us who can't say, 'Come in. Why don't you come in?'"

12/3- Mt. 1:6- David (Also Psalm 78:70-72)

⁶and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife* of Uriah.

Thoughts: Jesus has in his family line “David the king.” All those other names in this passage after David were also kings. But David is called “the” king because of his great example of goodness and grace. He was a shepherd boy- lifted up by the Great Shepherd to shepherd the people of God (Ps. 78:70-72). God indeed lifts up the humble. David, after his throne was secure, asked, “Is there anyone from Saul’s family I can show kindness to?” Saul had tried to kill him. But David sought to turn the other cheek and be hospitable.

He was not perfect, as illustrated in this passage. The Bible does not hold out people as perfect. In fact, some struggle with how God could use a sinner like David- but truth is, we all are sinners. David was a great king, but he was not that great a family man. His own son, Absalom rebelled against him. He was not as loving to his wives as he should have been. He was forced out of the capital and out of his palace. Yet God used David, and David won the day. . God uses us. Jesus is purposefully linked to David and is called “The Prince of Peace.” We are called to be instruments of His peace, showing hospitality.

Application: How can Jesus give you more peace? How can you bring more peace to others? Write a Christmas card tonight or tomorrow to someone you know who is struggling.

Prayer: Prince of Peace, may I walk in your ways and bring honor to you.



Statue replica of David by Michelangelo
(Taken by Ben Sloan overlooking Florence Italy)

Song: Once in Royal David’s City stood a lowly cattle shed, Where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed; Mary was that mother mild; Jesus Christ her little child.

Quote OHOH- “Before I fall asleep I sometimes pray for each house on the street...that the inhabitants will begin to search for happiness and hunger after righteousness.”

12/4- Mt. 1:8-11- Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah

⁸ Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. ⁹ Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. ¹⁰ Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. ¹¹ Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

Thoughts: Three really good kings are found in this list of kings. Jehoshaphat who always looked to God before he did anything; He conquered a huge army just by leaving Jerusalem in praise to God. Hezekiah conquered the mighty Assyrians in an amazing miracle and re-instated the Passover. Josiah also reinstated the Passover and cleaned the Temple, finding a hidden copy of the Law (probably Deuteronomy) there. These three kings all trusted God. In contrast to them are Ahaz who brought an altar from Syria into the Temple and then locked the doors of the Temple and Manasseh who sacrificed his own child in worship of pagan gods (both in the name of tolerance of religion). Ahaz's shutting worship was most inhospitable. Manasseh's killing of his son was drastic inhospitality and murder. Both Ahaz and Manasseh hurt the people economically, socially, religiously, and politically- the borders shrunk under their leadership, and Manasseh was actually captured and taken into exile. It matters that leaders are not ashamed to trust God and inspire the people to trust Him too. Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah invited those who believed outside their borders to come join them in worship (especially the Passover). Like anyone's genealogy, Jesus' genealogy has good and bad in it. We can learn from those who have gone before us. Psalm 33 says, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." Today, I hope, we can see this is true. God protects us when we look to Him. When we forsake Him- morally and spiritually- then we lose His protection (as happened with Ahaz and Manasseh).

Coins depicting Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and the picture above is of Josiah in the Sistine Chapel (Michelangelo December, 1511)



Prayer: Lord, may I learn from the good kings to fear you in how I treat others and am over others.

Song: "O Worship the King all glorious above! All greatfully sing his power and his love; our shield and defender the ancient of days, pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.

Activity: Send an email to a politician you admire and thank them and say a prayer for them.

Quote OHOH: For the Christian, there is no caste, no race, no sex discrimination. We must minister to all...What would happen if each church adopted a hurting child by sponsoring a foster family?

12/5- Mt. 1:16- 21,24- Joseph

¹⁶ And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^f because he will save his people from their sins.”
²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”^g (which means “God with us”).

²⁴ Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, ²⁵ and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS.

Thoughts: Joseph was a man full of integrity and grace. He was kind and faithful to Mary though he was not sure (until an angel spoke to him in a dream) that Mary was faithful to him. God's plan was to infiltrate the world in a covert fashion- in a non-flashy way. He did not parade into town. Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth entered into a small town as a nobody. But it was His love that changed the world.

Jesus came to save His people from their worst enemy. The worst enemy is not poverty. The worst enemy is not terrorism. The worst enemy is sin and death which are related. When Jesus came to save us from our sins, He also saves us from our spiritual death- the consequence of sin. Jesus is the solution to the ultimate enemies of life and peace for He is the Prince of Peace.

Joseph adopted Jesus as his own. He sacrificed his reputation, his possessions, and all for Him. Such adoption or fostering is a strong image of hospitality. For men, Joseph is a tremendous model of hospitality and kindness to his wife and children.

Prayer: In tough times and good times, help me to be a person of integrity- doing your will and the right thing.

Activity: Do something for the children of Thornwell Home who may have lost or cannot be with their earthly father. At the least say a prayer for them.



Song: “To a maid engaged to Joseph, the angel Gabriel came. Fear not the angel told her, I come to bring good news; good news I come to tell you, good news I say, good news.”
(#98 in Glory to God)

Joseph with Jesus- Caspar Jele 1848;
Joseph and the Angel

Quote from OHOH: Teresa of India, the Saint of the Sidewalks, works among the displaced in society, caring for the leprosy, the orphaned, serving unto Christ. She said, “Our work is for people who have forgotten how to smile, forgotten the human touch, and have a greater hunger for these than for a plate of rice. Such hunger is even greater in the West than in India.” This is the radical hospitality of the church.

[24](#)After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. [25](#)"The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people." [39](#)At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, [40](#)where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. [41](#)When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. [42](#)In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! [43](#)But why am I so



favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [44](#)As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. [45](#)Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Thoughts: Elizabeth and Zechariah were old enough to remember when Judah was free and independent under the Maccabees. Zechariah, her husband, was a priest who had the important job of keeping the incense maintained and lit. Twenty years before the priests held special honor and had a real say in the governing of the land. But all that was taken away when the Romans came to help- but then turned their help into taking over the land. Yet, Elizabeth never forgot the promises of God, and had hope that Mary's baby would be the Messiah that would rescue the people somehow. It is important, in the face of fear, to always believe in the promises of God. The things we have can be stripped away, our titles and our money can disappear, but our focus is never on what we lose, but on the One who will always be with us- Immanuel- God with us- Jesus. Elizabeth welcomed Mary, and her baby (John) leapt in the presence of the baby Jesus. The picture shows Elizabeth welcoming her cousin with open arms- though some doubtless accused her of having a baby before marriage (a horrible offense in that day). This was such an encouragement to Mary that it is recorded forever. People need the hospitality of encouragement.

Prayer: May your presence cause me to leap for hope and joy as John did in your presence, Lord.

Activity: Think of someone who is older who needs some cheering up by a child. Make a card for someone who is older to cheer them.

Song: O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel!

(p. 88- Glory to God.)

Quote from OHOH: "Fill our home, Lord, with yourself. Let us give to those who come, you."



²¹Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.²²When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak. ⁵⁹On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, ⁶⁰but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.” ⁶¹They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.” ⁶²Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” ⁶⁴Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

Thoughts: What were the people thinking who observed Zechariah? God was beginning to try to stir the people up. They at first realized Zechariah had seen a vision when he exited the Temple mute. This, in itself was a hopeful sign, for visions and prophecies were scarce. God was showing them He was still at work despite the oppression and terror of the Romans and Herod. When Zechariah began to speak the minute he wrote “His name is John” everyone knew there was something special going on and something special going on with the child. God is not silent. He speaks through His Word and Spirit. The first way God spoke to the people was through a muted priest. Today He still speaks in surprising ways to tell us He is around and we should not forsake Him.

Part of hospitality is being around other people so they can see God at work through you. We are not called to live in a holy huddle or a Christian ghetto. We are called to be salt and light to the world. Part of that is just being around others and living out our faith and hospitality.

Prayer: Lord, speak to us anew and wake us up to your presence.

Activity: Think of the people you may know who do not take part in church regularly. Today say a prayer for them, and seek to invite someone to Christmas Eve worship.

Song: Let all Mortal Flesh Keep Silence and with fear and trembling stand; ponder nothing earthly minded, for with blessing in his hand... Christ our God to earth descendeth, our full homage to demand. (#347 Glory to God)

Quote from OHOH [Open Heart, Open Home]: “I have come to learn how important it is to sit in silence before my Maker. The time for words and pleas and explanations is over. We do not look for bright lights or sensations or experiences but for Him. ‘Come Lord Jesus, Be our Guest’ is no longer the prattled singsong of the children at the table, but the deep cry of my heart. At night, lying on the pillow, I would invite Him to inhabit our home, to fill every room with His love. ‘Fill our home, Lord with yourself. Let us give to those who come to you.’”

12/8- Luke 1:12-22, 62-64 Zechariah

[12](#)When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. [13](#)But the angel said to him: “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.[14](#)He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, [15](#)for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. [16](#)He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. [17](#)And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” [18](#)Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

[19](#)The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. [20](#)And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.”

[21](#)Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.[22](#)When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

...[62](#)Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. [63](#)He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” [64](#)Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

Thoughts: Zechariah, the priest, was a godly man in the midst of legalism on the one hand and hedonism on the other. But he was a godly man who doubted the power and ability of God. It is the skeptics and non-believers who only believe in a philosophy and system and do not account for God’s ability to change things and change people. Even when face to face with an angel, Zechariah still doubted. We should learn to believe that nothing is impossible with God- not even an old man and his wife having a baby.



Prayer: Lord, in you all things are possible. Help me to believe and act on that belief.

Activity: If you know someone who doubts God, pray for them today. As Zechariah needed to have faith and hope so do they.

Song: Watchman Tell us of the night, what its signs of promise are.
Traveler, what a wondrous sight: see the glory beaming star.
Watchman does its beauteous ray news of joy or hope foretell?
Traveler, yes; it brings the day, promised day of Israel. (Right Zechariah and the Angel- W. Blake)

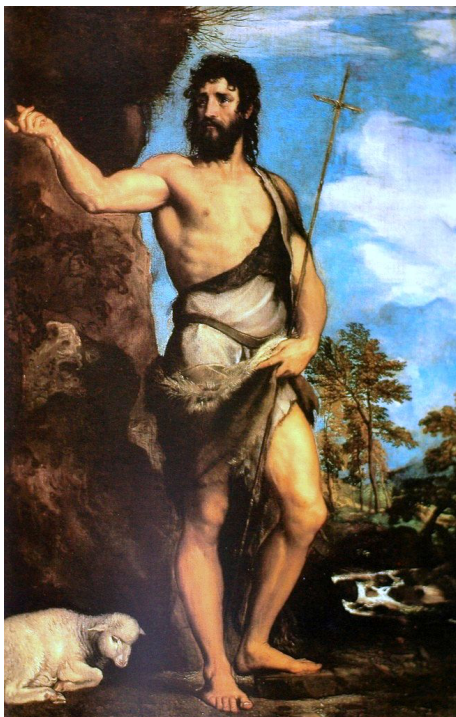
Quote from OHOH: “The Spirit is not bound by the usual. Nor is God static.”

12/9- John 1:27, 29,30; 3:30 John the Baptist

He is the One who comes after me [said John], the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me...He must become increase and I must decrease.'"

Thoughts: John the Baptist was called by Jesus "the greatest born among women." He was considered a prophet in the power and office of Elijah. John did an amazing job. He humbled himself- saying "He [Jesus] must increase while I must decrease." This is great advice for all of us. The word "John" means "God is gracious" and He was. John did not shrink back from challenging even the soldiers who were oppressing the people to not be over-demanding just because they could. He also did not hesitate to rebuke Herod the King- even at cost to his life. He was not about to play it safe or be politically correct so as not to offend the powers that be. John was the one who pointed to Jesus- "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29)." We too can point to Jesus. John was the one who prepared the way for Jesus' coming. He teaches us to be prepared to experience Christ by turning away from evil and turning toward God. John welcomed Jesus into his ministry and had no ego to uphold. He was able to be hospitable to the One with greater gifts because his main concern was the glory of God.

Prayer: Lord, may I point to you the author and perfecter of my faith.



St. John by Titian 1542

Activity: Prepare today to have a holy Christmas. What do you need to do to make your Christmas more holy? Can you get your children a religious gift as well as a regular gift? Could you teach your children generosity by getting a gift for a Thornwell child?

Song: Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary; pure and holy; tried and true; With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

Quote from OHOH: "Truly they shine forth Christ as they give the simplest gifts of tender compassion to those in the greatest of need."

12/10- Luke 2:1-4 Caesar Augustus

1In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2**(This was the first census that took place while ^aQuirinius was governor of Syria.) **3**And everyone went to their own town to register.

4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

Thoughts: Caesar Augustus perhaps was one of the most powerful and wealthy men in the history of the world. He instigated the Pax Romana- a time of relative peace for most of the Mediterranean world. He made a decree that everyone should be counted in order to procure his taxes. Such a census also showed the world that the government was in control. Yet such control was an illusion. God used Caesar's desire to control the world to control where His Son would be born- not in Nazareth but in the prophesied Bethlehem (Micah 5:2- prophesied 300 years before). The mightiest king of history played a role in the birthplace of the King of kings. Terrorism and war interrupt the illusion of our peace, distraction, and control. Yet, God is in control despite the illusion of the terrorist's chaos. His purposes and plans will be achieved. Think of how to be caring to your leaders for they are people who need God as well.

Prayer: Sovereign God, King of kings. May my heart be yours. I trust in you and your plan for life.



Caesar Augustus

Activity: It is important to teach our children and ourselves to pray for those in authority over us. Take time to send a Christmas card to a politician, thanking them for their public service and telling them you have prayed for them.

Song: (to tune of "I Love to Tell the Story")
All hail to God's anointed, great David's
greater Son! All hail, in time appointed your
reign on earth begun! You come to break
oppression, to set the captive free, to take
away transgression and rule in equity.

All rulers bow before you, and gold and
incense bring. All nations shall adore you,
your praise all people sing. To you shall
prayer unceasing and daily vows ascend.
Your rule is still increasing; your rule is
without end.

Quote from OHOH: Catherine Zell of
Strasburg (a preacher's wife) opened her
home to refugees and singlehandedly
provided relief for thousands [despite their
denomination/beliefs].

12/11- Luke 2:6, 7- The Innkeeper- “No Room...But we have a Stable”

6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Thoughts: There have been debates about whether the innkeeper in Bethlehem was a terrible person- kicking a pregnant woman out of the inn, or a merciful person finding a barn for her in crowded circumstances. This passage does not judge, and we would do well to not judge either. Yet, we can learn to be merciful to the homeless, the stranger, the lost- for we may be entertaining angels unawares. Hospitality should be a part of who we are. In tough times- like floods or terrorism it is even more important. That shopkeepers opened their shops to strangers escaping the dust of falling buildings on 911 in New York makes them heroes. That an innkeeper would open his door- even a barn door- to a pregnant woman on a crowded night- makes him also a type of hero.

Prayer: Help me to be hospitable as you have been hospitable to me. There is room in my heart for you, and help me to open my life to others.



Activity: Who is left out this Christmas? Do something for the homeless or young mothers today or tomorrow.

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

O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today! We hear the Christmas angels- the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

Quote from OHOH: “How often, with a minimal supply and increasing demand, I can testify to His creating enough for all from fishes and loaves.”

12/12- Luke 2:9-13 The Angels

[9](#)An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.[10](#)But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. [11](#)Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. [12](#)This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”[13](#)Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests.”

Thoughts: Christmas without angels would be hard to imagine. But we restrain angels to the memory of Christmas instead of the mysterious reality of today's Christmas. The term “angel” means “messenger.” These powerful messengers woke the shepherds up from their status quo. The shepherds' response was to also be messengers by going and telling everyone they met about Jesus' birth and what they saw. We can be messengers of the good news as we share the hope we have in Jesus with others. People need their fear shattered by those who bring good news- “Do not be afraid for I bring you good news of great joy for everyone.”

Often today we talk about someone as “an angel” who is kind, goes the extra mile, or helps someone in need. This idea of hospitality should not be separated from the idea of sharing good news. The good news of Christ gives us hope, lifts our spirits, tells us we are not forgotten or alone.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be a good messenger of your great news.

Activity: Angels were messengers of good news. How can you encourage someone today? Compliment and encourage someone to build them up.

Song: Hark the Herald Angels sing, glory to the newborn king! Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled. Joyful all ye nations rise; join the triumph of the skies; with the angelic host proclaim, Christ is born in Bethlehem. Hark! The Herald Angels sing- glory to the newborn king!



Quote from OHOH: “It really doesn't matter how big your rooms are. Somehow Christ expands the walls or compresses the people.”

Thomas Cole

12/13- Luke 2:8, 15-20 The Shepherds

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Thoughts: The shepherds were oblivious to Rome. They were not oppressed by the soldiers in the city. They could see Herod's fortress in the distance from the fields of Bethlehem. But, they were just ordinary folk trying to live out their lives. Yet the shepherds were nervous and afraid. They had little hope for anything good- but the angel said they had good news for all people- even shepherds. Today, the hope of Christ calms the fears of all- rich and poor and those closest to tragedy and those far away. The shepherds went to investigate Jesus. We should too, leaving our busy-ness behind.

Shepherds would be equivalent to the working homeless, or to those who work all the time for a small place. Most lived with their sheep in the fields, in the pens, or in caves. Shepherds were always on call- always on guard – a bit like first responders today. But God brought the good news to them first.

Prayer: Lord, shatter my busy-ness, my fears, my expectations of the status quo. Come to us and abide with us O Lord Emmanuel.

Activity: Today remember those who have to work a lot (like the shepherds) to make their living- even the farmers, the fire fighters, police and law officers, the army soldiers far away. Make a card for someone you know or for the local fire station thanking them for all they do.

Song: There's a star in the east on Christmas morn. Rise up shepherd and follow. It will lead to the place where Christ was born. Rise up shepherd and follow. Follow, follow, rise up shepherd and follow. Follow the star of Bethlehem, Rise up shepherd and follow.

If you take good heed of the angel's words, rise up shepherd and follow, you'll forget your flocks, you'll forget your herds, rise up shepherd and follow. Follow, follow; rise up shepherd and follow; Follow the star of Bethlehem, rise up shepherd and follow.



Quote from OHOH: "Some of my economic limits are self-imposed. If my Christian friend is outclassed by what I offer- made to feel he can never return the favor- then limitations ought to be self-imposed. If we find ourselves comparing something is wrong. We are in danger of covetousness."

12/14- Third Sunday- Luke 1:29-37, 46-50 Mary “Welcoming the Baby”

Mary was troubled at these words and wondered what kind of greeting this was. So the angel told her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. [31](#) Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. [32](#) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, [33](#) and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never end!” [34](#) “How can this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” [35](#) The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born^d will be called the Son of God. [36](#) Look, even Elizabeth your relative has conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called barren is in her sixth month. [37](#) For nothing is impossible with God. [38](#) “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it happen to me according to your word.”

[46](#) Then Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, [47](#) and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! [48](#) For He has looked with favor on the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed. [49](#) For the Mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is His name. [50](#) His mercy extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation.

Thoughts: These were indeed troubling words. Mary would be accused of adultery. What would her parents, friends, the priest think? Joseph may think of “putting her away” quietly or otherwise. How could she support such a baby? She could have doubted as Zechariah did, for this was not business as usual. Instead, Mary listened. Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant- may it be to me as you have said.” Mary actually praised God that He had chosen her, a humble one to bear the Messiah. She welcomed this baby out of faith that God would make it work.

Mary welcomed Christ into her life. We should too. This was the ultimate form of hospitality to God. Any child is hard to have, but to bear the weight of the Messiah is a tremendous joy and burden. “O come to us, abide with us- Our Lord Emmanuel!”

Prayer: Lord, help me to live with the mystery and uniqueness of your birth. Help me to have room in my life for you.

Activity: Show the most innocent person you know love and kindness today. Text or email them a happy message.

Song: The virgin Mary had a baby boy, the virgin baby had a baby boy; the virgin baby had a baby boy, and the name of the boy is Jesus.

He come from the glory; he come from the glorious kingdom. He come from the glory, he come from the glorious kingdom. O yes believer! O yes believer! He come from the glory, He come from the glorious kingdom!



Quote from OHOH: “When one bends the head and in childlike simplicity asks Jesus to “come into my heart”... then each uncertain step becomes worth it all.”

12/15 Luke 2:36-40- Waiting Anna

[36](#)There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, [37](#)and then was a widow until she was eighty-four.^a She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. [38](#)Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Thoughts: Why did Anna live in the Temple? Anna wanted to be close to worship and close to the Lord. She was known for her godliness and waiting on the Lord. She recognized the special person of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Anna lived a sheltered life- away from the terrorism of the Romans and the zealots. There are many who are really not physically affected by terrorism and they have the opportunity to see God in peace and waiting.

Anna came up to them. She was not a hermit- she was waiting for a chance to come up to God- up to greet the Messiah. Anna, though old, took initiative to get out of her comfort zone and go up to them, welcome and greet them in Gods name. Sometimes- in fact most times- hospitality takes effort. But it pleases God to welcome others.

Prayer: Lord, in my peaceful moments, help me to see you the Prince of Peace and recognize your presence.

Activity: How can you help someone have patience? Telling them to have patience doesn't work. Perhaps we can show them. If you can, visit an elderly person- maybe at the Lowman Home or Presbyterian Home and just let them know you care.

Song: Jesus, Jesus, O what a wonderful child! Jesus, Jesus, so holy meek and mild. New life, new hope, the child will bring. Listen to the angels sing! Glory, Glory Glory to the newborn king!" (Glory to God #126)



Quote by OHOH: "Many besides children need hiding places for short or longer periods of time."

Anna by Rembrandt

12/16- The Waiting Simeon Luke 2:25-35 “The Old Welcomes the Baby”

25Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. **26**It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. **27**Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, **28**Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: **29**“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. **30**For my eyes have seen your salvation, **31**which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: **32**a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” **33**The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. **34**Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, **35**so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Thoughts: Jesus later said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” Perhaps Simeon’s righteousness, devoutness, and patience put him in a position to see God while he was alive. In our day, we are not called to panic, to grumble, to give into temptation, but to wait on the Lord. In our day we want instant things- instant communication (text, phone, emails), instant answers (look it up on Google). Simeon is an example of godly waiting and patience in God. Instant trust, instant hope, instant patience does not exist. Simeon also knew how to expand horizons. His concern was not just for Jewish independence. He was concerned for reaching the whole world- the Gentiles included. This means this older wise man foreknew that the Romans would be conquered not by the sword but by the Good News of God. The Hope of the world is not found in politics, weapons, or money- but in the eternal hope of God.

Simeon took Jesus in his arms. This meant so much to the parents that this has been told for centuries. The old appreciated the new baby and the new change this baby would bring- a light for the Gentiles. He was ready to die now for he had seen God. To be able to hold the Messiah, the promised one, means the dream had been fulfilled. In some sense, there is fulfillment that happens when we are hospitable. For the old to care for the next generation is a form of hospitality. Here Simeon was welcoming another baby for dedication- which is important. But what makes this special is he recognized this baby as special- the one he had been waiting for- the fulfiller of dreams had come- the One who would break the barrier with the Gentiles. So He welcomed Him with hospitality- and sets us an example.

Prayer: Lord, may I put my patient hope in you no matter what the world faces. Help me seek purity and patience over worldliness and hurry.



Activity: Who do you know in your family or friends who has a pure heart? Send them a note by text, email, social media or a card.

Song: Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in thee.
Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Quote from OHOH: For years I prayed, “Father, if you want me to take into our home one of these disadvantaged children, please bring that child to me.”

Simeon- Rembrandt

[3](#)When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. [4](#)When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where ... [16](#)When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. the Messiah was to be born. [7](#)Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. [8](#)He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." [12](#)And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. [13](#)When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

Thoughts: Herod was supposed to be the mediator between Rome and the Jewish people, but he was always nervous of losing his throne. Herod banished one wife, killed another and ordered a son be killed to keep his throne. He ordered John the Baptist beheaded upon a vow he made to his dancing daughter. While he built the Temple into one of the brief wonders of the world he also built Pagan temples too. He professed the Jewish faith but he did not live it nor did he value it. So Herod also tried to kill the child Jesus. He was less concerned for God as he was that he keep his throne. In Revelation 12 Herod (and the Romans- the government) is depicted as a red dragon trying to kill the child Jesus and the mother. We should ask ourselves, do we only want God to help us establish our kingdom, or do we live and give for His kingdom? Herod is the example of inhospitality. He faked hospitality to the Magi, but then tried to kill all the babies under two years in Bethlehem to preserve his throne.

Prayer: Lord, give me grace to live for you and not for my own pride. Help me be hospitable.



Activity: Think of a politician you do not agree with and you think is doing bad things. Send that person a card that wishes them a Merry Christmas and offers up a prayer for them.

Song: Comfort comfort now my people;
Tell of Peace! So says our God.
Comfort those who sit in darkness
mourning under sorrow's load.
To my people now proclaim that my
pardon waits for them. Tell them that their
sins I cover, and their warfare now is over.
(Glory to God #87)

Above Herodium- desert fortress of King Herod- seen from Bethlehem.
Herod's power was visible especially from where the King of kings
was born!

Quote OHOH: "Some of our commitments to the neglected children of the world may be no more than supporting a child vicariously through one of the many Christian organizations that fund overseas sponsorship programs."

12/18- The Magi Mt. 2:1-3, 9-12 “Going Out of Their Way to Welcome and Worship”

¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, ²asking, “Where is the One who has been born King of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him... ⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the Child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with great delight. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the Child with His mother Mary, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they withdrew to their country by another route.

Thoughts: The people of Jerusalem reacted to the news. They were “disturbed” or “troubled” (KJV). It bothered them that perhaps another king was born. The status quo was disrupted, and they also doubtless knew Herod wouldn’t let anyone get in his way. But there is no indication that these “troubled” people bothered to check it out. It was about 22 miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The three kings could travel over 600 miles to find a foreign king to them, but there is no record that one person traveled 22 miles to see if their own king was born. Let it not be said of us that we would not travel a few miles in a warm car to go to a safe warm sanctuary to visit our king. Later the people of Jerusalem were disturbed again and cried out, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Perhaps if they had responded to Christ earlier (at his birth and in his ministry) they would not have had such a hard time at his end.

The Magi are examples of hospitality. They cared to travel so far, and also brought gifts with them. Let us also seek Him and worship Him.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from not caring about you. Help me not to be bothered by your existence but to crave and desire your presence in my life.

Song: Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright; Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace! Sleep in heavenly peace!



Quote from OHOH: “I realized my time was His time. I began to start each day with an inquiry of the Lord, ‘These are my plans. Is this what you want me to do?’”

12/19- The Scribes and Pharisees- Mt. 2:3-6

3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:|

6" 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.' "

Thoughts: The criticism of the people of Jerusalem- their apathy and not seeking after the Messiah could also be described to the people who knew better- the chief priests and teachers of the law. They knew how to read the prophecies- that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Maybe they were too scared of the fiercely jealous Herod to go seeking after the Messiah. Most likely their skepticism mixed with apathy and a tad of fear- to just stay home in their warm beds. Let us not seek our comfort and miss out on the most important and life-changing presence of God in worship.

One of the great killers of hospitality is pride and seeking our own comfort. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were famous for wanting to "look good." Jesus called them "whitewashed walls" of tombs- that look good on the outside but inside there is nothing but death and decay. In Open Heart, Open Home, Karen Mains points out that hospitality is not entertaining.

Prayer: Lord, give me a desire to worship you that would motivate me to love you more than my comfort.

Song: People look east the time is near; of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table.
People look east and sing today- love the guest is on the way.



Quote from OHOH: "True hospitality comes before pride. I had to learn to put away pride when I open my front door and accept those standing there as they are. Consequently, I expect them to accept me as they find me."

12/20- His Own People Did Not Receive Him- John 1:10-12

[10](#)He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11](#)He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12-But to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Thoughts: This is truly a sad verse. The Maker goes unrecognized. The One who should get all the credit gets ignored. He knocked on the door, but we left him out in the cold. The great Lord is treated worse than a neighbor, worse than a stranger, worse than an enemy. In many ways hospitality is a theme throughout Christmas. The Innkeeper and people should have been more hospitable to Mary. The song, "Sweet Little Jesus Boy- we didn't know who you were" reminds us that we need to open our eyes to God and welcome Him in.

Let us welcome Christ to our world by welcoming Him anew into our hearts.

Prayer: Lord, when you knock on the door of my heart, give me grace to welcome you in.

Song: Angels we have heard on high; sweetly singing o'er the plains. And the mountains in reply. Echoing their joyous strains. Gloria in excelsis deo! Gloria in excelsis deo!



1 Peter 4:9 "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."

12/21- BUT TO ALL WHO RECEIVED HIM- Romans 10:9-10; John 1:12

Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. (Jn. 1:12);

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:9,10)

At Christmas many will receive gifts. The receiving isn't the main part of the gift experience. Yet if we do not receive the gift that is offered us, the gift goes unappreciated. One year at our house, there were so many gifts under the tree for all the children and grandchildren. My wife's gift was in the back of the tree under the other gifts. All the other gifts had been opened, but my wife had not opened hers and I could see just a very slight look of disappointment (she gets the most joy out of seeing others receive gifts).

Jesus has offered us the gift of Himself. He is the greatest Christmas gift. Our response is to receive Him. The ability to receive and the desire to receive are gifts from God.

Part of being hospitable is to allow people to be hospitable to us. Part of being the church is not just to give to others, but also to receive the blessing of people being hospitable to us. While the disciples sought to serve Jesus, they also had to allow Jesus to wash their feet. Peter said he would not allow Jesus to wash his feet, but Jesus said unless I wash your feet you have no part in me (John 13:8). We are called to receive the gift of Jesus. Some have used the language “accept Jesus into your heart.” In our confessions it speaks of our being accepted by God as justification. Receiving Christ is not just an intellectual proposition, but it is also not simply an emotional experience. Faith is trust in the gift of God. Much like a child receiving a gift- receiving Christ is an act of joy. It is similar to greeting a long lost loved one back into your life. You welcome and rejoice to see them. The Moravian Christians have a great tradition of welcoming Christ. Their famous prayer is “Come Lord Jesus be our guest- and may this food to us be blessed.” The Moravians also leave an empty seat at their table for Christ to be their guest at the table. We do not just receive Christ once- at baptism or confirmation. Every time we take the supper we receive Him. We are called to continually welcome Him to come alongside of us by the Holy Spirit, to live with us wherever we go.

Prayer: Thank you Lord, that you invite me to welcome you into my life.

Song: O sing a song of Bethlehem of shepherds watching there; and of the news that came to them from angels in the air; the light that shone on Bethlehem fills all the world today; Of Jesus birth and peace on earth the angels sing always.

O sing a song of Nazareth, of sunny days of joy. Of sing of fragrant flower's breath and of the sinless boy; For now the flowers of Nazareth in every heart may grow; Now spreads the fame of His dear name on all the winds that blow.



12/22/25- Revelation 3:20- Jesus Asks Us to Come Into Us

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me. (Revelation 3:20)

Outside the pastor's office at Spring Valley Presbyterian is this wonderful picture of Jesus knocking on the door of our heart. Truth is all hospitality originates with God who made our world, and desires us to love and be hospitable toward each other. He comes to us and knocks on the door of our heart asking us to open up to His love. Jesus wants to come in and eat and live with us.

Jesus doesn't push the door open. We can reject Him.

The handle to open the door is on the inside of the painting. God knocks- that is grace. He calls to us, but we are called to respond and be hospitable, welcoming, and accepting to Him.

Prayer: Lord, I hear you knocking. Come into my heart this advent and help me to invite others to you as well.

Song: Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere- go tell it on the mountain Jesus Christ is born. Lo in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born, and God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn.



(Warner Sallman 1942 picture of Jesus knocking on our door; Outside of the Pastor's Office at Spring Valley Presbyterian).

12/23- Fourth Sunday- John 3:16-19 Some Loved Darkness, ut Let's Love Light

For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. [19](#)This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20](#)Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. [21](#)But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Thoughts: These are great verses for Christmas Eve. One seminary professor said John 3:16 here is the gospel summarized on one verse. These verses confirm God has come- Light has come- the Son of God has come out of God's love, but we refuse His coming. We refuse God's hospitality. So many reject Jesus. We reject Jesus when we do evil. We put ourselves in a position where we are blind to the goodness and light when we love darkness and wrong. In contrast, when we do good and wait patiently for God (like Simeon) we put ourselves in a position to receive and recognize Him. But the first and most important act of hospitality is welcoming Jesus- accepting Him into His life.

Prayer: Help me to walk in the light and not in the darkness O Lord. Help me to draw and point others to you.

Song: Good Christian friends rejoice with heart and soul and voice! Give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today; ox and ass before him bow and he is in the manger now; Christ is born today! Christ is born today! (Glory to God 132).

Prayer: Lord, help me to love your light and your life.

Song: Go Tell it on the mountain! Over the hills and everywhere! Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born! While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night, behold throughout the heavens there shone a heavenly light! Go Tell it...



Quote from OHOH: "O Lord, make my hospitality as unto yours. Be forever my archetype of endeavor, my firstfruit of harvested goodness: Love for the battered, misused child, Grace to bind running ulcers of flesh and soul, eagerness for the wealthy without servility, and for the poor without superiority."

12/24- The People of Bethlehem- Choose Hospitality Luke 2

[6](#)While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,[7](#)and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them... [17](#)When they [the shepherds] had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, [18](#)and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Thoughts: The people of Bethlehem were not expectant. In the busy-ness of the crowd due to the census (and everyone wanting to claim they were related to David by ancestry), the crowds did not welcome a pregnant woman, but kicked her out to a shed- an animal stall. Later when the shepherds spread the news, the people were amazed. There is a little evidence they acted on their amazement for Joseph and Mary traditionally were allowed to stay in Bethlehem where the wise men met them. We are a very busy people. In our busy-ness between going to games for the kids or grandkids; events; work; entertainment and sports- let us decide ahead of time not to miss the most important use of our time during this season.

Prayer: Lord, give me an expectant heart and the heart to be amazed at what you do.

Come to Bethlehem and see! Him whose birth the angels sing. Come adore on bended knee Christ the Lord of heaven and earth. Gloria! In Excelsis Deo!



Bethlehem at Christmas a few years ago. In 1960 Bethlehem was 80% Christian. Today it is about 10% Christian. The Arab majority cancelled Christmas in 2023 and 2024 because of the war.

Quote from OHOH: Through eternity you have been and will be utterly hospitable. Hel me, poor, faltering, unfeeling me, to be like you, with breath beat and soul-heart poured out emptied opened. Hel me to be given to hospitality.

