Journey To Bethlehem



Advent 2026

In our continuing tradition at Trinity Baptist Church, we are pleased to offer this booklet to the congregation to prepare for the celebration of the birth of our Savior.

I would love to take credit for the front cover art, but I must credit Microsoft Copilot for the picture. I simply asked for a picture depicting the manger scene for the theme Journey to Bethlehem and this tableau appeared. It feels like I cheated a little bit. I'm not sure what my late wife Connie, who was the creative director for this publication for many years, would have thought either. Fortunately, the co-producer of this publication is our pastor Nick Dawson, and he is in the business of forgiveness.

We did things a little bit differently this year to assemble our contributors. In an effort to be more inclusive of the overall congregation we assigned each Sunday school class scriptures according to their size. This has presented a better cross section among our members and has been easier to manage.

We want to thank everyone who shared their time and talents to make this book possible. We pray that everyone will find it inspiring as we begin our collective journey to Bethlehem this year.

As always, this book is available in bound print form and as a PDF download on the Trinity website at no charge.

Yours in Christ,

Rick Christenson and the Trinity Baptist Church Advent Book publishing committee.

And now, a message from our pastor, Nick Dawson…

Introduction

"Why would you pretend like Jesus hasn't already come?" That was a question posed to me once about the season of "holy anticipation" that we call Advent. Admittedly, it has been 2000 years since Mary and Joseph set out from Nazareth toward the city of David where the Christ-child was to be born. It seems strange to some folks to try to place ourselves "in the shoes" of the generations of old who awaited the coming of the Messiah when we live so far on the other side of his life, death, and resurrection.

In truth, though, our lives reflect many of the same realities and struggles that theirs did. While we understand how God's story plays out to an extent, we still stumble along in faith waiting for the return of the King of Kings. While we have experienced the grace and mercy of the Gospel, we still see the consequences of sin and death all around us. While we now have the perfect law of God "written on our hearts," we still long to know God more and grow in our faithful devotion to His will. In short, we have not arrived and are very much still on the journey.

I pray that, as you read these daily devotions from members of the Trinity family, the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ will fill your spirit. Let the stories and reflections renew your mind and remind you that you're never alone. May this Advent season strengthen your walk of faith and prepare you for the wonder of Christmas!

-Pastor Nick

Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

This verse from Jeremiah 29:11 carries a large weight during the Advent season. When these words were first spoken, God's people were living in the grief of exile, where they were far from home and wondering if they had been forgotten. Similarly, Advent meets us in our own spaces of waiting-whether we are navigating personal hardships or uncertainty. This scripture can help to remind us in our spaces of waiting that God has a plan for us even when we can't see the full picture.

Jeremiah 29:11 invites us to anchor our hearts in a very specific kind of anticipation: a future defined by hope. The fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy did not arrive in a majorly exquisite event but in the quiet arrival of a baby in a manger. Jesus is living proof that God's plan is for us to prosper and give us a future to look forward to. He ensures that we are never alone. This Advent season let this verse give you the assurance that even when you feel like no one is there for you, just know that God is paving a hopeful and prosperous future for you to look forward to.

Alex Weldon

Philippians 4:7

Anxiety is a basic human emotion. It comes to us in the night as we lie in the dark, staring at the ceiling, replaying a negative moment from the day or overthinking the days to come. For me, anxiety starts low in my stomach, a small twinge that grows into a gnawing fear, rising through my body, tightening my chest, and crowding out logic and reason. It's the What Ifs: What if I made a careless error on that project? What if I didn't consider all of the possible outcomes? What if I was just flat wrong about something? What if, what if, what if…

In our verse today, Paul writes to the early church at Philippi from a prison cell in Rome somewhere around 60 A.D. to thank the church for providing for him financially and to encourage them to continue the work he started with them. In the preceding verse, Paul tells the church not to be anxious about anything but instead to bring it all to God. Just as a child brings everything to a parent, so we are to bring every bit of news, good and bad, to our Father in heaven: prayers for forgiveness, our current needs, and guidance for the future.

Through prayer, we find the peace of God, which Paul says guards our heart. In the original Greek, guard describes a sentinel standing watch outside of a fortification, eyes open for an enemy's attack, while his brother soldiers sleep soundly inside. In my mind, I picture God's peace in the same function, standing watch in the night, protecting my heart and mind, and allowing me to sleep.

The What Ifs that keep us awake at night are dynamic, but God's peace is dynamic, too. It is not a passive absence of trouble, but an active presence standing guard over our fragile hearts and worried minds. When we hand over our middle-of-the-night spiraling to our Father in heaven, we aren't just engaging in wishful thinking. We are posting the ultimate sentinel at the door of our thoughts. God's peace takes the night watch, so we don't have to.

Advent reminds us that Christ entered a world full of darkness and disruption, not to remove every threat immediately, but to be God with us in the dark. As you wait and prepare this season for the coming of the Prince of Peace, notice where anxiety is trying to set up camp in your body and mind. Bring those raw What Ifs to the Father and let the peace that surpasses all understanding stand watch over you tonight.

Allen Edwards

Matthew 5:16

Let Your Light Shine

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls His followers the light of the world and urges them not to hide that light. The image of a light under a bushel basket may not resonate with children today as it did when I was a Baptist Sunbeam in the 1950s. Yet Jesus' metaphors continue to challenge us as we grow in our Christian walk.

My aunt and uncle served hot chocolate to neighborhood children at Third Baptist in St. Louis. My uncle worried that the children might never attend church, but my aunt persuaded him to keep serving. Winter there is cold, and the children needed warmth.

Henry Thomas said his campus minister at Mercer helped with Habitat for Humanity housing.

Joey Tucker's daughters helped at Food Bank when they were the age of Sunbeams.

My husband took a Wednesday night supper plate to a man who used a wheelchair. Others quietly cleaned yards for people unable to do that work themselves.

On mission trips, people have often asked me, "Why do you do this?" My answer is always, "Jesus said to."

-- Andrea Savage, octogenarian

Psalms 27: 14

Hard Journeys

"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart, wait for the Lord."

Have you ever looked back on the times you faced real trials—when you felt fearful, uncertain, and almost overwhelmed by your vulnerability?

Forty-six years ago, in 1980, my husband, Dan, was told he needed heart bypass surgery. The procedure was still relatively new, and our fear was real. What would his body endure? What if something went wrong? Our children were young; Heather was only three. How could I raise them without him? Thankfully, those fears did not come to pass, but the vulnerability we felt was very real.

Our grandson Dax was seventeen when he suffered an electrical injury and severe burns. Danna and I spent months at the Burn Center in Chapel Hill, praying he would live. Many nights, we received calls telling us his condition was touch and go. We prayed and waited because that was all we could do. I remember a violinist playing beautiful, soothing music outside his room. It felt as though God was saying, "All will be well." Looking back, we know God was with us at every step. Our fears were real, but somehow there was peace. Those memories remain in our hearts. Dax is now thirty-nine and doing well.

I have tried to imagine Mary's journey. Was she afraid? Did she feel vulnerable? What was it like for her to bring her baby into the world?

Mary knew He was special; Gabriel had told her so. Did she trust completely, or did she long for a deeper understanding? We can only imagine her experience from our own human perspective.

I believe God gave Mary a special peace for the road she traveled. When she held her baby and examined His tiny fingers and toes, did she grasp the fullness of the miracle in her arms—a life that encompassed creation? Her journey must have been hard, and it required waiting. We all face trials, but waiting remains one of the hardest lessons. Do we ever fully learn it?

Thank You, Father, for Your love and patience.

Bertha Ann Ward

Isaiah 40:31

We Are Weak, But He Is Strong

When Pastor Jorge asked for two volunteers from his Sunday School class to write devotionals for Advent this year, I was fortunate enough to get first dibs! As I was skimming over the two verses, (for what seemed no particular reason) Isaiah 40:31 appealed to me more than the other verse. Little did I know at the time when I began to delve into Isaiah, 40:31 just how much this one little verse was packed with so much meaning. I was actually blown away! Talk about feeling inadequate 'about my knowledge of the Bible... Wow!

I could probably write 8 or 10 pages on this one verse, but I'm not going to because Rick won't like me anymore if I do. However, I would like to challenge anyone reading this devotional to do a deep dive on this verse, (Isaiah 40:31) I'm certain you'll have the same opinion as I do.

Everything that Isaiah wrote to the ancient Israelites over 2,500 years ago applies just as much today as it did back then. Everything we need to know about hope, faith, patients, and endurance comes right out of the book of Isaiah. Self-will/human limitations verses God's will/everlasting power, Gods timing, instead trying to fix it myself, Believing and depending on God's strength, instead of relying on human strength; Depending on God to help us rise above our problems and difficulties. All this comes from one little verse in the Bible...

When I arrived in Moultrie, Ga. four years ago, I was extremely weak, worn out, and nearly dead. Self-reliance as I once knew it was utterly exhausted. I was completely out of ideas. I had absolutely no other alternative but to accept defeat, and I collapsed at Gods feet!

Maybe for the first time in my life, I had to trust the process and believe that God was working behind the scenes to sustain me day by day...

Amen,

Billy Weir

Luke 2:10

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'"

Imagine for a moment what it must have been like for Mary. She was going about an ordinary day when suddenly, everything changed. An angel appeared to her—something she had never seen before. This was not an ordinary visitor or conversation. It was a heavenly messenger standing before an ordinary young woman.

Mary's first reaction was probably one of fear and confusion. Then came the words that so many of us need to hear during Advent, words that can be found over 360 times in the Bible "Do Not Be Afraid". The angel did not begin by explaining everything, but by addressing Mary's fear.

How could the news she was about to receive possibly bring joy to everyone? She was about to begin a journey that would soon bring questions, uncertainty, and perhaps even rejection. Her life was about to become far more complicated than she could have imagined. She couldn't see the entire story, but she could trust God who had spoken to her.

The news wasn't simply about what would happen to Mary. The news was about Jesus, the child she would carry, who was the Savior of the world. This good news would reach far beyond her corner in the world. It would reach shepherds in the field and all the future generations of people who were searching for hope and salvation.

This joy wasn't dependent upon Mary's circumstances; it was found in God's promise. Sometimes we think joy comes when everything in our lives is running smoothly. We think we will have joy when the difficult situation changes, when the waiting ends, or when the road becomes easier.

God's word to Mary still speaks to us today: "Do not be afraid". Not because there is nothing frightening in life, but because Our Savior is present in the middle of it. The angel's message reminds us that God can bring joy where we least expect it.

Cecil and Celina Barber

Romans 8:18-25

Paul longed for mankind (and nature) to experience the full realization of what adoption into the family of God means. He longed for what the Old Testament refers to as The Day of the Lord and what the New Testament calls the Second Coming of Christ.

Paul believed the human situation was not hopeless. William Barclay says that Paul saw "man's sin and the state of the world, but he also saw God's redeeming power through Jesus Christ, and the end of it all for him was hope. Because of that, to Paul life was not a despairing waiting for an inevitable end in a world encompassed by sin and death and decay; life was an eager anticipation of a liberation, a renovation and re-creation wrought by the glory and power of God".

As Christians we must battle with our own human nature and live in a world of sin. But we must look beyond the consequences of sin to the power of God's mercy and love. As Christians, we wait for life, not for death and should never despair. We patiently hope for the Kingdom of God.

Cleve Bell

Luke 1:30-31

Grace For the Journey

I wonder how Mary felt when the angel told her not to be afraid. She was receiving news that would change her life, and yet not yet know everything the journey would require. Before explaining what would happen, the angel would reassure her that she had found favor with God. His favor did not mean her road would be easy. But as she heard the promise that she would bear a son and name Him Jesus, she had a reason to trust God with a future she could not see.

As a mother walking through my son Keegan's cancer treatment, I have felt the weight of an unknown future. Mary was receiving the promise of a child; we were receiving frightening news about ours. Those experiences are very different, yet her story draws me to the reassurance God offered her before she knew what lay ahead. I do not read "Do not be afraid" as a demand to hide my fear or pretend everything is okay. It is a reminder that I can bring my fears to God and as Him to help me take the next faithful step. His love does not spare us every painful or difficult road, but we can trust His presence along the way.

This Advent, as we journey toward Bethlehem, I am grateful that God came close to us in Jesus. He entered a world where people wait, worry, hurt, and hope– a world much like the one we know. The promise given to Mary points us towards the Savior whose presence we can trust today.

Whatever uncertainty we carry into this season, we can take the next faithful step knowing that we are loved. We may not see the whole road ahead, but we can turn toward the one who meets us along the way.

Elizabeth Ann Barber

Isaiah 7:14

My favorite place is on the stage with my friends. Whether it is a choir concert or a play, I love the teamwork a performance requires and the feeling of being part of something bigger than myself. I also love the moment right before a show starts when everyone is full of anticipation. The Withers Auditorium lights go down, the audience quiets, and you are waiting backstage for your entrance. Everything you have spent months rehearsing is about to happen.

Isaiah 7:14 feels like that kind of moment. God's people were dealing with real trauma, and their lives and futures were uncertain. In the middle of that, God spoke through Isaiah to tell them something big was coming. Immanuel, God with us, was on the way. God wasn't just going to sit in the audience and watch them struggle. Through Jesus, God would step onto the stage to join them when they forgot their lines or their voices failed.

Advent also feels like that kind of moment, but our waiting is different from what it was back then. We aren't waiting in the dark, hoping God shows up. We already know how the story turns out. Immanuel, God with us, came, and he is still with us today, bringing the same hope and peace to our world that God promised all those years ago.

This Advent, when it seems like the whole show is falling apart, remember that we are never alone on stage. Immanuel, God with us, is still with us.

Eli Edwards

James 5:7

As we celebrate every year the birth of Jesus Christ coming into this world and patiently waiting 12 months per year to celebrate the greatest King to reign the world, we also patiently wait for His second coming to reign with Him and celebrate eternally the redemption that we have been waiting for since His first coming.

Let's all continue serving the goals of the plan of salvation, patiently, until we receive the shower of blessings that the Lord Jesus Christ has prepared for us to receive and celebrate in His coming. As we journey to Bethlehem, let's love one another in patient love throughout the year.

Evelyn Houed

Romans 15:3

May the God of Hope fill you with ALL JOY and PEACE, as you trust in him, so you may overflow with hope by the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. ROMANS 15:3

"Can't believe Christmas is coming so soon. I've been thinking about what I'm going to give God and Jesus for Christmas…I think I know what…what about you?"

Because of walking through the valley of death with Mama, as she was dying during COVID, I discovered the gift I would give to God and Jesus.

My brother Tommy had COVID with no symptoms. I knew Mama's medical history, so I was the one to go during the height of the illness, to three COVID hospitals, sleep in a COVID house and ride in a COVID car.

I turned to Psalms 23:4: "Though I walk thru the valley of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me, your rod and staff comfort me."

The word I came away with is TRUST in the Lord with all your heart, lean not unto thy own understanding and He will direct your path. Proverbs 3:5

It hasn't been easy, but I learned to TRUST 100 Percent my God and his son, Jesus.

Soooo, get an index card, and write down your word. Place a ribbon on it and put it under the tree. SAVE IT!!

Gidge Taylor

John 3:16

The Journey to Bethlehem is the path of following God's promise. It's the road the shepherds and the wise men took to see the Christ child. It also symbolizes our own pilgrimage of faith, moving through uncertainty towards Christ's light. It hasn't always been a straight road, looking back my path to Bethlehem hasn't always been easy. There have been roads filled with uncertainty and moments where I wondered where God was leading me. I began my journey of recovery 34 years ago and looking back I can see I was never alone. God was always there, even when I couldn't recognize it. He met me in my brokenness and gave me strength to make it one more step.

Just as John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. So, whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life". That gift reminds me that grace isn't something I earn, it's something I receive. Every step on this road has brought me closer to understanding that love. As I continue toward Bethlehem, I carry gratitude for the life God has given me, faith for the road ahead, and hope that comes from knowing I am deeply loved.

Glenda McDonald

Romans 5:1-2

When I was little, baseball was simple and fun. Whether we won or lost, I was just happy to be on the field. As I got older and baseball got harder, the pressure to perform became real. Every strikeout, error in the field, and bad call by an umpire began to define my worth for the day. I started spending hours in the batting cage trying to earn my spot in the lineup and prove I belonged. I put so much pressure on myself with every at bat because I knew a couple of bad games could cost me my spot.

Just like in baseball, we can sometimes feel like we are trying to prove ourselves in life. We treat God like a head coach who keeps up with our stats and marks down every strikeout and error. We worry if we did enough, prayed enough, or were just good enough to make God's team.

In these verses, Paul tells us the opposite is true. He says that we are justified through Jesus, not by our own stats or performance. We don't earn a spot on God's team. Jesus earned it for us on the cross, and we are given our place through God's grace. Paul doesn't say God's grace is something we earn because we are perfect. It's a gift bought by Jesus and given to us.

Advent is the season where we wait for the arrival of our savior. But waiting during Advent isn't filled with fear or performance anxiety. Instead, I wait in hope. I stand firm on a foundation of grace that doesn't shake when I strike out, drop a fly ball, or worry about what comes after high school graduation.

As we look toward Christmas, try to remember where you stand. You aren't standing on your accomplishments, your statistics, or your future plans. You are standing in grace. Because of Jesus, you don't have to earn God's love or prove your worth. Because of Jesus, God doesn't see every error you make. God sees our perfect Savior.

Jackson Edwards

Deuteronomy 7:9

Living a Christian Life in a Challenging World

"Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments."

As we prepare for the Advent Season, we face a world filled with temptations, uncertainty, and perplexing outcomes. Christians should not feel discouraged by the world's challenges; God's love is our anchor. Moses's words to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7:9 show that God's faithfulness isn't conditional and endures forever.

In my earlier Christian life, I mistakenly believed I earned God's blessings through my actions and deeds. I now know that God's blessings and covenant are given freely and without end. I move forward boldly, ready to face the challenges of our uncertain world with God as my anchor. When you feel challenged and uncertain, reach out to God, your anchor.

I like this Prayer:

Lord God, thank You for being fully trustworthy and unwavering in Your love. When life feels unpredictable or heavy, help me remember that Your covenant of grace is sure and steady. Strengthen my heart to walk in obedience, to love You deeply, and to rely on Your faithfulness today and every day to come. Amen.

Jimmy Allegood

Psalm 130:5

"BE STILL"

I retired in 2003 and for the first couple years found it difficult to just sit, relax and do nothing. Honestly, it's still hard for me. If I watch TV, I'm also reading something; if I'm listening to a book, I'm working a Sudoku puzzle. My mind seems to constantly spin with To Do lists, constantly driving me to be doing something. Some of you will remember when former Pastor, Matt Marston, introduced a drill for us to work on where we only had to sit for 10 minutes, clear our minds and think about nothing. Was it as hard for you as it was for me? I don't think I ever succeeded. Matt was trying to teach us the discipline of *'being still'* so we could hear the Lord when he is trying to get our attention. I think He's been trying to get mine through this Advent Psalms, the Bible study of Job and our walk through Exodus.

Psalm 130:5-6 says *"I hope, Lord, My whole being hopes, and I wait for God's promise. My whole being waits for my Lord… "* Coincidentally, NOT, our Ladies' Community Bible Study is in the book of Job, where we are reminded of the "patience of Job" for all he endured at the hands of the enemy. How staying focused on God was what brought him through unimaginable tragedy and suffering AND blocked the enemy's attempt to break his faith.

Simultaneously, we're in Exodus as we walk thru God's story in Sunday morning Bible study and worship. As the Israelites were being pursued by Pharaoh's immense cavalry upon leaving captivity in Egypt, about to cross the Red Sea, they were so afraid for their lives that they wanted to return to slavery. Thru Moses (Ex 14:13-14), God said "Don't be afraid… *You just keep still*'--- and watch me keep my promise. In a Wednesday night study (Ex 13:1-15), Pastor Nick reminded us we need to "listen to God", to really focus when He's trying to get our attention. We can't do that if we're not intentionally attuned to Him.

I think between these verses in Psalms and the studies of Job and Exodus where, again and again, God says to "be still", to "listen", to "wait", He's certainly trying to get my attention. It's hard for us. We are so sidetracked and driven on Earth by the busyness of our culture, stuff that truly has no eternal value, leaving little to no room/time left for us to just "be still" and focus on God---even for 10 minutes!

I'm a very visual person and I'm trying to consciously seek things around me every day that remind me of God's hand at work. I find so many little things and just as many majestic ones all day, every day that point to Him. When I see the clouds, I think about how God was in the cloud that went before the Israelites during the day to lead them on their journey and at night to light their way (Ex 14:19-20). Exodus 16:10

goes on to say *"…then the glorious presence of the Lord appeared in the cloud."* What a beautiful picture that paints in my mind and what an absolute comfort and affirmation of his promises to go before us, to walk beside us, to go through life with us, to be wherever we are, to meet our needs, to love unconditionally…PRAISE THE LORD.

Our hope, like Job, is in our redeemer (Job 19:15) and in our knowing that God keeps his promises. I think God's keeping his promises is an overarching message for us from the Old Testament. To know and recognize His promises, we have to study the Word and then be still, wait, and listen to see/hear Him working them in our lives.

In His Love,

JoAnn Callaway

1 Peter 1:8

Emmanuel

1 Peter 1:8 "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy".

In my experience I would say this verse is describing the spirit filled life. A life that in the midst of struggles, loss and pain can press on because of the hope and faith we have in Christ. This passage brings to mind another verse that speaks of the joy and assurance God graciously shares through the Holy Spirit. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived - the things God has prepared for those who love him". This reveals God's redemptive plan centered on Jesus Christ.

As the Holy Spirit speaks to us, we can experience a deep internal trust and faith in God. Romans 10:10 says: "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation". Our focal passage from 1 Peter expresses that we believe, we trust, we have faith in Him that leads to "an inexpressible and glorious joy".

The season of advent is a time to contemplate the longing and anticipation of our coming Savior, Jesus Christ. Though *we* have not seen him, *we* love him. As Christians, we have confessed our belief in Him and are filled with a joy that sometimes cannot be explained. We stand on the truth that God has come to dwell with us, He is our Emmanuel. Isaiah 7:14 "...a virgin will bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel."

John Grobe

Ephesians 4:2

Always be humble, patient, kind and loving.

In every sphere of life, it is important to show a Christlike spirit that consists of the following:

Lowliness (humility) - On many of my previous jobs, I learned that you are not always on top. There were those to teach me things I didn't know and to accept that they knew more than me and were willing to share their knowledge with me if I were humble enough to accept their help.

Gentleness and kindness - Through many years of working in missions, I learned the joy of giving kindness to those who needed a gentle smile or by providing a simple gift of a handkerchief, hand lotion, cards - just to bring a smile to their faces and let them know they were loved and cared about.

Long-suffering and love - This began when I married my husband of 21 yrs. who was a disabled paraplegic. I learned the joy of caring for him sometimes like I would have a child by supplying his needs. Love allowed me to apply my skills to care for him because of my deep love for him.

Love never fails.

These are instances that have helped me along in "My Journey to Bethlehem."

Judy Howell

2 Corinthians 4:6

Light Out of Darkness

> *"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."*

The story of Advent is the story of light entering darkness. Paul takes us back to the very beginning, back to Genesis 1 when darkness covered the earth and God spoke light into existence. The darkness could not overcome itself; God had to speak. In much the same way, the world into which Jesus was born was waiting in spiritual darkness - longing groaning, for redemption and unable to rescue itself. Then God acted. The One who once said, "Let there be light," sent His Son into our darkness to be the Light of the world.

That is what makes Bethlehem so extraordinary. The baby lying in the manger was not simply another teacher, prophet, or religious leader. Paul tells us that in the face of Jesus Christ we see the glory of God. God had not abandoned a darkened world; He had come near. The glory that once seemed distant and unapproachable could now be seen in the person of His Son. The glory that was once veiled in cloth is now veiled in flesh. Advent is more than remembering that the Light came long ago. Paul says that the same God who commanded light to shine at creation "has shone in our hearts." The God who brought light out of darkness is still doing that work. Through Christ, He opens our eyes, changes our hearts, and allows us to see His glory. Christmas is not merely the announcement that light has entered the world; it is the invitation to step out of darkness and live in that Light.

So, during this Advent season, whatever darkness may surround us - uncertainty, grief, weariness, fear, or simply the brokenness of the world -

we remember that darkness does not have the final word. Christ has come. His light still shines. And those of us who have seen His glory now carry that light into a world that desperately needs to see Him. May we look again toward Jesus and find our hope in the Light that darkness can never overcome.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for sending Your Son into the darkness of our world. Just as You spoke light into creation, shine Your light again in our hearts. Help us to see Your glory in the face of Jesus and to carry His light faithfully into the lives of those around us. During this Advent season, turn our attention again to Christ, our hope and our Light. Amen.

Lee Hill

Psalm 126:3

Journey to Bethlehem

The Lord had done great things for us; we were joyful.

Mary's and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem was likely a grueling one, but at their destination, how joyful they must have been! Mary's baby boy, God's Son, had been safely delivered, and shepherds had come to worship Him and reported hearing the news of His birth from a band of heavenly angels.

What about our lives' journeys? The Lord has truly done great things for us. One of Jerry's favorite sayings is, "We have been blessed, no doubt about it!" Jerry wrote: "I consider myself to be a doer. The majority of what happens in my life, I had a part in making it happen. But occasionally, I would say that something "fell into my lap", something that I didn't have anything to do with, or make happen. So, how do I explain that. I just have to say that "God did it". Some people would say it was luck, or that I was lucky.

How do these things happen? Am I lucky? If I'm lucky, how do I figure out why I'm lucky or if it really is luck? Then, I recall Scripture and realize that there is a Power (God) who is looking out for me, no matter what the situation. Our Scripture tells us that God is love and He is the Father of all things, including us as individuals. Once you realize that God loves us and cares for us, how can we not love Him, and try to live for Him in the way He guides us in our lives?

But remember, we are human beings. We are endowed with the ability to think and to do, and in doing so, we must realize that when we try to go our own way, we may find that we have strayed from the path that God had planned for us."

Our lives' journeys may go in different directions, but if we follow God's leading, we will wind up in the place where He intends for us to be. Amen.

Linda and Jerry James

Psalm 89:1 KJV

"I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations."

The word "mercies" reminds us of all the gifts and love that God has shown us. In this Advent season, we think of God's gift of his only son, Jesus. While his son and his plan for our salvation through Jesus, is the greatest gift, it is not our only gift from our Lord.

Christmas is a joyous, warm and happy season. It is easy to see God's mercy during this time of year, because as Paul Harvey would say, we know the rest of the story. During other more challenging seasons of life, we often fail to recognize that God is with us, until after the storm has passed. When we pause to reflect, it becomes clear that we were never alone in the tempest.

As a young mother raising two sons alone, after my husband's death, I came to understand this well. There is a sense of numbness after a loved one's death. Grief is almost a natural sedative or anesthetic, evidence of God's mercy. Only with the passage of time and prayer, do you begin to wake up and feel alive again. This is confirmation of God's faithfulness and comfort.

Faithfulness to all generations is his promise to us according to the scripture. When we've experienced his steadfastness, we want to share that blessing with others, our children and grandchildren. In the words of a current country music song, McArthur, "When you pass on, whatcha gonna pass down?" I pray that others, my children and grandchildren, see God's light in my life and that I pass down that love of Christ to them. It is worth more than gold, stocks, bonds, property or cash. As we anticipate and celebrate the birth of Jesus, may we be ever mindful of God's plans for us and our futures. He is always with us.

Lynn Heard

Colossians 3:15

PEACE….. World Peace; Inner Peace; Peace with God

How many times have I prayed for peace during my life? Countless times!! I often find myself seeking peace in anxious, troublesome, difficult times. And God is always there to provide the peace I desire. Over the past year, peace has been one of our family's biggest prayers/desires/needs.

Witnessing the traumatic birth of our sweet granddaughter has given us the strength to fully rely on God to provide the peace we desperately needed. When in the NICU God sent the kindest, sweetest nurse to be with Janie five consecutive days (very rare in the world of NICU nursing schedules) GOD PROVIDED PEACE!

Each procedure performed; every doctor/nurse/therapist attending Ivy or Janie; the aftercare at home; the numerous therapies/appointments Janie endured - all of these were orchestrated by our Heavenly Father. GOD GAVE OUR FAMILY PEACE!

As I write this entry for Trinity's Advent devotional, Janie is at her six-month post NICU evaluation. Ahead of this appointment, we again sought peace. After we received a miraculous report, tears streamed down my face washing away the worry and the audible sounds of praising God were deafening. Sweet Janie has experienced tremendous gains/growth in all areas - physically, cognitively, neurologically. God moved before us setting the path and placing the best care/resources available to Janie. GOD GRANTED PEACE!

Experiencing God's peace is overwhelmingly wonderful. Thank you, Jesus, for your enduring love, grace, mercy, and peace.

As we enter this holiday season, let us pray for peace on earth and in the lives of those who seek God's peace.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body, you were called for peace. And to be thankful."

~Colossians 3:15 (NIV) Notes according to (NIV Study Bible) 3:15 *peace of Christ*. The attitude of peace that Christ alone gives - in place of the attitude of bitterness and quarrelsomeness. This peaceful attitude is to "rule" (lit - "function like an umpire") in all human relationships.

As the song goes "...Let there be peace on earth and let it begin in me...take each moment and live each moment in peace, eternally..."

Blessings of peace,

Sabrina Odom (child of God, Wayne's wife, Ivy's mama, and Janie's Fancy Granny)

Matthew 1:23

Immanuel
God is with us.

During Isaiah's time, he prophesied that a virgin would give birth to a son, and the people would call him Immanuel, which means God is with us. God came down from His throne to walk among us, sharing the pain, suffering, and joy that we all endure. He is not distant from us because He is with us in all things we do. Every step we take, He is with us. Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy. He walked among us. He ate with us, cried with us, and shared joyful occasions with us. He loved us so much that He died for us.

As a farmer, I often experience uncertainty and worry about what the future will hold, but I have to remind myself that God is with me. When the rains do not come, God is with me. When equipment breaks, God is with me. When market prices are low, God is with me. I have comfort in Him no matter what each day may bring or what challenges I may face because He overcame this world. God is with us yesterday, today, and forever.

Rob Cannon

John 8:12

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."

Walking into a pitch-black room, you do not know where anything is. With every step you risk tripping over furniture or other obstacles. The room does not change when you turn on the light, but your ability to see changes the way you perceive everything.

Jesus says he is the light of the world. He offers all of us a way out of the dark. When we are down, and life seems so hard, we don't have to travel that road alone. He will help us through the darkness. During this time of year when life can be overwhelming and depressing, turn your focus to Him, follow his footsteps, and trade the darkness for his "light of life."

Sharon Roberson

Isaiah 9:6

In the advent season we turn our hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. I've been thinking about how God uses a baby to fulfill his plans many times in His story. When he was ready to form a nation, he called Abraham. God told Abraham his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abraham believed God but he was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born. Jacob was born to Isaac, and he had 12 sons that formed the 12 tribes. Judges was a very dark time for the tribes, for everyone did what was right in their own eyes. So, God gave the baby Samuel to Hannah. She dedicated him to be in the Lord's service all his life. Samuel ushered in the time of the kings. He anointed Saul and then king David, who brought the tribes together. And the nation of Israel was formed.

During the reign of kings there were also prophets. Many prophets saw a savior. Isaiah 9:6 reads, For unto us, a Child is born, unto us a son is given. This scripture shows us the humanity, and the deity of Jesus. We read the Old Testament knowing a Messiah is coming. The birth of a baby is important in God's story. But the birth of Jesus is God's Son. How can we honor the Father and the Son for this incredible gift? We can love him. We can praise him. We can obey him. Jesus lived a sinless life. He taught his followers to love and forgive each other. He taught them how to pray. He was obedient to the father's will even to death on the cross. He arose on the third day, and with that He gave us eternal life. Hallelujah!

We need to know Jesus. We have that opportunity every Sunday morning before worship. We have Sunday school where the Bible is read and studied. Many blessings come from being part of a Sunday school class. You will get to know people, and you will love them because that is what

happens when God‘s word is shared. And you will be part of a group that prays for each other. My husband and I can tell you what a comfort it is to know that people are praying. As we grow to know Jesus and understand the birth of this baby that we celebrate is God’s only begotten Son. May we honor, cherish, and remember this gift every day of every season.

Suzy Brock

John 14:27

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

It's hard to imagine how difficult finding peace must have been for Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem. Little did they realize their journey would lead to all of us receiving the gift of peace beyond our worldly understanding. Not one that is transactional, but a peace that is guaranteed and eternal.

As Jesus spoke these words to his Disciples at the Last Supper he was giving them the gift of Peace. Not peace based on circumstance, but a peace that remains with you no matter the circumstance. He knew the fear and uncertainties that they would face, and he provided an anchor for them to have the strength to face these uncertainties.

The Christmas Season can be one of the most hectic times of the year. Preparing for the holidays can often become overwhelming and we can become so easily distracted from the reason we are all celebrating. From the fun of the advent season like Christmas parties, church plays, and Santa visits to the harder realities of this time of year like facing it for the first time without a loved one or added financial burdens to make sure every kid has the perfect Christmas morning, this season can be stressful for a multitude of reasons. It's easy to see why anxieties can rise during this time.

This Advent Season when schedules are packed, and stress and anxiety are creeping in I'm going to turn to this verse. Peace is always there. A free, no strings attached gift from Jesus. An anchor of calmness in the chaos of life.

Tyler & Lindsay Mobley

Hebrews 10:23

This passage is reflected in my life as I continue pursuing my goals through disappointment and uncertainty. I am learning to keep my hope rooted in God's faithfulness, while doing my part through preparation, perseverance, and service to others.

Tyler Dismuke

Psalm 130:5

It has been said that if you have a vision of what you are to be doing in the Kingdom of God, you have hope.

This hope is not a fragile wish rooted in uncertainty. I hope my team has a successful season this year or I hope I don't get lost trying to find the doctor's office are examples of this.

The hope that God grants is a confident and certain expectation rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an enduring assurance in God's promises for the future. Romans 15:13 says that God fills believers with joy and peace so that they may abound in hope through the Holy Spirit. Our Christian hope is tied directly to salvation through Jesus Christ rather than human effort, making it secure and unshakeable. What is your vision of what you will be doing in God's Kingdom?

R. C. Gresham was a great friend of Trinity Baptist Church. Our men's Sunday School class is named after him. The poem below is a Christmas poem that he penned years ago and sent out as a Christmas card.

"Then let every heart keep its Christmas within,
Christ's pity for sorrow, Christ's hatred for sin,
Christ's care for the weakest, Christ's courage for right,
Christ's dread for darkness, Christ's love of the light."



William Reese

Devotion for Christmas Day

For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." –Acts 13:47

Growing up, the excitement of Christmas morning at my house was always recorded on video. It was the era of the shoulder-mounted VHS camera, and that clunky thing captured every moment of the surprise and celebration of my brothers and me seeing what Santa had brought us and opening presents of all kinds. When I'm back with my family for the holidays, we sometimes pull out those old home videos and "stroll down memory lane." Of course, I now can much more conveniently record my own kids digitally on my smart phone and play back the "light" of Christmas morning joy throughout the year.

In Acts 13:47, Paul and Barnabas reflect on how God has made them a "light" to the nations that the Gospel might be known throughout the world. Their ministry is a testimony to the Good News of Jesus, and the Lord is using them to bring salvation to people who are far from God.

I pray that the joy of Christmas will be evident in our lives throughout the year. When life is hard and the world seems dark, may you remember the "light" of this season and be inspired to shine for Jesus. Like Ebenezer Scrooge at the end of *A Christmas Carol*, may we say, "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year."

Merry Christmas!

Pastor Nick Dawson

Notes

We hope you enjoyed and were inspired by our Journey to Bethlehem this year!

May the words and meaning of Advent help color your season with pure joy this Christmas of 2026. Also, with the Peace and love of this month of Advent, fill your hearts and minds with the gracious goodness that our Lord and *Savior Jesus Christ* has bestowed on us all in the countenance of that little child in the manger.

Many thanks to all who contributed and made this book possible.



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