

2009  
*Advent Devotional*

# *The Light of The World*



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*An Invitation to  
Advent 2009*


Advent is a particularly unique time of year in the calendar of the church. It is a season of waiting - waiting with deep expectation. Hear again the words from the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome: *"The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us, it's within us. The spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling birth pangs... We are enlarged in the waiting...The longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy"* (Romans 8:22-25 *The Message*). We wait with expectation for our families to grow closer and reconcile, for our habits and character to be transformed, and for our prodigals to come home. We eagerly yearn for the Lord Jesus in our midst to come and come with power. What are you longing for this Advent Season? Open up your heart again to receive the many blessings from God.

Refer to your own Bible for the scriptures offered each day and enjoy the corresponding devotion. If one of them is particularly speaking to you, pause, and stick with it. Perhaps share it with a friend. Meditate on that word and invite more of God's spirit to speak and bring His life. We hope, through this Advent season, that your heart will be enlarged to experience and encounter afresh the living God in our world.

*Grace and Peace,*

*The 2009 Advent Devotional Team*

Lisa Belding  
Rochelle Castillo  
AJ Fenlason  
Kathy Johnson  
Scott Schimmel



*December 1  
John 1:1-5*


Two verses in the Bible describe the beginning of history. They both start with *"In the beginning."* Genesis 1:1 *"In the beginning God created..."* John 1:1 *"In the beginning was the Word."* Have you ever wondered which one came first in pre-history? Actually, the John 1 passage refers to something that preceded Genesis 1 in pre-history. Before God created anything - heavens, earth, sun, moon, animals, people - before there was any creation, "the Word was with God and the Word was God." Before creation, God the Son was in a loving relationship with God the Father. God the Son and God the Holy Spirit loved each other perfectly. God the Holy Spirit and God the Father loved each other perfectly. Then God decided to create a planet with humans and invite them to join in God's perfect love.

In a perfect world, Jesus would arrive in Bethlehem as the loving God-human, and the entire human race would rejoice and welcome him. However, that is not our Christmas story. The story of Christmas is about God coming to this world as a human but the world did not know Him or love Him. The King in Jerusalem sent his soldiers and children in the village of Bethlehem died. There is grief and sorrow in the Christmas story. The father of the baby had to flee to a refugee camp where God's Son grew up. There is charitable care and compassion in the Christmas story. But one of the most important themes in the Christmas passage we read from John's Gospel is that it's not the way it is supposed to be.

Here is the truth: The baby was born into a broken world. Jesus came to our rebel planet and promised to restore us. The good news is that we still have the story of how it once was. *"In the beginning God..."*

*Lord, help us pause this season to remember how it once was. When we have lost our way, thank you for rescuing us with Your Word.*

Bruce Humphrey



*December 2  
Isaiah 7:10-14*


"I can't wait 'til Christmas" ... a familiar chant from children all over. It can start in our home as early as July! The wish list, the countdown, the anticipation, all for that special day. One advantage the kids have in their waiting ... they know the day will come, eventually.

In the Advent hymn we hear the cry of the people, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." The waiting went on for years, as God's people watched for His coming. Emmanuel, God with us. We can rejoice because we know He has come. Jesus has come to redeem.

But as you walk through these days of Advent, perhaps you are waiting for an answer from God, waiting to hear from a prodigal child, or waiting to know the outcome of some event. God sees and knows each waiting heart. We can rejoice in knowing that Emmanuel, God is with us. Even in our waiting. And the greatest gift can often be that assurance that He is with us.

*Dear Lord,  
Please meet us in our seasons of waiting. We know that You are our hope, that You are the living God ... with us, each moment of each day. May our hearts rejoice in Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.*

Nancy Casey



*December 3  
Isaiah 9:2-7*

I was at a Christmas party with my wife last year. She is a Stephen Minister, and I went along with her to their holiday gathering at Steve and Rochelle Castillo's house. We had just finished eating, and I was sitting there after dinner telling one of the Stephen Ministers about a rotator cuff that I had torn in three places. One of the tears was a second tear in the same place, and I was scheduled for surgery in February of 2009.

The Stephen minister asked me if he could pray for me, and, of course, I said, "Yes." He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "In the name of Jesus, your shoulder is healed." "Are you kidding me?," I asked. "No, I'm not kidding," he said in a very matter of fact tone. I thanked him profusely, but he said it had nothing to do with him and everything to do with Jesus.

Day by day, it started feeling better. Eventually, I went back to the doctor, and he said, "Well, let's see what happens." February came, and the pain was gone, so I canceled the surgery. Now, eleven months later, I'm playing golf and tennis, and I'm having no problems with it. To me, it's a miracle.

*Jesus really is a miracle worker, and He loves a party. Maybe this holiday season God could work a miracle through you. All it takes is a simple prayer and a simple trust in a God who does miracles.*

Jack Guenthard with Dee Crimmel



*December 4*  
*Isaiah 11:1-10*

Isaiah foretells the arrival of a Savior-King whose reign will truly be good news.

We are told that the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon the promised Savior in multiple ways, demonstrating to us that his qualifications to rule and reign will far exceed those of mere earthly nobility.

We are told that our Savior will reign with a righteousness that far exceeds mere earthly wisdom. He will judge in a manner that will bring justice to the poor and the needy.

We are told that the coming reign of the Prince of Peace will express reconciliation, peace, and harmony in ways that currently seem impossible. Yet, this transformation was made available to us when our King Jesus entered into our world.

The good news is that we now have the option to live beneath the benevolent and loving rule of Jesus, the very place we were designed to live. Moreover, as we are being transformed inwardly, we are invited to participate with Him in His work of transforming the community, nation and world.

*Jesus, help me learn to live my life completely yielded to You. Thank you King Jesus that You are putting my life right. Thank you for calling me to help You put this world right. Amen.*

Geoff Hsu



*December 5*  
*Jeremiah 31:31-34*

*"The day is coming,"* says the Lord. As we look forward to celebrating the impossible miracle that the Lord of all breaks out into this world as a child, we are awestruck. Everything will be different, prophesies Jeremiah. Our relationship with the Lord will be redefined completely. This ancient voice of Israel knows that the presence of God will burst forth from our hearts, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and need not be taught any more. He knows that all of us will bow our knees and have the chance to surrender in to His embrace. And, when we bow and surrender, He offers the other great miracle: full forgiveness with perfect redemption.

We offer this devotional to the Lord and all who desire Him. Thank you, Lord, for Your miraculous work in our family. Just as You burst forth from the womb, You have burst forth in new ways in our lives. Just as You came to heal the brokenness of all mankind, You have mended past failures and inadequacies in us. Our minds struggle to grasp the concept of a grace that is so strong that God forgives and forgets our sins. But, we know it to be true. In this season of Advent, we rejoice for having lives within the covenant that Jeremiah foresees. On bended knee, our hearts are full as we anticipate the birth of our Savior.

*Dear Lord, we thank you for the gift of Your precious son, Jesus Christ, and for the gift of Your Holy Spirit to guide us. What an amazing God You are, not only to forgive us of our sins when we confess them to You, but to forget them, as well. Help us, Lord, to forgive others and ourselves and even forget, as You have. Amen.*

Brad Lichtman and Diane Moss



*December 6*  
*Revelation 21:1-4*

Advent is about good news, encouragement, hope. And this world can always use more. If we aren't careful we can become discouraged by the headlines – war, hate, financial meltdown, even global warming. We may run out of ozone if we don't run out of fossil fuel first. More than anything, we are overwhelmed by the hurt that happens around the world and in our own neighborhoods. The outlook could be bleak if we were not reminded by Christmas of the good news of faith. We are reminded by our passage from the book of Revelation that this world is not the ultimate reality. There will be a new earth someday and a new place to live where God will be with us. Tears will be wiped away for the last time. The appearance of “things always seeming to be getting worse,” will be gone. It may not happen right away but we are reminded by our advent celebrations that it will happen one day.

*Take today's newspaper headlines and pray that the promise of Revelation 21 and the hope of Christmas would break into the stories and lives behind the headlines.*

Neal Nybo




*December 7*  
*Isaiah 32:1*

The Old Testament concept of righteousness is a much deeper and broader concept than hits our ears today. Righteousness today connotes a sense of holiness; or perhaps, judgment. Those who are considered ‘righteous’ often are avoided because of the ‘holier-than-thou’ attitude that can accompany them. To them, though, righteousness was about being truly good on the inside. To them, a righteous leader would be heard and seen as a leader who was truly good on the inside - full of integrity and equity and compassion. The ancient Hebrews weren't used to righteousness and justice. They had decades and generations of leaders who would make decisions based on “what was right in their own eyes” (ex. injustice, inequity, violence, rich-poor divide), rather than holding to higher standards. So, when a new king is announced who would rule with righteousness and justice, this would be not just good news, but great news! This king, pronounced by the prophet Isaiah, is a good king - truly good from the inside out. He will rule their people with compassion, with mercy, and with justice - all that they were desperate for. His coming means that change is coming. In this future promise, the question then would be how to welcome the new king and make room for Him.

The promise to the people has been fulfilled - the king has come. How have you welcomed this new king into your life - into your family, your business, your social life, your habits, and your secret places? What parts of your life are hidden? As we welcome the Lord Jesus again this season, what change might be coming for you?

*Lord, I welcome You into all parts of my life. Thank you for being the truly good king. Rule my life with justice. Amen.*

Scott Schimmel

  
*December 8*  
*Isaiah 52:7-10*

Beautiful feet are not something guys think about much. Some time ago, I found out that good things come to one who gives his wife the gift of a pedicure. Betsy went to her first pedicure wondering what all the hype among “the girls” was about. She came home with beautiful feet and a relaxed smile. It seems that the Lord has many ways to “comfort His people!” Now she’s one of the regulars down at the shop.

The book of Isaiah is a record of his prophetic visions. In today’s passage, he is especially exuberant about the vision he is receiving from on High. It is a message of hope for the Hebrew nation who had been longing for the Messiah for many generations. Exiled to parts of the world not friendly to their kind; lost without their central worship site, the temple in Jerusalem; lonely for God, they need a vision to keep their hopes up.


Who doesn’t? The work-a-day world wears us down with its constant demands and ceaseless routines. Don’t we need to get in touch with our salvation, too? Don’t we need a word from Him who brings good tidings of peace? Jesus is coming soon! He is coming to bring Good News from our Creator: God loves us and wants to bless us.

God’s first blessing is Creation; God’s second blessing comes to us with rough, dusty feet. Probably, Jesus would have appreciated a good pedicure, even if he is a guy. Regardless, his feet are beautiful for their own special reason: they bear our salvation.

Look! Live! Celebrate! He is coming! He is coming soon! On foot...

*Gracious God, when feet and back are tired, comfort me. When my soul is out of sorts, soothe me. Where others need your comfort, let me be a messenger of peace to them, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.*

Chris Cook

  
*December 9*  
*Matthew 1:1, 16-17*

This is one of the most skipped sections of the Gospels. Why would the message of Jesus, the Messiah, start with a tedious list of His ancestry?

Here is proof not only that Jesus came through the heritage of Abraham and David, but also that He came from a long list of men and women that are just like us! This list represents people that have great moments, and moments of failure. It shows people who make very poor decisions, but turn around and follow God in heroic measures. We see that God dropped Himself right into a human, imperfect family tree that is just like yours and mine...

Here is where this “most skipped scripture segment” speaks to you and me, for God is saying that His message of salvation through Jesus Christ is for ALL of humanity. He reaches out to us, picking those that aren’t always the best of the best, aren’t perfect. Hebrews 4:15 states that we have a High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is able to empathize with us in all of life’s good and bad moments, because He knows our humanity, personally. Jesus is the mysterious mix of being fully God and fully human, too.

*As we near Christmas, the day when God entered into our humanity through Jesus, let us remember the “not so perfect line-up of humanity” that God chose as His! God’s love is for all of us, in our moments of greatness and even darkness. Amen to that!*

Ryan Ross





*December 10*  
*Luke 1:5-25*

Zechariah, a Jewish priest, and his wife Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes. They obeyed all His commandments and laws. They had grown old and were childless. Zechariah was on duty, directing the worship services, when he was chosen by casting lots to enter the Holy Place to burn incense there in the Lord's presence. This was most likely a once in a lifetime opportunity. When the people saw smoke from the burning incense, they prayed; the smoke drifting toward heaven symbolized their prayers ascending to God.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah while he was in the Holy Place and told him that his wife would bear a son. They were to name him John; he would be great in the eyes of the Lord. He was never to drink wine, and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth. He would persuade many Israelites to turn to the Lord and he would precede the coming of the Lord, preparing the people for His arrival.

Zechariah and Elizabeth no doubt had prayed many years for a child, without results, so to be told this news caused Zechariah to have doubt. He questioned Gabriel, and because of his doubt, Gabriel told him he would be unable to speak until his son was born.

*As we pray, then wait and watch for God to answer our prayers, we learn that God answers prayer in His own way and time. We must also be open to what God can do in what seems to us to be impossible situations. God's answers may not come soon enough for us, but they are never too late.*

*Keep praying, watching, and waiting---God IS listening!*

Gwen Miller



*December 11*  
*Luke 1:26-38*

*"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Luke 1:38*

There are times in life when God offers us something great. How we respond can have effects far greater than we can even imagine.

A little over 2000 years ago God sent the angel Gabriel into the life of a young Jewish woman in a small unimportant Jewish town, to proclaim that He was stepping into human history, and she was chosen to be the mother of His Son.

How did Mary respond? She was at first troubled at Gabriel's greeting. He continued, explaining God's plan, and her fears gave way. Mary's response was, *"How will this be since I am a virgin?"* – not if, but how. As Gabriel unfolded the rest of God's plan, she listened – God's Holy Spirit would come upon her, the power of God would overshadow her, and the *"impossible"* would be done.

Mary's final response reflected her trust in God: *"I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said."* In her humble submission, her life and that of all humanity would be forever changed.

*Holy, gracious, loving God,  
As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Your Son, we praise You that for You nothing is impossible. Thank You, Jesus, for stepping into human history and bringing Your great love into the world. When Your Holy Spirit speaks into our lives, may we, too, listen and humbly respond, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as You have said." In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

Rachel Gleed



*December 12*  
*Luke 1:39-45*

While reading Luke 1:39-45, it came to mind these two women of God greatly loved one another and were so connected far beyond being cousins. Mary, mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, wife of Zechariah and mother of John the Baptist, are about to witness a miracle. Mary hurriedly prepared to visit Zechariah and Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea. When Mary entered their home she greeted them. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed, "*Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.*" Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!

*Pray for a humble state of being; as in Mary's feeling of unworthiness for God's honor.*

Carrie Griffith



*December 13*  
*Luke 1:46-56*

This particular passage of scripture, known as Mary's song, has always been one of my favorites. I have a special memory concerning this verse which takes me back to Christmas of 1994.

We were living in the Los Angeles area, and attending Hollywood Presbyterian. My daughter Melissa was 14, and had been asked to read Mary's Song for both Sunday morning services. She was told very specifically when to go up to read the scriptures. During the first service at the appropriate time, Melissa went up front with her Bible and faced the congregation, ready to read. All the lights were on her and Pastor Todd Bolsinger. Usually the pastor gives a few introductory words, and then the scriptures are read. But this Sunday, Pastor Todd's intro was much longer than usual. He was talking about how Mary as a young girl had said, "Yes!" to God. Melissa stood there and waited for about ten minutes and then gave me a look as if to say, "Did I come up at the wrong time? Should I sit back down? What should I do?" I motioned for her to just stay there. Eventually, she read the scriptures, but after the service, we asked Pastor Todd if Melissa had come up at the wrong time. Pastor Todd said, "Oh no. It was perfect. I wanted the congregation to gaze at a 14-year-old girl. I wanted them to see how young Mary was when she said, 'Yes!' to God."

*Lord, I pray I will always be willing to say "yes" to You. Please give me wisdom and strength to continue on this spiritual journey. Thank you for going before me and for leading the way.*

Kathy Johnson



*December 14*  
*Luke 1:57-66*

What's in a name? I chuckle to myself every time I hear the name "John the Baptist." As a child, I could not understand why he was not "John the Presbyterian." I had no idea that it had nothing to do with him preferring one denomination over another!

In reading the scripture passage, I am struck by the fact that "the Baptist" part of his name is not the focus - it is "John." God makes it very clear that this child is different - he will not "carry on the family business." Even when John is in the womb, it is obvious that God has a great plan for him.

The exciting thing is that God indeed has a plan for each of us as well. We may not go down in history as the one who baptized Jesus, but we are all created with a purpose - God's purpose. We are here to make a difference in the lives of others, to show God's love. We may not have John's gift of oratory, but what we do have is God's love and the knowledge that whatever our situation or ability, we can reveal that love to others each and every day.

*Dear Lord, I know You have a plan for me. It may not be the path that I would choose for myself. Teach me to trust You and guide me so that I may serve You. Let Your love be revealed to others through me - each day. Amen*

Lisa Belding



*December 15*  
*Luke 1:67-80*

What an exquisite tribute to our glorious and loving Father. As I read this scripture, I am amazed that God always delivers what He promises and that He does this through the transformation of ordinary people. For me, the significance of this passage is that if we remain faithful and steadfast in our belief, we will be blessed beyond measure with the abundance of His redeeming love and mercy.

*Dear Heavenly Father, You are a loving and forgiving God even when we, your children, fall short of Your glory. I pray that during this holiday season You will use us as You used John - to spread the news of salvation through forgiveness of our sins and transformation of our lives through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Barbara Angius



*December 16*  
*Luke 2:1-7*

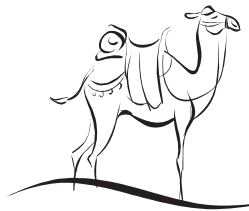
It's fascinating when you think about it; God being born in a manger. When you really stop to think about it, it's more than fascinating; it's absolutely absurd. But the truth is that we've heard the story so many times we've managed to turn something extraordinary and absurd into something ordinary and mundane. So as we take this time to prepare our hearts for the miracle of Christmas, let's pause and allow ourselves to appreciate the absurdity of Christmas.

The truth is that God, being all powerful, could have entered the world at any time, place, or manner of His choosing and yet, He chose to enter the world through an unwed, teen mother. Not only that but Mary delivered her baby, God incarnate, in a barn! She had to lay Him in a feed trough because there was no other place for them to stay.

But the most absurd thing about Christmas is not the unwed, teen mother or the fact that the Creator of the Universe was born with goats and sheep in attendance. The most absurd thing about Christmas is that it happened at all. The fact is that God, all-powerful, all-knowing, chose to leave His heavenly throne to be born as a baby in a manger; totally dependant, utterly humble.

*So today take a moment to revel in the mystery, to wonder at the obscurity and to thank God for the absurdity of Christmas.*

Dawn Neldon



*December 17*  
*Matthew 1:18-25*

What a shock that must have been for Joseph!

When his sweet, beloved Mary told him about her pregnancy, he knew immediately that the baby was not his. According to scripture (Deuteronomy 22:23-24) Mary could have been stoned to death for adultery. Joseph protected her from a violent death by planning to quietly send her away.

But God had an even better plan. He sent an angel to Joseph confirming the supernatural conception and encouraging the marriage.

Joseph believed. He chose to trust God no matter what the consequences would be. Some people would call him a fool and others would probably say Joseph and Mary were delusional. But Joseph and Mary were strong believers, willing to follow God's guidance rather than seek the approval of others. Perfect parents for Jesus!

*Lord, God, Thank you for showing us how Mary and Joseph believed You and trusted Your guidance. Help us to believe and trust Your guidance even when our circumstances seem impossible. Amen.*

Cheryl Magulac



*December 18  
Luke 2:8-20*

Can I identify with the shepherds? I've never lived out in the fields tending animals - never even slept outside at night without a tent. Were the shepherds even religious people - who knows? Yet, they were open and willing to hear the Good News, go directly and see for themselves, and then go and tell everyone in the neighborhood what they had seen. Can I identify with the shepherds in that way? Has my personal contact/relationship with God thrilled me, awed me, made an impact that has flowed naturally through the actions of my life?

The shepherds were part of an experience that changed the world. We, too, can choose to be part of a life - changing experience - not sit on the sidelines, but let God's Spirit blow through our life and lead us to become the transformed person God created us to be.

We were created by God to work with Him in His plan of redemption (Ephesians 2:10). The shepherds glorified and praised God when they discovered everything they had been told was true. Can I live my life as a praise to God (Ephesians 1:12) as I discover for myself that God is real and faithful to His promises?

*Dear Lord, You are so awesome and great - help me to see I am part of Your large plan in many small ways with every action I take and every word I say. Help me to let go of the details and be a part of the flow of Your spirit in this world. Amen.*

Linda Allen



*December 19  
Luke 2:21-40*

In the day that Jesus was born, there were many devout Jews awaiting the coming of their Messiah. In this brilliant moment, scripture weaves together the longing of God's faithful people of the Old Testament with the fulfillment that is Jesus, Son of God. When Mary and Joseph took the baby Jesus to the Temple to present Him to the Lord, Simeon, a righteous and devout Jewish elder was there. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he recognized Jesus. Simeon's declaration not only proclaims the Lord's coming as Israel's strength and consolation, but also that Jesus has come for the whole world.

*"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you now dismiss your servant in peace.  
30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people,  
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and for glory to your people Israel."*

Simeon's prayer is rooted in the past, declared in the present and glimpses the future.

How can we carry this message today and share the truth that this Child is the Hope of the World, the long-awaited Savior... and that He has come not just for some, but for all?

*Father God, May we, like Simeon, be faithful in waiting. May we live to proclaim the salvation brought to each and every person through Your Son. Help us to share the true Light of the world through the blessing of Your Holy Spirit. Come thou long expected Jesus, Come today and set us free.  
In Jesus' Holy Name,  
Amen.*

Cary Boyll

*December 20  
Matthew 2:1-12*

“When the word of their inquiry got to Herod, he was terrified – and not Herod alone, but most of Jerusalem as well”

As I read the Matthew 2:1-12 passages, the “fear” Herod and others felt really spoke to me. The message of a “Messiah” being born, a newborn “King of the Jews” must have raised questions. How will this Messiah impact my life? What will this new Messiah be like? Herod’s fear drove him into secrecy and deception, blinding him from being able to experience the joy the wise men eventually did.... *“When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.”* Matthew 2:10.

I think back to when my oldest son was in high school. His sole purpose in life was to “have fun.” This pursuit became a concern for me. After all, there is more to life than fun.....when would he realize that?

It wasn’t until sorrow hit our family that I was able to see the true depth of his heart. During my father’s days in hospice, it was this very teenager who sat with him, held his hand, shared his thoughts, and prayed for God’s loving comfort. One day, I stopped myself before entering my father’s room to see my son lying on the bed with my father, holding his hand, and telling him how much he loved him. At that moment, I saw what God had been trying to show me for weeks but my fear was blinding.....I saw the depth of this young man.

What fears keep you from experiencing joy?

*Lord, help us to be open to the unknown, walk with You in faith, and experience the joy You intend for us.*

Patti Hunter

*December 21  
Matthew 2:13-18*

In this passage we see both the future foretold and prophecy fulfilled. The omniscient, omnipotent Lord. He knows when we will listen. He knows when we will obey. He knows when evil will strike.


For me, a mother of three, this passage is one of the darkest in the Bible. I cannot imagine the terror of knowing that someone was coming to kill one of my children. How fast would I run if I was given warning? Faster than LaDainian Tomlinson. Would I pause to pack a bag? Not a chance. Would I travel to a foreign country to save them? Even to the moon.

As I enjoy the holiday season in my warm, cozy Poway home, surrounded by my husband and three healthy children, I pause to reflect that there are millions in this broken world without these comforts. Night and day, parents worry if their children will live to see adulthood, or even the next day. Their very existence is threatened and they have nowhere to go, no “Egypt” escape route. Evil lurks at their doorstep. How far away that seems from the abundance of our holiday parties and shopping lists. And yet, it tugs at my heart.

*Lord, I am humbled by the many blessings You have poured upon my loved ones. May we be ever thankful for the gift of Your Son. Grant us the ears to hear Your call on our lives, the hands to help those in need, and the heart to love as You have loved us.*

Rochelle Castillo






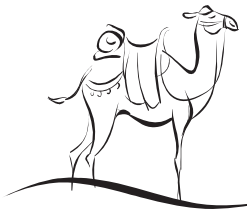
*December 22*  
*John 1:14*

This is one of the greatest single verses in the New Testament. It tells us about the most precious gift we could ever receive. Far greater than any gift we will find under our Christmas trees--a gift we don't deserve and we cannot earn by ourselves. God's unfailing love and faithfulness. Jesus came to live and die for us. God created the world and then God became human in the person of Jesus Christ filled with Grace and Truth and Glory. If we want to know what God is like all we need to do is look at Jesus. He came to show us so we will get to know God intimately and know how to live our lives. Jesus shows us the right road to take when it is not clear. Jesus never gives up on us. When we feel like giving up He won't let us. His Spirit is with us always. He cherishes us. We are precious. He is compassionate and understanding. We can pray and talk to God any time.

The longest journey in the world is from our heads to our hearts. When the truth finally reaches deep in our hearts - that Jesus died for us, for you and me - what greater love is that? How can we not follow Jesus, trust Him, and praise Him? How can we not be filled with love and gratitude, and go out and tell others of the most precious gift in the world?

*How is your relationship with God? Are you committed to God's service and in the participation of God's transforming spirit in your life?*

Polly Purcifull



*December 23*  
*John 1:19-34*

John knew what God's purpose for his life was. What would it be like to be born knowing what God's purpose for me is? Would it be easier to follow God's wishes? Would I still rebel and try to do things my way?

Fortunately, God has given us His word (The Bible) to guide us to stay on the path He would have us follow.

It is a constant search for me to stay on that path. I am always hoping for a sign from God to let me know that I'm going His way. John was watching for a specific sign (the spirit as a dove would descend to and remain on Jesus). When John saw this he knew that Jesus was the Messiah.

My signs have not been so public or dramatic, but Jesus does let me know that He is with me. It is during those quiet times, when a sudden sense of well-being descends on me and I know all will be well. It is when He sends the right friend to call or visit just when I need them most. Sometimes it is when He moves me to be the one to make that call or visit.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for your signs that remind us that you are with us. Thank you for the Bible, that is so important to help us in our search to live the life that You want for us.  
In Jesus name, Amen*

Iva Pace



*December 24*  
*Hebrews 1:3*

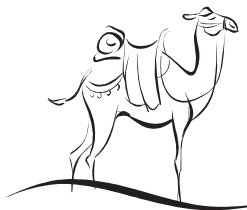
Reading this scripture brings to mind a song, written by B. Millard, sung in our contemporary services. "I Can Only Imagine" describes what we might experience in those first moments in God's presence when we get to Heaven.

*"Surrounded by your glory, what will my heart feel? Will I dance for you Jesus or in awe of you be still? Will I stand in your presence? To my knees will I fall? Will I sing 'Hallelujah?' Will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine, I can only imagine."*

What an incredible experience this will be when we finally meet the triune God face to face. Scripture tells us that humans are not able to look into the face of God, but when we get to Heaven, that will change. Then we will clearly see God's glory before us. The greatest gift that the Father could bestow upon us is the gift of His son, Jesus Christ. Because He sacrificed His life for us, we are free of our sins, fully forgiven on the day we arrive. What will it be like to be seated with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Until that day comes, one thing is for certain - I can only imagine what I will think or feel or do or say.

*Heavenly Father, Light of the World, lead me in the paths of righteousness all the days of my life so that when I arrive in Heaven, You will greet me in glory and I will sing Hallelujah for eternity, dancing with joy forever. Amen.*

Barbara Bennett



*December 25*  
*Isaiah 2:1-5*

Contrary to the old song, the best things in life are not free. Rather, they are often elusive and always fragile. Consider peace. People everywhere yearn for peace. But peace of any kind is elusive and fragile. We yearn for lasting peace between nations, but wars and rumors of war are always with us. We long to be at peace with our spouses, family members, friends, and neighbors, but peace with others is interrupted by periodic disputes and conflict. We want to be at peace with ourselves, but frequently find ourselves dissatisfied or distressed by what we have said or done. And we yearn for peace with God, but find our walk of faith littered at times with doubts and guilt.

In the midst of our frustrated hopes, we encounter Isaiah's vision. And it reminds us that these four kinds of peace—peace between nations, peace between people, inner peace, and peace with God—represent the eternal will of God as well as the yearnings of humankind. In the prophet's vision, the four dimensions of peace converge into a future where they are no longer elusive and fragile, but are the essence of life. We get a taste of peace in this life. And we shall know peace in its fullness in the life to come. For the Prince of Peace is come, shall come again, and shall bring us into the fullness of His peace.

*Lord, send me forth this day with Your peace abiding in my heart. Amen.*

Bob and Jeanette Lauer



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for their heartfelt and prayerful  
contributions to this devotional.*



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