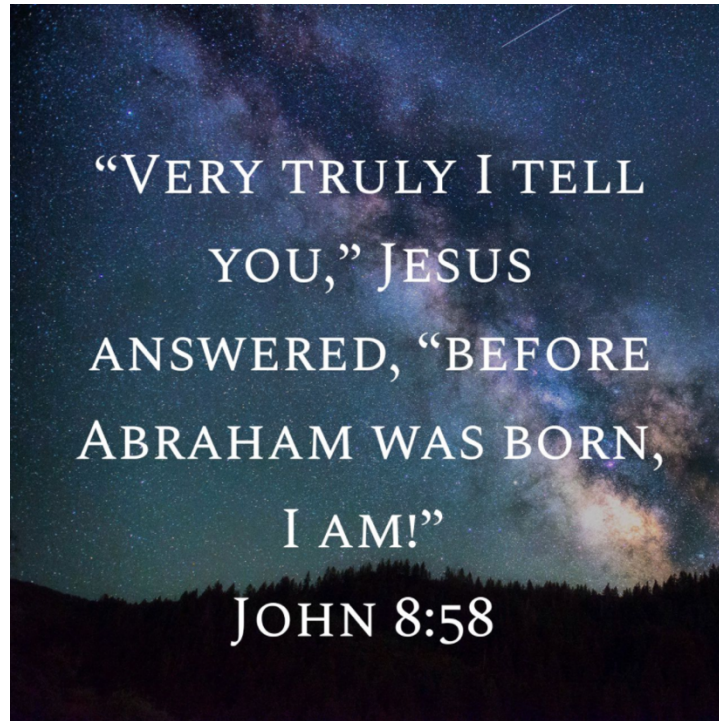


# *First ARP Women's Ministries*



*2021 Advent Devotional*

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May these devotions enrich your time with the Lord as you grow in knowing Him better and loving Him more for the glory of His beautiful name!

Thank you to Lilah Craig, age 8,  
for the beautiful artwork on the cover.

## *Dear ladies,*

The Christian faith believes the Messiah has already come to earth as Son of God and Son of Man.

Our faith believes Jesus Christ has taken our sins to hell and we will never be judged for them. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, is part of the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the alive I AM and for us Advent is a time of anticipation as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, “I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. (John 6:35) The I AM has the power to satisfy our souls with peace. He satisfies as with his presence and we have a contentment the world will never know.

“I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12) The I AM gives us spiritual sight so we’ll never walk in spiritual blackness again. We are saved forever from the fiery abyss of Hell.

“I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:7) Our Messiah is the giver of provision. First, as the good shepherd, He laid down his life for us. And second, his children know his voice and follow him.

Our Messiah gave us a great gift. We know his voice. He is the I Am, the most powerful force in all that we see and in all that we don’t see, but we know his voice!

“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6). Our hearts don’t have to be troubled for the Messiah, a real person, speaks truth. We need direction, something genuine and something that lasts. The Great I Am has answered our need for direction, truth and life in one Scripture. That is why we celebrate Advent. Jesus Christ is our Messiah who delivers us from all sin, enables us to hear his voice, and gives us eternal life.

***Eve Schaap***

2021-2022 Women’s Ministries Spiritual Life Assistant Leader

## **December 1**

### ***The Word ~ John 1:1***

*“In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God.  
The Word was God.” (John 1:1)*

Jesus is the Word. According to equivalent substitution in mathematics, let's replace the Word with Jesus. In the beginning was Jesus. Jesus was with God. Jesus was God. (John 1:1).

When I first came to the Lord, I did not understand John 1:1. If I read the replaced version, it would be crystal clear and reveal the key point ---- The Word is Jesus!

Jesus is the Word of God, which means everything God wants to show and say to humanity is shown and said in Jesus perfectly.

When you read “in the beginning”, it might remind you of another Bible verse. *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)* In Genesis Chapter 1, through the process of God's creation, God said everything He made was very good. Because every day started with God's Words. In the same way, every day was good because every day started with having Jesus. Therefore ----

Before you enter the world and its adventures every day, meet with Jesus first. Put on your armor---- Jesus. Let him be your bulletproof jacket. Let him be your armor to protect you from the attack from the evil and temptation of the world. (Ephesians 6:13, Romans 13:14)

Before you enter the world to fight, meet with Jesus first. Pick up the sword of the word----- Jesus. Let him be your weapon with which to fight. (Ephesians 6:14-17)

Before you enter the world to meet people every day, meet with Jesus first. Put on Jesus. Let his aroma reach those who don't believe, touch those who are broken, and snatch the lost out of the fire. (2 Corinthians 2:15)

Before you enter the world every day, meet with Jesus first. Let him be the light on your path so you won't stumble or get lost (John 8:12). Let him be the salt in your mouth so your tongue won't set fire and stain yourself and others (Galatians 4:6).

Start your day with God's Word. Start your day with a date with Jesus.

How sweet! ❤️

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us your words. Thank you for giving us Jesus. Please give us the hunger and thirst for your words, and give us desire for Jesus more and more day by day. In Jesus's name we pray.*

**Huiping Wood**

**December 2**  
***Wonderful Counselor ~ Isaiah 9:6***

Let's be honest. All of us love to hear the sound of our own name-especially when it's spoken by a loved one or a close friend. What's in a name that makes it so special?

Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ Isaiah prophesied that a child would be born for us and given to us. He would be our Savior, our King, our Wonderful Counselor. He would be our advisor, our mentor, our consultant. What a comfort and joy it is to know as we enter this season of preparation that He is indeed our guide, our organizer, our Wonderful Counselor.

But what kind of organizer or guide? He is wonderful! He will cause us to be "full of wonder." Jesus' kind of wonderful is awe-inspiring and superior to any other kind, for He is perfect in every way. (Matthew 5:48) His love is so wide and deep (and wonderful) that we cannot fully understand it. (Romans 5:8)

So don't leave Him out of your Christmas chaos! As you prepare your Christmas meals, as you shop, as you wrap your gifts and as you gather with those you love-don't forget to call Him by name! Our blessed Savior-the One who gave ALL He could will rejoice at hearing you call Him by name-Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God!

*Prayer: Father God, thank you for the gift of your Son, our Savior. Help us this Advent season to intentionally call Him by name, Wonderful Counselor, and invite Him to be a part of our daily lives. In His sweet and precious name, Amen.*

**Sharon Froneberger**

**December 3**  
***Mighty God ~ Isaiah 9:6***

What does it mean to be mighty? Mighty means possessing great power, strength or authority. Mighty sure does seem to describe our God! Our God is powerful, strong, and has all authority in heaven and on earth.

In the Bible one of the greatest displays of power despite size occurs in the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Despite David's youth and small stature in comparison to the giant Goliath, David miraculously wins the battle. Although this is impressive, the little guy may not always win. In fact, we are told in Ecclesiastes 9:16 that "wisdom is better than might." While some may say that it was wisdom that won for David, there are those times when the little guy may just lose against an opponent that is bigger and stronger. It is a comfort that at the end of the day, we have a Mighty God on our side that can overpower any opponent by his sheer might. We can rest assured that our Mighty God will always win. Our God never fails.

The mightiness of our God should impress us even more as we recognize that His might is better than our might. His strength is better than our strength. God's might is a part of who God is. God doesn't need to work to be mighty or strong. He just is! As humans we need to work to be physically strong. We also have seasons of our lives when our physical strength is greater than others. God's mightiness isn't something He needs to work for, or that he can lose. He is mighty, all the time! God also has might to spare. He desires to share his unlimited mightiness with us as he tells us we can turn to him for strength. In Ephesians 6:10, we are told to "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." This verse in Ephesians is part of the well-known passage about the armor of God. Just like you choose to put on armor to head into battle, we need to choose to be strengthened by God, and in the power of His might. When we feel weak, we can choose to turn to God for strength.

So, as we go through the challenges and trials of this sinful world, take comfort and rest assure that the God we trust is Mighty.

*Prayer: We praise you that you are a mighty God, and you do mighty things! One of the mightiest was sending your son to make an unrighteous people, righteous, in a righteous way. We confess that the depth of our sin necessitated this mighty act. Thank you for the gift of salvation that you have made available to us through the mighty work of your son Jesus Christ. Empower us to share the Good News of your mighty work to advance your kingdom on this earth. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

**Sabrina and Cora Kuiken**

**December 4**  
***Everlasting Father ~ Isaiah 9:6***

Have you ever received a gift and you didn't fully understand all that the gift was, could do or accomplish? You had to carefully read instructions or be extensively instructed in order to enjoy the gift at its full potential? With that in mind, I want you to imagine that you're opening Isaiah 9:6 as a present.

***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”***

You open this gift of all gifts to see a baby born in a stable to poor parents; he's wrapped in swaddling clothes and a manger is his bed. This child is born for you. He is the Son of God given to you. From all eternity He existed in perfect unity with the Father and the Spirit but his incarnation marks the starting point for his humanity and he did so for you.

At the end of the verse we're given a beautiful quartet of names that heap blessing upon blessing for us. In the Bible, names are not chosen based on what's trending in the culture or family. Names represent the intrinsic nature of the person. So, the significance and meaning of this gift is revealed and opened to us. Through the Spirit, Isaiah tells us God's Son has come to be to us our *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*.

So how do we understand that this Child's name is Everlasting Father?

First let us make the distinction that the Son is not the Father - they are distinct within the Trinity. But Jesus is *to us* an Everlasting Father. In ancient times, the father of a nation shared a similar role as the father of a family. These men were tasked with protecting and providing for those under their care. In a similar way, this Child, Jesus, will become King and be a father to His children - protecting, providing, watching over, and guiding us to our heavenly home. And because he is our everlasting father, He is not limited by aging or death but lives forever in perpetuity.

Oh, the blessings of having Jesus as our Everlasting Father! As Spurgeon once said, “There is no unfathering Christ, and there is no unchilding us,” He is everlastingly a father to those who trust in him.”

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the child born to us, the Son given for us - Jesus. Help us to trust His fatherly care for us in every moment of our lives. Teach us more and more about who you are so that we may love and adore you increasingly*

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**Betsy Forbes**

**December 5**  
***Prince of Peace ~ Isaiah 9:6***

Humanly speaking we all seek peace; that wonderful feeling that all is right with the world! At this time of year, we hope for peace, saying, "peace on earth, good will towards men." In Isaiah 9:6, Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. Indeed, it is Jesus who came to earth to bring his Father's perfect peace.

What is the peace that God gives mankind? The Bible has a lot to say about how we get it and the word peace appears over 400 times in scripture. Fundamentally the scriptures talk about the peace we can have with God as well as the peace we are called to have with our fellowman. Let us walk through the Bible to explore some thoughts on both.

First let's look at Peace with God. "...the Kingdom of God is...righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Roman 14:17) God's peace comes through justification. "Since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1) Peace comes through loving God's law. "Great peace have those who love your law and nothing can make them stumble." (Psalm 119:165)

Next, God wants to bless us with His peace. "He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads you beside still waters." (Psalm 23:2) "Peace I leave with you. My Peace I give you, not as the world gives. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27) "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety." (Psalm 29:11)

Finally, God calls us to have peace with one another. "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 12:18) "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and be holy; without holiness no one will see God." (Hebrews 12:14) "Whoever would love life and see good days must seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:10) May the very words of God bless you as you ponder these thoughts on peace this Christmas season!

*Prayer: Prince of Peace, fill us this Christmas with a fresh knowledge of the peace we have because of what you have done for us. Help us seek peace with everyone you place in our path. And "may the peace that passes all understanding guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus!" Amen.*

**Annabelle Kelly**



## **December 6**

### ***Son of God ~ Luke 1:35***

Luke 1:35 - !And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God."

To understand Gabriel's answer to Mary we need to put it in context, so a brief summary of verses 1:26-34: Mary was a virgin who was engaged to a man named Joseph who was a descendant of David. Gabriel told Mary that she would conceive a child to be named Jesus (Messiah). This child would be called the Son of the Most High (God) and that he would sit on the throne of David forever. Mary asked how this would happen since she was a virgin and verse 35 is his answer.

This child that Mary conceived was begotten of God through the power of the Holy Spirit and therefore had the very nature of God so that he could be called the Son of God. Hebrews 1:3 states that this son "is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe with his power." As the Son of God, he shares God's divine nature, as the son of Mary, he has a human nature. Joseph was his legal father, but not his biological father therefore Jesus did not have a sinful, human nature. He is fully God and fully man. In Jesus' divine nature, he lived a sinless life of obedience so he could be the ... "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29)

Just as the three persons of the trinity cooperated in the creation of the world, so they each had a role in the redemption of mankind; God conceived the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Son took on human form and lived, died and was resurrected to achieve the redemption of mankind. How truly awesome that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Often when I think of the Son of God coming to earth and entering time and space as a man, I think of a quote from C.S. Lewis on the incarnation: "If this thing happened, it was the central event in the history of the earth." (*Miracles*, p.108) Amen! Something we should celebrate at Christmas, but think about and wonder at all year long.

*Prayer: Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the depth and breadth of your love for us as demonstrated by your plan of redemption is truly overwhelming. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that by becoming man you understand us, our struggles and our joys, and that you are not only our Savior, but our Great High Priest, and our intercessor. We offer you the praise and worship you deserve. In your holy name we pray. Amen.*

**Viki LaChapelle**

**December 7**  
**Jesus ~ Matthew 1:21**

**“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”**

This passage is very familiar to us, but we often fail to understand what exactly Matthew is saying. In today's world, names are not as significant to people as they were in Jesus' time. In this passage, Matthew tells us exactly who Jesus is and what his name means.

Jesus means Yahweh saves and was a common name in Israel. Yahweh carries the hope that God will save Israel, but in Biblical times people understood it in more literal terms. But in this passage, the angels are proclaiming so much more. They are telling Joseph that Jesus will save us all from the bondage of our sins.

The angel comes to Joseph to let him know that what Mary is telling him is the truth and that Jesus is the Messiah. We are so privileged to have a God who loves us so much to have sent His Son to die for our sins and transgressions.

We all know the three gifts that the Wisemen brought to Jesus as gold, frankincense and myrrh, but God has also given us three gifts in Jesus Christ. 1.) A Son of David who fulfills God's promise of a king who will reign forever; 2.) A child who is God's Son and conceived by the Holy Spirit; and 3.) A Great Deliverer, who saves his people from their sins. Jesus's half-brother James later writes (James 1:17) that there is no more precious than the gift of Jesus. Nothing can or ever will compare to this gift to us.

***Prayer:*** Lord, I thank you and praise you for the most amazing gift we could have ever received from you. Your Son, Jesus Christ, is the only gift we ever need. I thank you, Lord, for all the wonderful blessings we have and the promise that one day we will be allowed to enter into your kingdom. Please Lord, help me to never take your most precious gift Jesus Christ for granted. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen!

**Colleen Bledsoe**

**December 8**  
***Immanuel ~ Matthew 1:23***

It was almost lunchtime on a hot day in my Hebrew conversation class in Jerusalem. I was trying to concentrate on the prepositional phrase we were studying - *with us*, instead of food and the heat.

*with us ... immanu*

Our friends will be eating ***with us*** (*immanu*) tonight.  
We appreciate you meeting ***with us*** (*immanu*) today.  
David is staying ***with us*** (*immanu*) for a week.

Everyday occurrences ... doing life together ... ***with us*** ... *immanu*.

Then it struck me (I'm a slow learner). We weren't just learning a grammar pattern. What we were really studying was a description of the present and eternal reality of the incarnation ... *Immanu-El* ... the *with-us-God*.<sup>\*</sup> Even though my orthodox classmates didn't seem to make this connection, for me it was as if God interrupted the class and said, "That's who I am. Immanu-El. It isn't simply a name I had when I was laid in a manger so many years ago. And it's not just my name in the critical events of your life. No. I am the currently and constantly present *with-us-God* ... *Immanu-El* ... in **all** of the day-to-day routines of your life - eating with you, meeting with you, staying with you. In all of the mundane, the difficult, the joyful, and the painful routines of your life, my heart's desire is to be your *with-us-God*." And this incomprehensible desire of the Godhead to be *with us* - with you and with me - has been revealed and repeated throughout Scripture. In the Exodus, God rescued His people from slavery "out of the land of Egypt so that [He] might *dwell among them*" (Ex. 29:46). In times of distress, David reminds us that "the LORD of Armies is *with us - immanu*; the God of Jacob is our stronghold" (Ps. 46:7). And Solomon's prayer is ours: "May the LORD our God be *with us - immanu* - as He was with our ancestors" (I Kings 8:57). We look forward to the day that John the Revelator foretold when he "heard a loud voice from the throne say, 'See! God's dwelling is *with* mankind, and He will live *with* them. They will be His people, and He himself, *God-with-them*, will be their God' " (Rev. 21:3).

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, we thank you for being *Immanuel* - the *with-us-God*. As we prepare to celebrate Your birth, may we also live in the reality of Your presence with us in the daily routines of life and in light of Your future coming to dwell *with us* forever. Amen.

\*"*El*" is a shortened form of the Hebrew name of God - "*Elohim*."

**Sarah Koh**

**December 9**  
***Savior ~ Luke 2:11***

As a kid, I looked forward to finding my Christmas stocking on Christmas morning. . . Would there be a Lifesaver Storybook in there for me? There usually was. Several rolls of that candy contained in a neat little book-like package. There were some flavors in those rolls that I liked more than others. . .the pineapple, the watermelon. Some I didn't care for (and still don't) . . . the cherry, the orange.

A little later in life, I learned about the story of the Candy Cane and its connection to Christianity (the shape of the candy cane represents The Shephard's staff, the red represents the blood of Jesus, and the white represents His purity). As it turns out, the Lifesaver candy was called "Lifesaver" because it was made in the shape of a life preserver. (Head-smacking here – duh!)

After thinking about these mainstays of candy we see during the Christmas season, I can't help but think there is a correlation between the Lifesaver and Christmas. Christmas – the birth of our Savior. . .

**“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”**  
**Luke 2:11**

There were times when those half-eaten rolls of Lifesavers got stuck down in the bottom of my pockets. . .full of lint. . .so much so that I didn't want them anymore. An abundance of Lifesavers. I believe we treat God's grace in much the same way. His abounding grace is freely given to us, but many times our attempts at self-sufficiency get in the way. We know his provision is within our reach but turning to Him can sometimes not be what we want because we think it means giving up control. It's cherry. It's orange.

But accepting this free gift is exactly what we need – because it is the only thing that will save us. Save us from our brokenness, our sin. And bring us back to the safety of knowing that God gave us his only Son, Jesus - a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. We can rest in that assurance, that by believing in Him, we are saved.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, you are our Savior. Apart from you, we can do nothing. We thank you that you that you sent your son, Jesus Christ, as an atoning sacrifice for our sin. Let us never take that for granted. Hide within us the knowledge of your saving grace. Amen.*

**Kelley Kelly**

**December 10**

***The Lamb of God ~ John 1:29***

*“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said,  
“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*

In Genesis chapter 22, we see a foreshadowing of Christ’s advent. Abraham is taking his only son Isaac to the top of Mount Moriah in obedience to God’s direction to sacrifice the boy. On the way up, Isaac asks his father, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Likely not realizing the profoundness of his answer, Abraham responded, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” Before Abraham could raise the knife to kill his son, God provided a ram as a substitute sacrifice. But centuries later, God would provide an even more astonishing and magnificent substitute to atone for man’s sin!

Why did God command the Israelites to sacrifice animals? As Nancy Guthrie explains, “The daily killing of lambs was meant to show that sin has a consequence, and it is death. The sacrifice of an innocent substitute was necessary to obtain forgiveness and to approach God.”

Most Jews of Jesus’ day were engaged in this ritual of substitutionary sacrifice. As John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” those present would have taken notice. John was announcing the ultimate sacrifice for sinful men, a representative perfectly acceptable to God the Father because Jesus had no blemish of sin.

“...you were ransomed,...not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (I Peter 1:18,19)

This divine Lamb willingly took on the sin of His chosen ones even as the wrath of His Father was poured out on Him, cursed on a cross. God’s acceptance of this substitution was then confirmed by Christ’s resurrection! The sinless Lamb of God died and was raised to secure our redemption!

So, as we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate the coming of this Lamb who will someday receive all the adoration He is due: power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! (Revelation 5:12) For now, what can I give Him in gratefulness for what He has done?

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1,2)

*Prayer: O great God, you are worthy of all honor and praise! Thank you for the priceless gift of Jesus, the spotless Lamb who purchased redemption with His blood. Please help me to live my life as a living sacrifice, devoted to you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

**Donna Tyree**

**December 11**  
***Healer ~ Matthew 9:35***

The ninth chapter of Matthew begins and ends with Jesus healing. Our verse today is Matthew 9:35: “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.”

Let’s look first at where Jesus went. Verse 35 tell us throughout ALL the cities and villages, every single one of them... large cities and small villages. No place was too big or too little for Jesus to visit. Each one was important to Him.

Why did He go there? He went to teach in the Jewish synagogues (churches), to preach the good news of salvation through faith in Him and to heal the people who came to see Him. He taught, preached and healed every place He visited.

Our parents teach us about many things, such as right and wrong and how to brush our teeth. Our Sunday school teachers help us learn about God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. Pastors Matt, Brian, Josh and Mark preach from the Bible and help us understand God’s words to us. The doctors we go to help heal us from things like a cold or put a cast on a broken arm. Many people around us every day teach, preach and heal.

However, in Matthew 9:35, Jesus came to the people as a servant healer. He healed those around Him because of His love for them, of His own will, not because someone made Him do it. In His heart and with His life, He wanted to help stop hurt and pain in people.

Verse 35 says Jesus was healing EVERY disease and EVERY affliction. A disease is a sickness that affects a person, keeping his/her body from working normally. An affliction is weakness in a person’s body, mind or spirit. In every person who came to Jesus for help, Jesus healed them... every single person, every single disease, every single affliction.

*Prayer: Let’s pray together today: Dear Jesus, thank You for coming to teach us, to tell us the Good News of faith and eternal life and to heal us. We praise You, because we understand that You are the Great Physician, the Great Doctor. We are thankful that we are ALL important enough for You to see us and to care about us. We pray for others, our families and ourselves for You to heal our hearts, our minds, our bodies, our spirits, wherever it is needed. Heal us so we can serve you with ALL of ourselves. In Jesus’ precious name, AMEN.*

**Dana Haley**

**December 12**  
***The Bread of Life ~ John 6:35***

Jesus knew how to put things into terms that people could relate to. From biscuits to baguettes, and bagels to brioche, bread has been a mealtime staple throughout the ages. In fact, bread is often used as a metaphor for our most essential needs. For example, “bread and butter” refers to the having the basics in life, and “having enough bread” refers to having enough money to live on. The people Jesus was speaking to would have viewed bread as a staple of their daily diet.

Jesus had just fed the 5,000 with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. After everyone had enough to eat, there were 12 baskets left over! The next day the people followed him. He pointed out that they were only following him for physical nourishment, but that they were missing the bigger picture. He was offering something much greater - something lasting and eternal. He referenced the manna their forefathers had eaten in the desert. God provided that bread to the Israelites every day to nourish them. But that bread would not keep. If they gathered more than one day’s worth it would rot overnight. Its nourishment was also temporary because our physical bodies will eventually die. But Jesus is the bread of LIFE. He is not temporary like manna; he is eternal. Through him we also can have eternal life in heaven with God the Father.

The feeling of hunger can leave us feeling desperate. We’ve all seen images of starving people who are given food. They seem desperate to eat as much as they can, as fast as they can. Likewise, our spiritual selves need nourishment. Without spiritual nourishment we can feel empty to the point of desperation. Our culture offers lots of counterfeit solutions to fill our sense of emptiness: entertainment, material wealth, alcohol and drugs, etc. Those things may satisfy us for a short time, but eventually they will spoil and we’ll hunger for something lasting. Jesus offers that through a relationship with him. But just like nourishment for our physical bodies, we need a daily walk with Jesus for our spiritual health. How fitting that the Hebrew translation of the birthplace of Jesus, Bethlehem, is “House of Bread.”

What are you craving? Don’t accept counterfeit satisfaction that the world offers. Settle for nothing less than complete satisfaction offered through a steady diet of Jesus, the Bread of Life.

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for providing for our every need, physical and spiritual. Please help us to not be distracted by the temporary things this world has to offer, but to always look to Jesus, the Bread of Life, for our spiritual nourishment. Amen.*

**Claire Wilson**

**December 13**  
***The Light of the World ~ John 8:12***

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

This devotion is simple. Google search “Lauren Daigle’s ‘Light of The World.’” Listen at your highest tolerance, and get your praise on. For best results, download the song and play it on repeat. Another sliver of advice: You may want to be alone in your car or at home, as it may get to you.

“The Light of The World” is my reset song, and I invite it to be yours. When life is overwhelming, situations are frustrating, and things aren’t going my way, this song resets my heart and mind to my purpose and to my king. This song, when played at the aforementioned settings, has the power to make me openly weep. My dog (named Daigle, respectively) comes and checks on me when she notices the tears. It’s a praise song and a perfect reminder that while we wait for The Light of The World, He is already here, waiting with us, holding us, letting us know that our purpose, our everything, is greater than this world.

Following Him and turning from darkness is not always easy. It’s tempting to laugh inappropriately, judge constantly, and behave in ways that do not reflect our Christian beliefs and values. But we are called to love, to reflect Jesus, and to be a light to others so that they will seek Him too.

The Light of The World shines through us, but as previously stated, sometimes we need a hard reset. I know I do. I need to be reminded that my time, my experiences, and my victories are much greater than this world. In fact, they are not mine at all; they are His. Just as Romans 8:28 reminds us, *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*

As a Christian, I am to be a light to others and to lead them from darkness, just as He led (and leads) me. Sometimes shining for others is frustrating, stressful, and discouraging. I don’t always see the transformation made by being used as God’s light, but I follow Him and trust that He is using my words and actions for the glory of His Kingdom. On occasion, He does reveal the miracles He has performed through me, and those moments give me full body chills, offering another hard reset, reminding me of my calling to follow the one true Light of The World.

*Prayer:* Jesus, You are truly The Light of The World. May others see that light reflected through me so that I can lead them to You. Use me as a vessel to reveal Your love and Your will so they can then continue to spread Your light into this world. I give all glory and praise to You. Amen.

**Jamee Webb**



**December 14**  
***The Door of the Sheep ~ John 10:9***

When my kids were little, leaving the house could be an ordeal. Nobody can find shoes. Somebody has to go to the bathroom. Finally, we get out and get where we need to go. My (kind of embarrassing) problem was that we would sometimes return home and the door was open. I don't just mean unlocked - although I've certainly done that as well - I mean wide open. I have no idea how that can be missed by so many eyes when we are pulling out of the driveway. And, when you come back to a dark house with the door open, it can be unnerving. The door provides security. You feel safe coming home to a house with the door locked and shut. It's easy to put babies to bed and climb under the covers yourself because of the protection of the locked door.

John 10:9 tells us Jesus is the door - not just for a safe night's sleep but for eternal salvation! It's the second part of the verse that made me stop and think, "why are we going in and out when we've gotten salvation?" But, it's because the sheepfold isn't for living in. We come in for rest and go out to find pasture. Thinking of Christ as the door that we go through in all of our comings and goings is a great way to keep Christ at the forefront of our thoughts. I love the quote from St. Patrick, "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left...."

This focusing our whole life on going through Christ in all things brings about the rich blessings that are spoken of in the next verse - "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). We are given not just eternal life, but an abundant life. All blessings are found through Him. C.S. Lewis says, "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

There are distractions everywhere, and this time of year things can be especially hectic. I am going to try to be conscious everywhere I go that I am going through Christ. Amidst the bustling of Christmas goings on, I might leave my door wide open, but may I never fail to be mindful of Christ before me and behind me. May others see Christ in me. And may many more this Christmas season enter through Christ into salvation.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Your Son to be the door through which we get salvation. I confess that my mind is so often on lesser things. Please remind me that I go through you in all my comings and goings. In Jesus' name, amen.*

**Carolyn Bomgaars**

**December 15**  
***The Good Shepherd ~ John 10:14-15***

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep...and I lay down my life for the sheep." [John 10:14-15] Before Jesus was born, King David as a shepherd boy wrote, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing." [Psalm 23] And, Isaiah the Old Testament prophet wrote: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way." [Isaiah 53:6]

Why does Jesus say of Himself, that He is the good Shepherd? And how are we, God's people, "like" sheep?

Sheep settle for less; they only see what is right in front of them. They will drink from a dirty puddle even though there is fresh, clean water a few yards away. Like sheep, we settle for less, (sin) even though we know it will harm us. **Jesus, the Good Shepherd "leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul."**

Sheep are vulnerable to predators and cannot defend themselves. The Shepherd's rod protects and defends his sheep against thieves and wolves. His staff lifts wayward sheep out of deep ravines. **Jesus, The Good Shepherd, protects us from the political, commercial & religious thieves & wolves that threaten us. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff comfort me."**

Sheep are not made to carry burdens. **Jesus, the good Shepherd, carries our burdens, "Come to me, all you who are weary & burdened and I will give you rest. [Matt 11:28]** God's word reminds us, "Cast your burdens on the Lord, & He will sustain you." [Psalm 55:22]

SHEEP are valuable. Only Wealthy men owned large flocks in Bible times. Like sheep, we are of great value to God; **Jesus, the good Shepherd gave his life for us : "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."** [I John 3:16]

As God's people, His sheep, we go "astray," we need provision, protection, and someone to carry our burdens and give us rest. We are of great value to God: "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." [John 3:16] We are His sheep and He is our good Shepherd!

*Heavenly Father, I praise you for Jesus the Good Shepherd who provides everything that I need. This Christmas season and always, help me to remember that Jesus is the Great Shepherd of the sheep, who gave His life for me that I may live eternally with Him in Heaven. In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.*

**Karen Willis**

**December 16**  
***The Resurrection and The Life ~ John 11:25-26***

These verses fall in the middle of the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus delayed going to be with Lazarus, Martha and Mary for two days after hearing that Lazarus was sick. Just as men would later say of Jesus, “He saved others, let’s see if He can save himself,” so, too, there may have been many who wondered why the Healer had not acted in time to save Lazarus. In fact, both Martha and Mary say the same thing: “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus’ words of comfort are astounding. He is saying that someone better than a healer is here. That there can be someone so great that death is no longer a threat. And before He demonstrates this by raising Lazarus, he calls Martha to faith by claiming that He is the source of true life.

The season of Advent is a time of reflecting and hoping. We reflect on God’s promises in Scripture and we look forward to the day when Jesus returns, restoring life and bringing about his Kingdom in full. The gospels are full of eye-witness testimony that Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promises. His miracles and teaching show us both His sovereignty over creation and His mission to renew the broken relationship between God and humanity. Jesus, the Word made flesh and dwelling among his people, cleansed uncleanness, healed sickness, and defeated death. His identity caused a ripple of new creation that spread to the entire world and continues to this day as His people live in light of this truth: Jesus is the resurrection and the Life.

Are you struggling with fear, doubt, sadness, or anger at the brokenness of the world— a sickness? isolation and loneliness? The loss of a loved one? A desire unmet? Does it feel like God is ignoring you and if only He had come sooner, this mess could be avoided? Jesus offers us a gracious invitation. He freely wept and entered into his friends’ grief, even knowing that God’s power would raise Lazarus from the dead. He will meet you where you are. But He won’t leave you there—He will offer you Himself as your resurrection and your life. Do you believe?

*Prayer: You enter into our own grief and suffering and You offer words of hope and healing. In You is there true life, life that will never end. Please help us believe your word and walk in light of eternity as we call on Your name. Amen.*

**Elisabeth Cary**

**December 17**  
***The Way, The Truth, and The Life ~ John 14:6***

Not long ago, an old friend of mine travelled out of state for a major surgery. She could barely walk, and her other friends and I knew that the surgery would change her life for the better. My friend, however, was frightened by the idea of surgery. We had to come alongside her and encourage her to remember that though she had to pass through a frightening time, these things had to happen for her good, and she should look forward to the new life she would have afterward.

In the same way that we encouraged my friend, Jesus sought to encourage His faithful, believing disciples during the Last Supper. He knew that His arrest and crucifixion drew near, and He also knew that His disciples did not fully understand who He was and why He came. It was at this time that He revealed Himself to them as, "the way, and the truth, and the life."

After dismissing Judas Iscariot, Jesus told His faithful disciples that He would soon leave them and go to a place where they could not yet follow Him. However, He told them that they knew the way to where He was going. His disciples seemed to think that Jesus was preparing for a physical journey to a physical place, so they asked Him where He was going and how they could possibly already know the way there. As in other instances when the faithful misunderstood the nature and purposes of God, Jesus makes plain to His disciples who He is and why He came. He is the way; there is no other. Is this way sure and secure? Yes, because He is also the truth. Where does this unfaltering way lead? To eternal life through reconciliation with the Father. "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Jesus knew that both He and His disciples were about to encounter challenging and frightening circumstances. To give them strength, He revealed not only the truth about His identity but also the hope of the new life they had and the eternal life to come.

*Prayer: Father, I thank you that you sent your only Son to be the way for us to come to you. I ask that while we remember His coming to us, you would work through this season to prepare our hearts for the eternity we will spend with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**Hannah Miele**

**December 18**  
***The Vine ~ John 15:5***

What a gift – that we who were once far off, by the sacrifice and life of Jesus, are brought near. Furthermore, we are grafted into the vine itself – the true vine – and commanded to abide in him.

This is the last of Jesus’ “I am” statements in the book of John. He paints a picture with himself as the vine and his people being the branches. For those of us not trained in vine dressing, Jesus teaches us that a branch is worthless unless it is connected to the vine. Lest there be any confusion, the branch separated from the vine cannot stay alive, nor can it produce any fruit and it is destined for the fire. Life itself cannot flow from the vine to the branch unless the branch stays fused to the vine.

Like the branches, we too are utterly dependent upon Jesus, The Vine. This is a picture of intimacy, belonging, connectedness, life, purpose, and fruitfulness – all for the glory of the Father. Being grafted into Jesus is life itself. As we remain connected with him, Jesus causes the Holy Spirit to flow life into us.

When we seek life from a source outside of Jesus, we become anemic. When we attempt to produce fruit according to the world or by our own efforts, we produce dust. I expect I am not the only one who has worn myself out, hurting family and friends in trying to do all the things that society tells me I need to do or chasing perfection. Nor am I the only one who has vainly attempted to change myself – and control others – as if that would make me more presentable and holy. It is meaningless and I become a fraud – as preposterous as if I were a branch supergluing grapes to herself to prove to the gardener that she is worth keeping around.

When we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, when we love Him with all of our hearts and let Him show us how beloved we are, we are abiding in Him. As we abide in the Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we produce fruit that will last. Thanks be to God who has redeemed us and called us by name, grafting us into His family by the precious life of Jesus, the vine.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son Jesus so that we might have life to the fullest. Just as you have loved your Son, would we know in increasing measure the love that the Son has for us. Bind our hearts to you Lord and let us abide in you alone. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.*

**Laurie Meberg**

**December 19**  
***Son of David ~ Matthew 21:9***

“It’s all in a name.” For many people, lineage is important. Who someone’s parents or grandparents are is enough to garner approval or maybe disfavor. To this day, when I visit my dad’s hometown of Gap, Pennsylvania, if people know I am Dr. Beacher’s granddaughter, or George Beacher’s daughter, there is an instant connection.

When we don’t know someone’s family background or there isn’t name recognition, it can often take time to build relationships and trust. In a culture where importance is placed on a name and too often on perceived status, approval is initially granted based on lineage. To some, family connections can be significant.

The importance on lineage is nothing new. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and the exuberant crowd cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” They recognized his kinship with King David. They knew of his family history. Through their salutations to the Son of David, they beseeched Jesus in Hebrew to “Save us,” and they acknowledged his royal lineage. Their praise-filled cries declared that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The Messiah from the seed of David had arrived. (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

In Matthew 1:1 we read God’s account of the origin of Jesus Christ, “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.” From his humble birth in Bethlehem, to his triumphant entry on a donkey, the people recognized his royal lineage.

Jesus, through his birth, crucifixion and resurrection, has made it possible for us to be joint heirs with him. We are washed in the blood, made new, and we share Jesus’ name. As Christians, we are grafted into this beautiful family tree. The hymn “Family of God” is a beautiful reminder of this:

“I’m so glad I’m a part of the Family of God, I’ve been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood. Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, For I’m part of the family, The Family of God.”

As we pause to celebrate the birth of Christ, we can rejoice in God’s divine plan. Those who saw Christ in person, recognized the significance of his lineage as they cried out, Hosanna, to the Son of David!” Now, through faith in Christ, we are part of that family.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, with thankful hearts, we praise you for sending your Son, a descendent of King David, to save us from our sins. Lord, during this season of Advent, may we slow down and focus our hearts and minds on the precious gift of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

**Laura Long**

**December 20**  
***Suffering Servant ~ Isaiah 53:4-6***

These words were written by Isaiah the prophet between 745 and 680 B.C. He begins these 3 verses by affirming that Jesus “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows”. According to some commentaries, “borne” and “carried” imply the taking of our burden, placing the weight of it on his shoulders and bearing it away.

Then Isaiah prophetically tells that the Jewish people will see Christ’s suffering and death as punishment from God. The self-righteous, arrogant Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day called him a blasphemer and a deceiver and demanded that he be crucified. But in verse 5 Isaiah says it was for our sins that he suffered. Words used in these verses certainly evoke visions of agony: stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, pierced, crushed. Verse 6 tells us that we all, like wayward sheep, are bent on going our own way. In Romans 3:23 Paul writes, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The last half of verse 5 in our Isaiah passage says, “the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed”. He suffered punishment for us so we can have the peace of God and peace with God. He suffered wounds so that one day we can experience complete healing. He suffered being crushed and separated from the Father so we can dwell with him for eternity.

One of my favorite songs is “*How Deep the Father’s Love For Us*”. Verse 1 of the lyrics reads-

*How deep the Father’s love for us  
How vast beyond all measure  
That He should give His only Son  
To make a wretch His treasure*

At this point in the song my eyes have filled with tears. The next several verses cause the tears to run down my face, especially where they mention “*my sin on His shoulders*” and “*my mocking voice among the scoffers*”.

Then come the precious words of the last verse-

*“Why should I gain from His reward?  
I cannot give an answer  
But this I know with all my heart  
His wounds have paid my ransom.”*

*Prayer: Thank you merciful, loving, heavenly Father. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (ESV)*

**Becky Waters**

**December 21**  
***Sacrifice ~ I John 2:2***

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Jesus made many sacrifices when he lived on earth. He gave up the beauty of heaven for a stable when he was a newborn. He had to give up his home in Bethlehem for a home in exile as a young child. And had no home during his ministry. Luke 9:58 says, “*He had nowhere to lay his head.*”

He gave up perfect companionship with the Father and the Holy Spirit to live among men who doubted, rejected, ridiculed, and harassed him.

He gave himself up to Judas, Roman soldiers, the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pontius Pilot. He gave himself up to being spit upon, whipped until veins, arteries, and organs were exposed. He gave up his dignity when he had to give up his clothes.

And when he died that horrible death on a cross he became an atoning sacrifice for our sins. No longer did the high priest have to continually offer sacrifices for sin. Jesus was an atoning sacrifice. He *once and for all paid the penalty for our sins-not will pay but has paid.*

At present there are approximately 7.9 billion people in the world. And we are all sinners. Jesus gave himself up to the cross that every one of us 7.9 billion and those who lived before us and those who will live after might be saved. What mercy! What a loving God!

*Prayer: Gracious God and Father of mankind, What thanks you deserve for your plan of salvation. I praise you for loving us so much more than we deserve I ask you for forgiveness when we take lightly this amazing gift of atonement. May we become more like Christ day by day. In His name we pray.*

**Jo Anne Parker**



## December 22

### ***Messiah ~ Acts 5:42 (NIV)***

“Shout it. Go on and scream it from the mountains. Go on and tell it to the masses that He is God.”—All the Poor and Powerless (All Sons & Daughters)

Every life shouts a message to the world. Our life can shout despair, entitlement, anger and envy or it can shout hope, life, peace and contentment. What message does your life declare?

The end of Acts 5 displays a group of believers who were bold, prepared, willing, eager, unashamed and courageous. Their message: Jesus is the Messiah. This is the message of Christmas. This is the message of every follower of Jesus. This courage came with a great cost. The apostles had experienced imprisonment, beatings, ridicule, and continual attacks against their faith. However, in their eyes, nothing could compare to the cost Christ had already paid. They would not compromise this mission of proclaiming the best news ever.

In the midst of great opposition, miracles were happening, community was being built and lives were being transformed. The evidence of Christ at work was the unshakable faith and serious joy of the apostles. *“Serious joy sets people free. When your joy comes from God through Christ, and is absolutely unshakable through grief and affliction and weakness and poverty and shame and persecution and loss, the culture loses its power to control you. If you take a stand the culture hates, and speak a word the culture condemns, and they shame you, and persecute you, and plunder you, but your serious joy remains, they’ve lost their power to control where you stand and what you say.”* (John Piper)

Opposition only intensified their eagerness to evangelize. As a believer, opposition can be used by God to propel us into even deeper ministry. *“When you have nothing to protect and nothing to prove, God moves through you.”* (Jennie Allen)

- How has God used opposition in your life to transform you more into His likeness?
- How has your personal suffering been used by God to form in you a spirit of perseverance, character, and hope?

The apostles loved God more than anything else. Their love was clearly displayed in the urgency in which they shared the gospel. *“We must obey God rather than men!”* (Acts 5:29) They joyfully obeyed. Just like the apostles, Jesus wants our full obedience in evangelism. *“Evangelism is speaking to anyone, anywhere, the gospel.”* (John Piper)

In this Advent season, may the treasure of our hearts be only Jesus. May the proclamation of our life be only Jesus. May the one thing that brings us serious joy be only Jesus.

*Prayer: Father, Help us to never stop telling the good news because Jesus loves us, He died for us and He is the only God. He wants us to preach about Him so others can know about Him and it will spread all over the world. Every person matters to God. As we go, we need to tell people God is with them, Jesus loves them and He made them for a purpose. Amen.*

**Courtney, Caris, and Addie Kate McKeown**

**December 23**  
***Mediator ~ 1 Timothy 2:5***

Jesus is the Great Mediator. The Greek word for mediator in 1 Timothy 2:5 is *mesitēs*. This describes an intermediary or go-between; one who intervenes to restore peace between two parties. Between whom does Jesus intercede and why? He is the intermediary between us and the Father. When sin entered the world, it made the throne of God unapproachable. Sin stains us in the presence of the One who is clean and as such we were banished from His presence. The Mediator bridges the gap introduced by sin and “is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2) which is to say He is who makes the Father positively disposed toward us in spite of our blemish.

When does intercession occur? One might say our justification is the past work of the cross; the pinnacle of Jesus’ earthly mission. While the work of the cross is finished and complete, intercession is the present on-going application of the cross. As Dane Ortlund put it in his book *Gentle and Lowly*, “Intercession is the constant hitting refresh of our justification in the court of heaven”. From moment to every moment, Jesus is pleading on your behalf to the Father out of the abundance of His warmth and compassion for you. And it is the pleasure of the Father to affirm his pleadings.

Even more comforting, Jesus advocates for you (1 John 2:1). Not only does He stand between you and the Father but he joins you to the Father so that you are aligned to Him. What if you overheard Jesus the King in the next room praying for that which burdens you most? Let it be your delight to know that at this very moment, there is one who speaks on your behalf to the Father. Now and forever you have a personal advocate who pleads your cause to the High Ruler of all creation. You and I, sinners who are but dust, are made right before a mighty God because of Jesus’ great mediation.

*Prayer: Jesus our Lord, we thank you for your intercession and advocacy that you perform in perpetuity. Your kindness toward us is unceasing and your faithfulness unyielding. Impress upon us a higher view of your character so we may know you more intimately and let it be our hearts’ fullest joy.*

**Emma Heavener**

## **December 24**

### ***High Priest ~ Hebrews 4:14***

The "therefore" at the beginning of this imperative points to a truth stated in the previous verse that "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." vs.13. So, when we go before our Great High Priest in repentance, He knows all - even if we ourselves may be unaware of our motives or intentions. The author of Hebrews, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, continues to explain that not only does He know all, but our Great High Priest is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way - just as we are - yet without sin. This reminds me of the relationship that a child has with Godly parents. The complete trust, confidence, and assurance of love is paramount for that child to flourish.

And so it is with us and our gift of faith in our Great High Priest as Lord and Savior. Barnabas goes on to assure the believer that we may approach the throne of our High Priest with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

I am reminded of one time when I was a recipient of that marvelous, miraculous grace. The weatherman had predicted the first warm day after a long winter. As I looked through my closet bypassing the lined, wool pants and trying on garments appropriate for spring temperatures, I realized I had "outgrown" my options over the winter months. Later that day, on a miserable ride home from work in a hot car while contemplating my sin of gluttony over the past season, the Holy Spirit prompted me to go before my Lord and Savior - my Great High Priest - who is able to sympathize with my weakness, and to confess my sin. I felt such shame because now I would need to purchase more clothes for an already-packed wardrobe. What disregard of the family finances I had been entrusted to! In resignation, I told God of my plan to visit a nearby consignment store - and should I find nothing that fits (the size I was looking for was the most popular size and often unavailable) I would not complain, but instead praise Him for His abundant provision, unending mercy, and everlasting love from my humbled and contrite heart.

Now, beloved reader, get ready to envision this miracle. I walked in to a very small shop called Jeri Lyn's Consignment Boutique in Belmont on East Catawba Street. I'm being very specific here because I now consider this location "hallowed ground". There, in the middle of the aisle was an entire rack of size \_\_\_\_ pants in all kinds of lovely fabrics and prints! "Where in the world did you get all of these beautiful pairs of pants?" I asked Jeri Lyn. She said that a lady had just retired from her job and no longer needed her business attire. And then it hit me . . . my Great High Priest had leaned down from His heavenly throne and caressed my cheek! He had just presented to me more grace than I ever could have imagined! I burst into joyful tears and told the shop owner about my conversation/confession that I had just had with Jesus! What a sweet moment of worship and affirmation we had together.

I love sharing this miraculous sign of God's love, presence and compassion, especially to those who go into that little shop with me for the first time. I could have missed it, though! I might have said, "What a coincidence!" or "This must be my lucky day!" But thanks be to God my eyes were opened to His mercy and grace! Often when I recall this sweet embrace of His arms of love, I giggle like a young child. Oh precious believer, let's hold firmly to the faith that we profess - we do have a Great High Priest - and His name is Jesus the Son of God at whose throne we can find grace to help us in our time of need.

*Prayer: Dearest Jesus, may we be eternally mindful and grateful that you are our great high priest who has gone through the heavens, and because of your death and resurrection, we also may become sons and daughters of Almighty God, our heavenly Father! Amen*

**Ruth Bernet**

**December 25**  
***Alpha and Omega ~ Revelation 1:8***

Ask yourself, how does Advent relate to the Names of Jesus? Well Revelation 1:8 states, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."* (CSB) Jesus also states in Revelation 22:13, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."* (CSB)

Take a moment to let that sink in. Jesus is the beginning and the end. I don't know about you, but that's a little hard for me to grasp. My finite mind associates this to a birth and a death. And this did happen. Jesus was born of a woman and died on the cross. But this doesn't tell the whole story. Genesis 1:1 states, *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* (CSB) Jesus, as part of the Trinity was there. Can you imagine the dark void of space and time where nothing exists except God? Wow!

What about the other side of that, "the last," "the Omega"? What does that even mean? Well, Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice. His blood covers our sin. No matter how bad we screw up, Jesus steps in as the ransom. The death of Jesus paid the price, and we are covered completely. All we must do is believe in Him.

Did you catch that? Back up a minute. All we have to do is believe in Jesus? Yep. Really believing in Him is more than thinking there is some "God" above who is like a genie to grant wishes when we want something, or to call upon when we get ourselves in a mess and need help getting ourselves out. When you give your life to Jesus the power of the One who was and is and is to come will be with you. He is so far above us, yet next to us at the same time. Always remember that He will return in His glory, and we will be with Him. This is the promise He made to us. The Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end looks down to you and I and cares about us. This is why we celebrate His birth and anticipate His return, because He loves us more than we can imagine. And remember, Jesus keeps His promises.

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you so much for sending your son to us. Thank you for the promises that we hold as truth. The anticipation of the day You return is our hope and our faith. May these words bless the one reading them. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.*

**Jacqueline Israel**



**Many thanks to our  
Advent Devotional  
Contributors!**

Row 1 – Lilah Craig, Eve Schaap, Huiping Wood, Sharon Froneberger,  
Cora and Sabrina Kuiken, Betsy Forbes

Row 2 – Annabelle Kelly Viki LaChapelle, Colleen Bledsoe, Sarah Koh,  
Kelley Kelly, Donna Tyree

Row 3 – Dana Haley, Claire Wilson, Jamee Webb, Carolyn Bomgaars,  
Karen Willis, Elisabeth Cary

Row 4 – Hannah Miele, Laurie Meberg, Laura Long, Becky Waters,  
Jo Anne Parker; Caris, Courtney and Addie Kate McKeown

Row 5 - Emma Heavener, Ruth Bernet, Jacqueline Israel



# 2022

*Come Join Us!*

## **Winter Bible Studies**

Because He Loves Me by Elyse Fitzpatrick

Sundays at 4:00

1/9, 1/16, 2/6, 2/13

Elijah by Priscilla Shirer

Thursdays beginning 1/20

10:00 in person; 1:00 via Zoom

## **Winter Luncheon**

1/23 after the second service

tickets \$5

Testimony by Nicole Wills,  
double lung transplant recipient

RSVP to Betsy

704-718-0026

*"You crown the year with Your goodness,  
and Your paths drip with abundance." Psalm 65:11*