

Dedicated to Holly Alexandra Ward, whose faith in God, creativity, and kindness were inspiring to those around her. May Holly's light continue to shine this Christmas.

The Wards

"Mary Holding Baby Jesus," by Holly Ward



Welcome

Hi, church family! For the past few months, we have been working on an Advent Devotional that our congregation can share during the Christmas season. This volume is a 25-day devotional with Scriptures and meditations that we hope will point us toward Christ as we celebrate his birth.

Many people helped us, and we want to thank everyone who has contributed to the project. We could not have done it without you!

Please join us in reading these Scriptures and devotions in December.

We hope you find hope, love, faith, and peace in the meditations. But most of all, we pray that this work will praise Christ.

Glory to God in the Highest!

Bethel Baptist Writing Club

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Monday, December 1

Titus 2:11-14

Christmas was a big deal in our house as I was growing up. Some might say it was over the top! Before the Thanksgiving dishes were put away, Christmas decorations were taken down from the attic. It was like this every year, so our confident expectancy for what was to come was well grounded in what had occurred in the past.

In Titus 2:11 Paul reminds us the grace of God appeared at the first advent there in Bethlehem. That first appearance was lowly, humble and, for the most part, unexpected. Only a few knew what was happening. Only a few were looking for Jesus' arrival.

The grace of God appeared at the first advent there in Bethlehem bringing salvation. Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ graciously gave himself for us and to redeem us. He gave himself to set us apart for himself and fill us with a passion to serve him.

The grace of God appeared at the first advent there in Bethlehem to train us; to teach us that grace not only saves us, it also sets us free from the condemnation and control of sin and teaches us to live for Jesus instead of ourselves. It trains us to live hopeful, holy lives for his glory.

The reality that the grace of God appeared that first time is the basis of our confident hope and expectation of his glorious return. Only a few shepherds saw his glory that first time, his greatness was veiled. The second "appearing" will be universally glorious and his greatness will be evident to all. Every knee will bow before him (Phil 2:10) and every eye will see him (Rev 1:7).

Our confident hope in Jesus' triumphant return is based on the grace of God that appeared in Jesus Christ at his first coming. That same confident hope is demonstrated today as we live for him instead of ourselves. Yes, we are waiting for our blessed hope. This is our confident expectancy.

Gerald Hodges

Tuesday, December 2

Psalm 27

At Christmas, we celebrate that Christ entered the world as a light in the darkness. In Psalm 27:1 David declares "The Lord is my light." Christ came as a baby to fulfill the promise of being the true and only light of the world. In this time of uncertainty, busy schedules, fears, and heavy hearts, Christmas still arrives. Christmas does not take away these feelings but provides a reminder of the hope that we can find in Christ. As David says in verse 3, "Though an army encamp against me my heart shall not fear. Though war arises against me, yet I will be confident." This serves as a reminder of the hope that we do not have to face our struggles and fears alone. Christmas is a reminder that as we are waiting for his return we can be assured that what God promises, he fulfills. God sent himself in flesh so we could see his beauty through the face of Christ—full of grace, mercy, and truth. Just as Christ came as a baby we can be confident as we wait for his second coming. This Christmas season let Jesus be your light and hope. When the pressure of the world builds, stop and whisper, "Jesus is my light." Amid the hectic demands of this season, set time aside to simply be with Him and continue to wait with hope. The same God that kept his promise in Bethlehem will be faithful to keep his promises now. As David states in verse 14 "Wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage."

Grace Moricle

Wednesday, December 3

Luke 1: 39-45

As we think about Mary and Elizabeth, we must remember who they were. Elizabeth was an old woman, unable to have children, and thus was considered a disappointment among her people. Mary was a teenager, a virgin and yet pregnant. Why would God choose these two women who had nothing to offer to be a part of his plan? Surely there were more dignified, wealthy, or seemingly worthy women. But God is not concerned with any of those things. These two women hoped in the Savior who was to come. Mary and Elizabeth didn't know when or how the Savior was coming, but they knew that he would come.

We have much to learn from these two women. We know more about God's plan than they did; we know all about Elizabeth's son, John the Baptist, how he wore camel's hair and ate bugs, and how he was the forerunner for the Messiah. He even started in the womb! We also know of Mary's son, Jesus, who is the Messiah, how he lived a sinless life, died a criminal's death, who was raised on the third day, forever defeating sin and death, and who ascended into heaven, making a way for us to be with Him forever. Hallelujah!

As we expectantly look to Christmas, we celebrate the fact that God became man in order to redeem us from sin and that he has promised to return to gather us, his people, for all eternity. We too, like Mary and Elizabeth, have nothing to offer Him, but praise be to "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundations of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Ephesians 1:3-4).

Let us remember, with praise and adoration, that Christ came, making a way for us to be with Him. And let us also praise Him in hopeful wonder as we anticipate His return.

Jesse Dishman

Thursday, December 4

Matthew 2: 1-12

The light of the world arrived on planet earth! Jesus Christ, the prophesied Messiah, King of the Jews, would now in the flesh, walk among all the people on earth. He would offer an eternal hope to all who are willing to accept him as Lord and Savior. However, Jesus would experience a variety of reactions to his arrival and message. Some people would be curious, some fearful, some excited, some receptive and worshipful. Some would reject Jesus and his message, while others would accept the hope he freely offers to all.

We see in Matt 2:6, a reference to the Old Testament prophecy in Micah 5:2. This reference established that the baby Jesus whom the Magi were seeking was indeed the long awaited Messiah. Jesus' birth fulfilled a seven century old prophecy that he was the King of the Jews. Jesus had come to earth, for both Jew and Gentile, to pay our sin debt and offer us an eternal hope.

In Matthew's account of the Magi's journey to find the baby Jesus, we find two distinct responses to Jesus' arrival. The first response: the Magi, who were anxiously seeking Jesus to honor and worship him. Representing those who are spiritually hungry willing to accept the hope found in trusting Jesus as Lord. The second response: King Herod, who was fearful, disturbed at the news of Jesus' birth and sought to kill him. But why? King Herod was not spiritually hungry, he was more concerned with what he would have to give up to accept the hope found in trusting Jesus.

Now, as then, we have a choice to make, as there are still only two responses to the Good News of Jesus Christ. So which choice have you made? Do you choose, like the Magi, to honor and worship Jesus? Or, like King Herod, to reject Jesus and the hope he freely offers? I pray that all will be drawn to Jesus, the light of the world, choosing to accept the eternal hope that he offers!

Doyle Ward

Friday, December 5

Luke 2: 22-38

To most people, it was probably just another ordinary day at the temple in Jerusalem. But for two individuals—Simeon and Anna—it was the most significant day of their lives. It was the day they had long awaited, hoped for, prayed over, and yearned to see: the day their promised Messiah would finally appear. How is it that these two recognized the significance of this temple day while the rest of the crowd did not? The answer lies in Luke's description of these faithful servants.

Simeon is described as "righteous and devout" and we're told that "the Holy Spirit was upon him." He grasped the magnitude of the moment because he had waited with expectant hope for God to fulfill His promises, and in that waiting, he had remained faithful and obedient. Simeon took this baby in his arms and blessed Him, overflowing with gratitude as he declared this child to be "salvation." And let us not miss that Simeon was so in step with the Lord that not only did he recognize Jesus as Israel's salvation, but also as the "light for revelation to the Gentiles."

Likewise, Anna, an elderly, widowed prophetess, was the picture of devotion to God. She never left the temple, spending her days and nights in worship, fasting, and prayer. How did she recognize that this tiny baby was the long awaited Messiah? Because Anna, like Simeon, lived in close communion with God and eagerly waited for the fulfillment of prophecy. In response, Anna gave thanks to God and shared with those around her that "redemption" had come!

I believe Simeon and Anna saw Jesus because they were looking for Him, longing for Him, in fact. Because of their faithful hope, they got to experience this magnificent moment. It makes me wonder what holy moments we may be missing because we are not expectantly seeking and yearning for the revelations of God in our "ordinary" days.

Lord, make us like Simeon and Anna—devoted, righteous, and expectant. Help us to seek You every day so that we may share Your plan and purpose with others, so that You may be glorified, and so that we can live in the joy of your fulfilled salvation.

Angela Hicks

Saturday, December 6

Matthew 28: 16-20

A Hope Beyond Ourselves

As we approach the Christmas season this week, we are focusing on hope. There are two aspects of hope that are emphasized in this passage, both of which are found through our Savior Jesus. The first is the hope that Jesus will not hold our past mistakes against us and will still use us to proclaim and spread his name throughout the earth. The second is that we will not be alone in this world and Jesus himself will provide us strength in our mission.

First, we see the eleven disciples meeting with Jesus in Galilee. Interestingly, in verse 17 they worshiped Jesus, "but some doubted." What did they doubt? In Matthew's Gospel this is the first time that the disciples are gathered together after fleeing from the Roman soldiers and abandoning Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Now they are seeing their Savior risen from the grave and they know beyond a shadow of a doubt that He truly is God. Would Jesus judge them for their abandonment? Some may not have had hope, but Jesus came near to them and proclaimed that He would use His authority to send them out into the earth to make disciples of all of the nations. Despite their previous failure, Jesus would still use them. In fact, He would use them even more than He had previously.

Second, Jesus promised that He would be with them. As at the very end of the passage, He states, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus gave them hope in a promise that He would never abandon His disciples.

While we are not the original disciples, we are still followers of Christ and we can find hope in these words as well. Jesus wants us to proclaim Him to the nations. He will use us if we are willing. Even more so, He will be with us and won't abandon us in this mission.

Agron Schmitt



Sunday, December 7

2 Timothy 1: 5-14

Love that Gives Courage and Purpose

When you think of love, what comes to mind? Is it a warm hug? The warm cookies your mom gives you when you come in from the cold? Or a kind word on a bad day? Those are beautiful expressions of love, but they're not the kind of love Paul is talking about in this passage. Paul is giving Timothy the truth about who he is in God's grand narrative of redemption.

Paul starts by telling Timothy that he has been given a gift. It's a gift that God has given him through the Holy Spirit and that God has cultivated through his mother and grandmother. The Holy Spirit has also put Paul in Timothy's life to help cultivate this gift. What is the gift? Purpose. Purpose in God's plan for the world. God loves his people so much that he gives us purpose.

That purpose is the gospel. God wants you to share the love that He has given you with each other and with the world. Timothy was following in his family's and Paul's footsteps by doing what he was called to do. God loves you in the same way and has put people in your life that you can follow and who will guide you.

Last of all, this love that God has for you is full of power. Paul tells Timothy to fan into flames the gift he has been given, to not be ashamed or fearful in the midst of the suffering that will come. Paul was in prison when he wrote this and he says he was not fearful or ashamed of his purpose. Paul knew that God would see that purpose fulfilled.

God loves you and has called you to His purpose. He has given you the same Holy Sprit that Paul and Timothy had so that you can have courage and purpose through God's love and through salvation in Jesus Christ.

Ivan Dishman

Monday, December 8

Matthew 1: 18-25

God's love for us is incredible! We sin so much, and yet He forgives us over and over again. God sent His only Son down to save us from our sins by dying on the cross. Just think about how this all began with this passage.

When God sent Jesus to the earth, an angel came to Mary explaining that she would have a child, who was the Messiah. When Joseph heard about this, he felt like his only option was to divorce Mary quietly because he was confused about the situation and must have assumed the worst about his fiancé. Because God loved Joseph, He sent an angel down to Joseph while he was dreaming and revealed to him that he was indeed to follow through with his marriage to Mary after all. It was all part of God's plan. God needed Joseph to be Jesus' earthly father so that Jesus could save us. Joseph became Mary's husband, and he knew that he must obey what God told him to do. Joseph's obedience demonstrated that he loved and trusted God. But we also see that God must have cared deeply for Joseph to allow him to be the stepfather of Jesus, the Messiah.

In verse 23 it says, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel" [which means, God with us]. This verse is very powerful and is a beautiful reminder that Jesus loves us and has gifted us with his constant presence that dwells within us. He won't forsake us; He wants to show his love for us and be with us always. Praise God for such an encouraging message.

In thinking about these amazing truths, take time to pause and consider these questions: How has God consistently shown his love to you? Why do you think God decided to love us so much? How can you love like Jesus today and everyday?

Mabry Everhart

Tuesday, December 9

Isaiah 7:10-17

King Ahaz of Judah is facing an imminent threat—an invasion is on its way from Ephraim and Syria. He's a king with the weight of all Judah on his shoulders, incredibly scared and wondering what on earth he can do to prevent any fighting. Suddenly, Isaiah arrives in court to deliver a message: He wants Ahaz to trust in God's protection by asking God for a sign. But Ahaz refuses, saying God shouldn't be put to the test.

Ahaz misses the whole point when he suggests that God doesn't want to be troubled by his affairs. Judah is God's own people, God's own invention, and God's own children. But I think Ahaz has gotten the idea that he really owns the nation—not God—and that is why Isaiah gets so angry. To think that God doesn't want to be bothered about His own affairs is a little preposterous! But it reminds me of many other stories in Scripture. What about the Prodigal Son of Luke 15, who is so confident that his father will never want anything to do with him that he resolves to return home a slave and never bother anyone? That father, in essence, says, "Did you really think you could slip back into my house unnoticed?!" This loving father wanted to be bothered by his rebellious son's affairs.

The sign of Immanuel, or "God with us," means that God has never left people who find it all too easy to ignore Him. From the very beginning, God decided to be involved in "our affairs." And let's be honest, the things that come and go here on earth aren't really our affairs. They all belong to the Father who created and sustains us. This is His story—a story about the God who chooses to be with us despite all our issues. The sign of Immanuel meant that one day, God would get so involved that he would be with us on earth, first as a baby, then as a teacher and miracle-worker, then as our savior on a cross, then as our Lord ascending to Heaven, and then as the Spirit in believers' hearts. And one day, it is we who will be with God. I thank God, who is with me always, for being that concerned on my behalf. May we never disregard His steadfast love!

Bethany Kicks

Wednesday, December 10

1 John 3: 11-18

Regardless of how many definitions we have for love in the English language, the only true act of love that has ever been demonstrated throughout all of human history was "that He laid down His life for us." This passage reminds us that we, too, must lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in this present life. In fact, loving others is a mark of a true believer and will distinguish us from the world, which is how it was intended since the beginning.

This text takes us back to the beginning by showing us what love does not look like: Cain, the evil one, who murdered his brother. While you may be mentally checking off the "no, I did not murder anybody today" box as you're reading through this, be reminded that the standard that Jesus laid before us throughout the Bible is that even if we have hate in our heart, we are a murderer. Cain did not just one day decide to launch into a murderous rage and kill Abel. Ultimately, it was birthed out of jealousy and envy. What jealousy and envy have you experienced recently? Ask the Lord to forgive you and heal your heart so that you can love others as Christ has loved you and gave himself up for you. That is how you will know you are walking in the newness of life, which is the fruit of salvation.

The holiday season can evoke many emotions. The hope is that you are filled with sweet memories that have blessed your heart and home for decades. Unfortunately, however, this season can be filled with overwhelming distractions, stress and frustration at family members, and worry over the preparation of events or large family gatherings. It can also be consumed by unrealistic expectations for others. All of these things make us no better than Cain, whose little sin gave birth to his big sin. Instead, today, be obedient to the command that has been given to us since the beginning: Choose love, not just empty words or talk, but serve others in deed and truth!

April Everhart

Thursday, December 11

Exodus 34: 4-8

Once upon a time in a far away land there was an ancient king who was believed to be simultaneously the most loving and just king to ever live. While he was ruling, it was discovered that someone was stealing from his treasury. So because he was just, he made a decree that whoever was caught stealing from the treasury would be brought before the whole kingdom and given 10 lashes. The theft continued so the king issued a final decree that said anyone caught stealing from the treasury would be given 40 lashes. This was a big deal because 40 lashes was a death sentence. As weeks went by it was eventually discovered that the person stealing was none other than the king's daughter! So the question began to ripple through the kingdom, "How could the most loving king to ever live, kill his own daughter? If he is the most just king, how could he pardon her?"

Eventually the king examined the situation and came to the conclusion that the law was clear, sin had taken place, justice must be served. Now the king's own daughter was brought in front of the entire kingdom. When she got to the front she was laid over the executioner's table, but just as the executioner raised his whip to issue the first lash, the king stood and yelled "STOP!" Silently the king left his throne, made his way down to his daughter's side, bent over her, wrapped his body around her, ripped the shirt off his own back and said, "Now hit her!" 40 lashes fell upon the back of the king, he died, and the daughter went free.

This is the love displayed for us when God sent his son to earth. Christmas was for naught if not for the cross. Before Christ died on the cross he said "IT is finished," NOT I am finished. Praise God for His perfect love!

Carter Dishman

Friday, December 12

John 21: 15-25

In the week of our Christmas Advent devotions focused on Love, let us visit a passage out of John Chapter 21.

After Jesus rose again on the third day, he remains with the disciples for a short while before his ascension to heaven. In our scripture, we see a conversation between Jesus and Peter. As Jesus predicted, Peter denied him three times after the crucifixion, even though Peter said he would never do such a thing. Peter was stricken with guilt, and while seeing Christ resurrected brought him immeasurable joy, when Jesus started asking if Peter loved him, Peter was upset because he understood that Jesus had asked him three times if he loved him—the same amount of times he had denied Christ. But Jesus did not hold this against Peter. Just as the heading of this passage states, we see Peter is reinstated as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Jesus loved Peter so much, and loves all of us so much, that he pours out his grace on all of us, a grace that frees us from the power of sin, and sets us free in Jesus' name.

In truth, we have all been in Peter's position before. We have stumbled in our walk with Christ, we have been ashamed and maybe even afraid to go to the Lord with our struggles. But just as Peter says to Jesus, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you," we know that we serve a God who formed us in our mother's womb before the very foundation of the world, and the power of His Love and Grace is beyond our understanding, and we are in awe of it. The message of the Gospel is not, "Get right with God before you approach him," but instead it is as stated in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Jack Hicks

Saturday, December 13

Philippians 2: 1-11

Christmas is the ultimate picture of love. As like minded believers, we come together to remember and reflect on the birth of Christ each year. Paul shows us in his letter that we are not to be selfish or conceited, but we are to embrace serving others above ourselves, as Christ did for us.

As a child, I always pictured the birth of Jesus as this perfect scene in my mind. Mary is perfect, her clothes never wrinkled, and there's not a speck of dirt to be found near the manger. Yet, that's completely the opposite of what we should imagine. Mary was dirty, tired, and giving birth in a dusty and smelly barn surrounded by animals. Could God have picked a different setting for the Birth of Jesus? Of course, but that isn't what He chose. He chose humility, a true picture of His heart. He selflessly sent His Son to save us because He loves us that much.

God loved us so much that He took the form of man, coming as a baby to demonstrate true humility as a servant (v.6-7). He could have been born in the inn or even a spotless palace, but instead, he chose to be born in a manger. Not the perfect shiny cradle we picture for a king. He came to serve us because He loves us and chose us. He made Himself approachable by choosing the manger. He loved us so much. He wanted to be among us as a humble servant up until that moment on the cross. He provides a perfect example for believers, serving others by doing life together and loving us unconditionally, even though we are covered in sin and fail Him daily.

Christmas paints a perfect picture of God's heart through the example of self-giving humility. Setting up the perfect picture of God's love for us, this sweet baby would live among us and then one day grow up to selflessly die on a cross for each of us when we didn't deserve it (v.8). The perfect gift.

As you reflect during this Christmas season, what are some ways you can love others through service?

Maura Miller



Sunday, December 14

Titus 1: 1-4

As Paul writes his letter of encouragement to Titus, he begins by taking the posture of a servant, expressing his utter devotion to the Lord and opening in the humble manner that would have been equivalent to the birth of our Savior. But, the birth of our Savior was only humble to the world that expected a king to arrive in a royal display. The birth of this child would change the world forever.

Maybe this humble salutation to Titus was Paul's way of not creating additional anxiety for the young pastor. Paul was fully aware of the daunting task that lay ahead of Titus, and as a coach and friend, he quickly and clearly laid out the loving attributes of a loving God. "For the sake of the faith," "their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness," "in hope of eternal life... which God promised before the ages began," are just a few of the encouraging words that Paul laid out in this opening statement. The reminder of these attributes would have emboldened Titus to walk in a way of confidence when ministering to the people of Crete.

Paul confirms with Titus in verse 4 that he is indeed a "true child in a common faith," furthering his love and support of this young pastor in establishing and leading multiple churches in Crete. Paul knew from an earlier assignment that Titus was up to the challenge of leading the churches of Crete, having served him personally in his ministry to the troubled church in Corinth (2 Cor. 8:6). Throughout the letter, Paul gives very specific instructions and encouragement to carry out the mission to the troubled island.

In ending the short introduction, verses 1-4, Paul iterates to Titus one last statement that sets the tone for his work and reminds us of his goodness still today: "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior." Grace and peace—a comfort to Titus in an uncertain time, and a comfort to the world today at Christmastime. What if we all had the same statement at the ready for the world today, "Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior"?

Chad Hicks

Monday, December 15

Colossians 1: 15-23

What a beautiful picture of our Lord Jesus that Paul gave us in this letter to the church of Colossae. He has painted a picture of Jesus, being fully God, coming to dwell among us and die for all of our sins to be forgiven. Jesus is our image of God right here on earth, our creator, our superior, our king of all kings! What a gift God has given to all of us who believe in Him. A gift we are not worthy of receiving, but He is so good to us, we are still offered it. All we need is faith, and we are also given that gift. This verse in Hebrews 11:1-3 offers us this perfect description of faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." Without faith and the gospel of Jesus, we are separated from our Lord but he still loves us so much that He sent His only son to die for us. Through His death and resurrection, we are given life, peace, love, faith, hope and joy. Which is exactly what Christmas should be all about... what a beautiful, perfect gift. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says, "For God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Throughout the busyness of this Christmas season, make time to appreciate the gift of Jesus. The Hope, Love, Peace and Faith He provides to us, if only we put our trust in Him and Him alone. Share your faith with those around you and let your light shine for Him. Share the gift of the gospel with a friend or loved one, no gift is more important.

Chelsie Eldreth

Tuesday, December 16

John 1: 9-14

This passage speaks about how Jesus came to earth, how He taught and lived among His people who were Jewish and were raised to accept and obey God but didn't accept Him. It also talks about how others who believed in Him were accepted as children of God. This shows that it doesn't matter how you were raised or what status you hold, but rather what you believe in.

Modern-day society tends to place their faith for eternal life in their actions, such as people who believed they are saved if they go to church or if they are generally a good person. You could believe you are saved because you donate to charities or that you were baptized at young age or any way you want to justify yourself as good. However, you are only saved if you repent and put your faith in Jesus.

These verses also say that once you place your faith in Jesus, you will instantly become a child of God, and that you are no longer born of sin but born of Him. In other words, once you repent you are saved no matter what you have done. You are immediately accepted and forgiven. Everything you've done is no longer important and doesn't define you, you are now defined by your personal relationship in Jesus.

Jesus was born for this sole purpose to give us, a sinful people, a way to be reunited with Him and forgiven by Him. Jesus was born and died to give us a chance at eternal life and forgiveness. It is up to you to accept that chance and gain an eternity in heaven. That is what this season is truly about, His sacrifice for us and our chance to repent and be saved.

Darius Schmitt

Wednesday, December 17

Luke 1: 46-55

The words of a teenage virgin after being told by an angel that she will give birth to the long awaited Savior ring forth from the center of her being. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (v. 46). That song is not a mere emotional response. It is not Mary's heart that rejoices. It is her soul. Her inmost part praises the God who has done mighty things (v. 49). In the midst of all that uncertainty and possible cultural disdain, how could Mary respond with such joy? The clue is in the words of Elizabeth in v. 45, which declare, "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." Mary's beautiful song is the result of faith.

Mary can exult in the Lord because she rests on His promises and faithfulness to those promises in the past and she believes them for the future. She looks back all the way to Abraham and reflects on God's mercy to His people for generations. The words are already accomplished in her eyes, even though the promised birth of the Christ Child was some months off. While Mary waits, she believes and she rejoices.

The gift of faith from God enables us to look back and believe that He kept that promise to Mary by sending His Son into this world to live a perfect life, die a sacrificial death, and rise after three days to purchase our forgiveness and conquer sin and death. The gift of faith from God allows us to look forward and, like Mary, believe that there will be a fulfillment of what the Lord has spoken. He will return and claim us, His Bride, as His own. We can with Mary exult in the Lord and declare along with all those who belong to Him that "He who is mighty has done great things for me and holy is His name."

Susan Hodges

Thursday, December 18

Luke 2: 18-26

Faith often blooms in the most unlikely places. In Luke 2:8–16, we meet a group of shepherds—simple, hardworking men watching their flocks in the quiet of night. They were not religious leaders, not nobles, not people of influence. Yet God chose them to receive the first announcement of the Savior's birth. When the angel appeared and the glory of the Lord shone around them, the shepherds were terrified (I would be too!), but the message they received required faith: "Fear not... For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Faith always begins with hearing the truth, but we must choose to trust it, even when fear whispers loud. The shepherds responded in faith. They didn't debate, delay, or doubt. Scripture says they "went with haste" to find Christ. Faith is not passive; it moves our feet. It draws us toward Jesus. When they found Him—just as the angel had said—their faith became sight.

Their story reminds us that faith must lead to obedience. It must move us toward Christ, even when the path is unfamiliar. God still speaks through His Word, through His Spirit, through moments of quiet clarity. The question is whether we will respond like the shepherds—with urgency, humility, and trust. Today, may we practice that same simple, courageous faith. God meets ordinary people in ordinary moments and invites them to witness His extraordinary grace. When He calls, may we rise quickly, trust fully, and glorify Him joyfully—just like those shepherds who first knelt at the manger.

Consider these questions before praying:

- 1. Can you think of a time when your faith became sight?
- 2. How could the Lord be calling you to action today?
- 3. When the Lord calls you into action, how will you respond?

Anna Dishman

Friday, December 19

Hebrews 11: 32-40

This passage gives multiple examples of the great power of God that shone through his people in the Old Testament. It highlights the faith that God's people had through hardships. These people endured things that most of us can't even fathom today. The Word says that they conquered kingdoms, stoped the mouths of lions, quenched fire, and much more. They didn't know God's full plan or what He was going to do in their lives. Most importantly, they did not yet have the greatest gift of all time—God's son, Jesus. We are blessed to have the gift of a savior. We know that Jesus came and conquered death so that we might have salvation, saving us by grace through faith in Jesus. How much more should we trust in God and hold to His promises, knowing that we have been forgiven for our sins? We are able to have great faith that God will keep His promises and use us to further His kingdom.

Question to Consider:

What promises does God give us that can strengthen our faith? (See John 14:3)

Oren Dishman

Saturday, December 20

Luke 9: 18-27

In the true holiday spirit of the Christmas season, we usually forget why we're celebrating it. Presents, tree, cookies, candy canes, and Christmas music block out everything else.

Sure, we talk about the Nativity, even set out little replicas, but do we ever really think? The Christmas story is not about some lady who gave

birth to a magical child, a child that would become a superhero or a president. The Christmas story is not about some shepherds who saw an angel and were like "Cool." The Christmas story is not about three rich dudes who showered a family with wealth. The Christmas story is about a God so great and so kind and so merciful, that He became a person. He left His throne for a manger. He left heaven for a cross. He came down to earth for a bunch of rotten people not worth saving. Like, He literally died for us, y'all! And He rose again, defeating sin and death. That's actually what the Christmas story is about.

Now imagine, this same wonderful, powerful, awesome Creator of ours became a human and said to us, "Deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow Me."

Yeah, well, He did do that. And if God came down to His beautiful world, totally destroyed by us, and yet died so that we could live forever, what would we say to "Die to yourself and live forever for Me"?

Well, we should be saying "Absolutely, Jesus!" That's what we want to say. But, oh, it's sooooooooo hard. We want to save our own life, we want to survive. We want to be rich and powerful and have everything we want. And when people make fun of us, it's kind of natural for us to be ashamed.

But to live we must die, lose our selfish desires and follow!

We have to live by faith, and follow, even when it seems too difficult, or like we'll lose too much. We've cast off our old life and we need to embrace the new.

Think about what all the Nativity characters had to give up to see Jesus. Mary lost her reputation as a respectable young lady, and it would've been humbling for Joseph to marry her. What do you think the shepherds did with their sheep? Drag a whole host of them through Bethlehem? And the Magi...it took them an awfully long time to get there, and they gave some pretty valuable stuff away. They had faith that the Messiah had come, and had come to save them. They gave up what they themselves probably actually wanted and surrendered themselves to the Lord.

But the innkeeper, and the scribes? They weren't willing to deny themselves the comforts they were accustomed to, and you can be sure they weren't picking up any crosses. It was humiliating, a punishment for the worst of criminals! But our innocent Savior bore it in our stead.

But y'all, Jesus paid the ultimate price for us. Why wouldn't we respond in faith, love, repentance, and humility?

Christmas...it's about Jesus, the Greatest Gift. So let's make some time for Him this holiday season.

Emerson Everhart



Sunday, December 21

Titus 3: 3-11

The most quoted verse about peace at Christmas time is Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." That is the King James Version. I really like the ESV version which states, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Who is God please with? Are we to think that Jesus came to bring peace on earth to all people? I don't believe so. Mathew 10: 24-36 says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household." I assert that we need to look at the last part of that verse that states in the of the ESV translation, "of whom He is pleased." Romans 1:18 provides us with whom God is displeased with: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." God is only pleased with His children. You are either a child of the devil or a child of God, there is no middle ground. The wrath of God rests on the children of satan. Before we come to the Cross we are not enemies of the world, we are enemies of God. After we come to the Cross and repent of our sin and put our faith in the finished work at Calvary, we are enemies of the world and have peace with God. True peace is not having everything you want, perfect health or a comfortable life. True Biblical peace is the opposite of that. True peace with God is need, thorns in the side, trials and temptations, but through all of these, true peace is also the blessed assurance that God is with you and is sanctifying you to be more like the Son we are celebrating at this time of year.

Scott McGlure

Monday, December 22

Luke 1: 67-79

Peace is one of the most overused yet undervalued concepts in Christian culture. We hear of peace in sermons, in worship, in prayers, and most importantly, in Scripture, but when we take a step back to look at our lives, they are far from peaceful. In our culture of constantly doing, expanding, and looking for the next thing to check off the list or the next thing to entertain us, we seemingly disregard one of the most important indications of our faith in Jesus. In Galatians 5:22, the Apostle Paul lists peace as the third fruit of the Spirit, something we should be pursuing as we flee from our sinful nature as we grow in our relationship with God. But the enemy would love for us to spend our lives in a constant state of anxiety and exhaustion, making it nearly impossible for us to focus on Jesus and the Great Commission he has tasked us with, which is why I believe God has made so many promises to His people throughout the Bible. One example of this is in Luke 1:67-79. This passage is a prophecy from Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. This prophecy came as a response to the Lord restoring Zechariah's voice after the birth of John. This prophecy not only describes John's future ministry in preparing the way for Jesus, but it also talks about the coming of Jesus, the one who guides us in the way of peace. This passage gave so much comfort to those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, for they knew that he had come to rescue them from the darkness, so that they no longer had to live in fear. We Christians today can draw hope from this passage, for we no longer have to be enslaved to fear of our pasts, presents, or futures; we have been bought by the blood of Jesus and covered by his unending grace. So this Advent season, I challenge you to surrender the tasks, deadlines, diagnoses, and any anxiety to our Prince of Peace. He wants to take your burdens and exchange them for peace that only he can give.

Ryleigh Marton

Tuesday, December 23

Isaiah 9: 1-7

Sometimes people go into dark times, like losing someone we love, feeling isolated, being made fun of, dealing with sickness, fighting with a friend, or facing insecurity. But God helps us walk into the light, and we see the light through those hard times.

At other times we may get a new friend, make peace with our enemies, feel successful at school or work, get a compliment, or feel confident that God is there. In these times of light, people see the joy we have and it can bring them joy and light, and it can even bring them to God.

These ups and downs can feel like being in a battle. Sometimes it seems like we will succeed and start to win, but other times it seems as though we will be defeated. But our passage says that in the end, our burden and warfare will be taken away. This battle is taken away by Jesus, who was given to us and is always with us.

Jesus is our Counselor who helps us get through difficult things. Jesus is our Mighty God, who is strong and able to defeat the things we aren't able to fight. Jesus is our Everlasting Father, meaning that we don't have to worry about losing Him and that we can trust He will always be with us because He has no end. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and when we are having a hard time, he brings peace to our lives and gets us through it.

Through all our battles, there is one thing that never changes: Jesus' Kingdom. This Kingdom's full of justice and righteousness, and it will last forever. God has accomplished all of this. These verses can give us peace that God is always with us when we're going through ups and downs.

Taylor Everhart and Eliora Schmitt

Wednesday, December 24

2 Corinthians 5: 14-19

Peace; it is one of the most sought after states of mind and feeling that an individual longs for. I think that if we were honest with one another we would come to the conclusion that everyone desires an everlasting peace and we would all agree that we have tried pursuing this. The problem is that we try to solve an eternal problem with a temporary solution. When it comes down to it, the only one who can grant an individual with everlasting peace is God. In 2 Corinthians, Paul addresses the concept of reconciliation between God and man through Christ our Savior. The first thing we must address is the question of why is reconciliation between God and man necessary? The simplest answer is because of sin. Our sin causes us to be at odds with a Holy God, meaning that we are enemies of God. In the old covenant they were required to sacrifice animals as atonement for their sin in order to restore their standing with God. The new covenant is different. In our text we see that Jesus died for all as a substitutionary atonement, meaning that His sacrifice on the cross is sufficient for all, but only effective for those who repent. Because Jesus, the man who lived a perfect, sinless life, died for us in our place and bore our punishment, we can now pursue a relationship with God the Father. It is only because of that sacrifice that this is even possible. You see, Jesus is the ultimate Peacemaker because He reconciles all believers to the Father, who then can grant everlasting peace because you are no longer at war with Him, and this includes you. Notice what Paul wrote in verse 18 of the text, "Gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Jesus is the reconciler and we are the messengers. Thus, we as believers should have a heart for evangelism and a heart for the lost. Jesus is still in the business of reconciling people to the Father today. Jesus came so that we may have peace, therefore if we have been redeemed, we need to be a people that promotes peace and shares Jesus's message of everlasting peace, a.k.a the Gospel.

Ethan Scott

Thursday, December 25

Revelation 22: 1-21

Yay! It's the day we wait for all year: Christmas!

For most believers, Christmas seems like a celebration of a past event: Jesus' birth. Each year we reflect on Christ's humble but miraculous birth as we decorate, sing carols, fellowship, and even while reading Advent devotions like this one. No doubt, it should be a season of celebration because the incarnation of Christ is the most important past event in human history. God came in the flesh to live among us and die as our substitute on a cross, so that our sin would be forgiven, and we could have a relationship with Him. In thinking about the amazing truth of this Gospel message, we shouldn't celebrate it just one day a year; we should celebrate this amazing truth every day of the year!

Even so, Christmas is a celebration of more than a past event that provided us salvation from the penalty of sin. It also is a celebration of the future. Why? Because Jesus Christ's first coming points to His second coming as well, which is promised in Revelation 22:20. The first half of the verse says, "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon." This is Jesus speaking to the Apostle John who wrote the book of Revelation based upon Jesus' instructions to him. While it is essential we celebrate the past event of Christ's first coming each Christmas season, we must also focus on His second coming lest we miss an even greater promise: eternal life with God in a new heaven and new earth where the presence of sin is removed. In the future, we won't celebrate just one day or even many days; we will celebrate Christ and His finished work for all eternity. So, every Christmas we also need to shout in celebration like the apostle John at the end of verse 20, "Amen, Come, Lord Jesus!"

Chad Everhart



"Lo, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere.
Lo, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born."

