



ADVENT

The King Has Come

2022

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MERRY CHRISTMAS, CHURCH!

As we approach this Christmas season, what a joy it is to reflect on the King! This year, our Christmas series is going to be titled "The King Has Come," based on the prophetic passage about the Lord found in Isaiah 9. It is because of the Lord's birth, death, and resurrection that we have Hope, Light, Joy, and Peace. This season as a church we will be reflecting on these themes together.

As a staff, we have created this resource just for YOU. It is our hope that we might slow down this Christmas season and reflect on what the Lord has done for us. All the stories of the Bible point to Jesus. You can follow the scarlet-colored thread of the Gospel through each book of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This season we will look at these stories and reflect on how they looked forward to the coming of the King.

This Advent Companion Guide is just for you as we reflect on the coming of the King this Christmas. At the beginning of each chapter, be sure to visit the link to see additional video content that pairs with this study. Hallelujah, the King has come!

Michael & Katie Gossett

Michael Gossett

Katie Gossett





CHAPTER ONE

*The **Hope** of Christ in Desperation*

HOPE

ISAIAH 9:1

¹Nevertheless, the gloom of the distressed land will not be like that of the former times when he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the future he will bring honor to the way of the sea, to the land east of the Jordan, and to Galilee of the nations.

GENESIS 3:1-15

¹Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden?'"

²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. ³But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴"No! You will certainly not die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵"In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹So the Lord God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

¹⁰And he said, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid."

¹¹Then he asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

¹²The man replied, "The woman you gave to be with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate."

¹³So the Lord God asked the woman, "What have you done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

¹⁴So the Lord God said to the serpent:
Because you have done this,
you are cursed more than any livestock
and more than any wild animal.
You will move on your belly
and eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will put hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.
He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.

In the familiar story of Genesis 3:1-15, we see several firsts in the Bible.

In the first few verses, Satan appears for the first time as a crafty, manipulative serpent. This is the first time that man is tempted to disobey God. Satan lies to Eve by twisting what God has said. Satan convinces Eve that God does not have her best interests at heart because he told her she couldn't eat from one certain tree, even though she has a beautiful full garden to enjoy. We also see for the first time the results of disobedience. After eating fruit from the tree, Adam and Eve feel shame and fear and try to escape by covering their bodies and hiding in the garden.

What does this passage have to do with Christmas? What does this story have to do with the joy we experience at Christmastime? If you keep reading, you will discover the story has everything to do with the hope we fully discover at Christmas.

From this very first story of our sin, we see the true nature of God's love for us. Even though God knew what Adam and Eve had done, he went looking for them because He still longed to have a personal, loving relationship with them. The depth of his love for them never wavered. From the very first occurrence of sin in the Bible, God has been in pursuit of us in order to redeem our relationship with him and give up hope once again.

Finally, we discover for the first time the hope of victory over Satan. Verses 14 and 15 tell us that the serpent is forever cursed, and Someone will come at the right time to deliver a fatal blow to Satan by crushing his head under their feet. It is in this prophecy about our Savior that we find hope.

ADULTS

1. Do you regularly study God's word, so you won't be deceived by the lies of Satan? (See Psalm 119:11)
2. How did Satan convince Eve to disobey God?
3. In what ways has God shown you the depth of his love for you?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Why did Adam and Eve hide from God?
2. How can we know how to obey God?

DAILY PRAYER

*God, please give us a desire in this Christmas season to know
the hope that comes in knowing You and living daily
by Your Word.*

GENESIS 6:9-18

⁹These are the family records of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries; Noah walked with God. ¹⁰And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with wickedness. ¹²God saw how corrupt the earth was, for every creature had corrupted its way on the earth. ¹³Then God said to Noah, "I have decided to put an end to every creature, for the earth is filled with wickedness because of them; therefore I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

¹⁴"Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it with pitch inside and outside. ¹⁵This is how you are to make it: The ark will be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. ¹⁶You are to make a roof, finishing the sides of the ark to within eighteen inches of the roof. You are to put a door in the side of the ark. Make it with lower, middle, and upper decks.

¹⁷Understand that I am bringing a flood – floodwaters on the earth to destroy every creature under heaven with the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives.

Have you ever wanted to throw your phone because it just was not doing what you wanted it to do? You know what you need it to do, but it doesn't comply. Maybe it rings or beeps when it shouldn't, maybe it doesn't alert you, maybe the screen freezes and will not let you do anything. Of course, throwing your phone across the room is probably not the best solution, even though it would feel good! Instead, the solution usually involves resetting your phone to fix the issue OR you need to start over and buy a new phone.

Genesis 6:9-18, this passage of scripture shows us that God is holy, just, and loving. We see earlier in chapter 6 that "When the LORD saw that human wickedness was widespread on the earth and that the human mind was evil all the time, it grieved the LORD." It grieved the LORD because He is holy, which means set apart, perfectly good. Psalm 89:14 says, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; faithful love and truth go before you." Since our LORD is holy and just, He decided to "wipe mankind off the face of the earth" (Genesis 6:7).

Mankind was corrupt and God's justice comes onto the scene. God decides to reset humanity and all living things. However, Noah found favor with the LORD. God tells Noah to build an ark, and this shows His love by saving Noah and his family. Noah's ark leads us to the manger. Both are symbols of salvation!

In the same way that God protected mankind through the righteousness of Noah, he would one day redeem mankind through the righteousness of Jesus. Therefore, we can look back to Noah's story and understand that it is a reference to Jesus. The wrath of God because of our sin is severe and real. Yet, those who trust in the provision of righteousness found in Jesus can have eternal hope!

ADULTS

1. Do you think today's earth is more corrupt than in Noah's time?
2. What does it mean when it says Noah was blameless among his contemporaries?
3. How does the hope we have in Jesus lead us toward living blameless among our contemporaries?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Why did God spare Noah and his family?
2. What would it look like to live "blameless" at your school?

DAILY PRAYER

Father God, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for making a way for Noah through the ark and for us by way of Jesus dying on the cross. Let us be reminded that there is hope found only in You, Jesus.

GENESIS 9:8-17

⁸Then God said to Noah and his sons with him, ⁹“Understand that I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you – birds, livestock, and all wildlife of the earth that are with you – all the animals of the earth that came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you that never again will every creature be wiped out by floodwaters; there will never again be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹²And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all future generations: ¹³I have placed my bow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴Whenever I form clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant between me and you and all the living creatures: water will never again become a flood to destroy every creature. ¹⁶The bow will be in the clouds, and I will look at it and remember the permanent covenant between God and all the living creatures on earth.” ¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and every creature on earth.”

Christmas is the perfect time to be reminded of how much hope we have in the Lord’s birth. Our passage today reveals the covenant that God made with Noah (known as the Noahic Covenant.) While reading these scriptures, I can’t imagine how Noah and his family felt as they lived through the big flood. Even today, we’ve witnessed more rain and land devastation than usual. If there’s a hurricane, a tornado, or even high wind and rain, fear and preparation quickly set in. Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark were a part of God’s faithful promise to us: the promise to never destroy the earth again.

In the same sky that came rain for destruction, God placed a rainbow of hope. As I think about the story of Peter walking on the water, I can’t help but wonder if God placed the sign of the covenant there so we would have to look up and not be fearful. Have you ever noticed how often the word ‘covenant’ is used in this passage? It is similar to the way parents are constantly reminding their children of the same things! With the rainbow as the sign of the covenant, God assures Noah that it’s HE that makes this promise to him. The constant reminder reveals God’s abundant love for us.

What is awesome about the Noahic covenant is that the rainbow still reminds us of God’s provision of hope. Not only did God enter a covenant with Noah but God enters a new covenant with us with his son, Jesus. This season let’s look to the hope and promise we have in the birth of our Lord!

ADULTS

1. Review the passage and note how many times the word ‘covenant’ is used. Why do you think God reiterated it so many times?
2. What are some tasks during this season that turn your focus away from the Hope and Promise God has given to us?
3. Ask the Lord to reveal any areas in your life where you are putting your hope and promise in things of the world and ask Him to show you how to give that over to Him.

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Why do you think it’s easy to place our hope in things of the world?
2. How can you share the Hope you have in Christ with your friends at school?

DAILY PRAYER

*Lord, we can’t be assured that we won’t wade through tough waters,
but we can hold firm to the hand that calms the seas.
Thank you for sending Your hope and promise to us.*

GENESIS 22:1-14

¹After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he answered.

²“Take your son,” he said, “your only son Isaac, whom you love, go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”

³So Abraham got up early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He split wood for a burnt offering and set out to go to the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship; then we’ll come back to you.” ⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac. In his hand he took the fire and the knife, and the two of them walked on together.

⁷Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, “My father.” And he replied, “Here I am, my son.”

Isaac said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

⁸Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” Then the two of them walked on together.

⁹When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.

¹¹But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!”

He replied, “Here I am.”

¹²Then he said, “Do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him. For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your only son from me.” ¹³Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son. ¹⁴And Abraham named that place The Lord Will Provide, so today it is said, “It will be provided on the Lord’s mountain.”

The Lord will provide. What a powerful, true, and most difficult phrase. This was a moment in the lives of Abraham and Isaac that neither one of them had any control over aside from their own obedience. “The Lord will provide,” Abraham says to his only son as he walks him to the altar. This whole scenario starts with God’s word explaining that God was testing Abraham. One of the greatest acts of love God can do for us is test our loyalty and commitment to Him. When He does this, if we are honest and obedient, our idols and sin are most clearly revealed. For Abraham, it seems like his own family had become more important to him than his relationship with God.

But God provided. Even in Abraham’s sin, God provided. Even in the midst of our own sin, God provided a sacrifice for our sin. God gave His own son. God has provided everything we need in Jesus and Jesus has done all that necessary to restore our relationship with the Father.

This story from the Old Testament is yet another foreshadowing of the coming Savior. When John the Baptist arrives on the scene in John 1, he proclaims, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” Revelation 5, which is a vision of something that has yet to occur, details a scene where countless thousands proclaim in a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,” and every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth refer to Jesus as the Lamb.

So, when we gather to celebrate Christmas and tell the story of the baby Jesus being born, we do so with the full understanding that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In the same way that God provided a substitute for Isaac, God has provided a substitute for us—and his name is Jesus.

ADULTS

1. What has the tendency to capture your mind’s attention and your heart’s affection?
2. How might God be testing your faith in Him?
3. Do you believe God will provide a rescue from your sin? In light of this, what does obedience look like?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. God tested Abraham’s love for Him by revealing what He loved most. Why is it so important our parents love God first, above any other thing?
2. When is the last time you can remember that God has provided something for you or someone you know?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Christmas is a great reminder that You have provided for us the greatest gift possible which is Your Son Jesus. Thank You that He became our sacrifice so that we could have a relationship with You!

Walter Ballou, Minister to Men & Singles

EXODUS 3:7-22

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey — the territory of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. ⁹So because the Israelites' cry for help has come to me, and I have also seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them, ¹⁰therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

¹¹But Moses asked God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

¹²He answered, "I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I am the one who sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain."

¹³Then Moses asked God, "If I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what should I tell them?"

¹⁴God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." ¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Say this to the Israelites: The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation.

¹⁶"Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said: I have paid close attention to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷And I have promised you that I will bring you up from the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites — a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁸They will listen to what you say. Then you, along with the elders of Israel, must go to the king of Egypt and say to him: The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Now please let us go on a three-day trip into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.

¹⁹"However, I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go, even under force from a strong hand. ²⁰But when I stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my miracles that I will perform in it, after that, he will let you go. ²¹And I will give these people such favor with the Egyptians that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. ²²Each woman will ask her neighbor and any woman staying in her house for silver and gold jewelry, and clothing, and you will put them on your sons and daughters. So you will plunder the Egyptians."

Many years after Moses' unplanned departure from Egypt and the death threats of Pharaoh, he finds himself shepherding the flock of Jethro on the far side of Midian. He is a long, long way from the glamour and comfort of growing up in Pharaoh's household. But he has put the past behind him and moved on with his life...or so he thought. An angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. As Moses walked toward the fiery bush, the Lord declared, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." The Lord continued by explaining the misery and oppression of his people in Egypt and his plan to rescue them. The shocking news was that Moses was going to lead the strategy.

Immediately, Moses began to protest and provide excuses for why this was not a good idea. Once again, the Lord stated his identity to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Ex. 3:14).

There are several valuable insights we can take away from this interaction:

- First, Moses needed to be reminded of God's Identity and promises to His people.
- Second, God reassures Moses of His presence.
- Third, no matter how difficult the situation, there is always hope (Matthew 19:26).

God challenged Moses to think bigger than his circumstances, abilities and past. As we look forward to Christmas and the true meaning of the season, let us be reminded of God's Promises, Presence, and the Hope we have in Jesus Christ.

ADULTS

1. Why do you think Moses needed to be reminded of God's identity?
2. What are some other references in the Bible of God stating His identity to people?
3. How does hope benefit us during the difficult times of our life?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. How does knowing our identity in Jesus influence our actions?
2. How does Matthew 19:26 change the way you pray?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, over the next few weeks, remind us of Your amazing promises, Your daily presence in our lives and the remarkable hope we have in Jesus.

EXODUS 12:1-7

¹The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt,
²"This month is to be the beginning of months for you; it is the first month of your year. ³Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they must each select an animal of the flock according to their fathers' families, one animal per family. ⁴If the household is too small for a whole animal, that person and the neighbor nearest his house are to select one based on the combined number of people; you should apportion the animal according to what each will eat. ⁵You must have an unblemished animal, a year-old male; you may take it from either the sheep or the goats. ⁶You are to keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembly of the community of Israel will slaughter the animals at twilight. ⁷They must take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where they eat them.

In today's passage, the land of Egypt was in big trouble. Due to disobedience, the sentence was clear; all the firstborns were doomed to death. The sentence was unavoidable, the payment was due. The only remaining path to life was through the death of a substitute. The debt was still owed, but the Lord provided a substitute by way of an unblemished lamb. Israel was given a path to life.

The Passover Lamb in Exodus 12 is a picture of why Christ has come. The Passover Lamb provides such a clear illustration of what Christ did for us. The path to life is outside of oneself and relies on the death of another. The lamb was the perfect substitute. If there were any imperfections at all, it would be disqualified. The lamb had to survive a fourteen-day period to prove its purity. Only after that proving period was it eligible as a substitute. In the same way, Christ had to survive His life on earth completely pure and sin-free. He was fully subject to Law, yet without failure in any form. Christ's perfect living qualified Him as the perfect substitute for the death each of us deserved.

The blood of the lamb over the doorpost worked. There was death all over Egypt except for the places where the blood of the lamb was displayed. Those places were passed over and spared. Likewise, God sent His Son for this purpose. He knew we were hopeless without Jesus, and he offered the free gift of grace and mercy in the form of His own death. None of us could ever earn life on our own but praise the Lord that we can be debt-free and forgiven! We have a path to life through the death of the perfect Lamb, Jesus Christ. The Christ, whose birth we celebrate this Christmas, has come to us to be the Lamb that was slain. Because of Him, we have hope.

ADULTS

1. Why does the path to life require a death/sacrifice?
2. How does the Passover lamb help you understand your need for a substitute/Savior?
3. What makes the greatest impact on you personally in realizing that Jesus acted as payment for a debt you owed?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. What things does the Passover lamb have in common with Jesus?
2. What does the blood of the Passover lamb represent in the story?

DAILY PRAYER

*Lord, thank You for sending Your Son for us and giving us a free path to life!
 Thank You for the sacrificial lamb, Jesus, who died so that we may live.
 We love You and we give You all the glory this Christmas.*

EXODUS 16:1-16

¹The entire Israelite community departed from Elim and came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left the land of Egypt. ²The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!"

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. This way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "This evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you will see the Lord's glory because he has heard your complaints about him. For who are we that you complain about us?" ⁸Moses continued, "The Lord will give you meat to eat this evening and all the bread you want in the morning, for he has heard the complaints that you are raising against him. Who are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord."

⁹Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your complaints.'" ¹⁰As Aaron was speaking to the entire Israelite community, they turned toward the wilderness, and there in a cloud the Lord's glory appeared.

¹¹The Lord spoke to Moses, ¹²"I have heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them: At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will eat bread until you are full. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God."

¹³So at evening quail came and covered the camp. In the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew evaporated, there were fine flakes on the desert surface, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, "What is it?" because they didn't know what it was.

Moses told them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each person needs to eat. You may take two quarts per individual, according to the number of people each of you has in his tent.'"

In this passage we see God providing for the needs of His people. He sends them food and then tells them to gather only enough for that day. Sometimes we tend to want to gather more than we need out of a fear that God will not provide tomorrow. He reminds His children that He will provide exactly what we need. Jesus reminds us that the motive for God's provision here is clear, "God wanted his people to see his glory and remember that he was working on their behalf." The motive remains the same today, He is working for our good, but more importantly, for His glory.

Sometimes when we lose focus on God and what He has promised, we fall into the trap of wishing for what we do not have or even what we had before and find ourselves complaining to God...or anyone who will listen. In Exodus 16:6-7 Moses tells the people that the Lord heard their complaining and that they would know that evening that it was Him that delivered them out of Egypt. The word "know" here is translated from the Hebrew word "yada," which means acknowledge, consider, declare, or understand. God's provision for them that day was a reminder to them "...that He who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). The provision we receive from God each day is a reminder of the same thing. Sometimes our complaining prevents us from remembering all that the Lord has done for us. Let us anchor our hope in Christ today. He will provide all that we need.

As we reflect this Christmas on the birth of our Savior, this story is a reminder that God will always provide for us. God has provided in Jesus everything we need to be righteous, everything we need to be restored, everything we need to be redeemed. It is because of this Jesus that we have hope.

ADULTS

1. Are you struggling to trust that God will provide for you both today and tomorrow? If so, what is keeping you from trusting Him?
2. How have you seen God provide for you lately?
3. Are there any areas of your life where you find yourself complaining more than remembering what Christ has done in the past?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. What are some ways that God has provided for you?
2. What is something that you are thankful for? How can you express this gratitude?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, provide in us a renewed trust in Your perfect provision for us; please remove our fears and help us to focus on You.

Kurt Fehlis, Student Pastor

EXODUS 20:1-21

¹Then God spoke all these words:

²I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

³Do not have other gods besides me.

⁴Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. ⁵Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, ⁶but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

⁷Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God, because the Lord will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.

⁸Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: ⁹You are to labor six days and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You must not do any work — you, your son or daughter, your male or female servant, your livestock, or the resident alien who is within your city gates. ¹¹For the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy.

¹²Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³Do not murder.

¹⁴Do not commit adultery.

¹⁵Do not steal.

¹⁶Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

¹⁷Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

¹⁸All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the ram's horn, and the mountain surrounded by smoke. When the people saw it they trembled and stood at a distance. ¹⁹"You speak to us, and we will listen," they said to Moses, "but don't let God speak to us, or we will die."

²⁰Moses responded to the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that you will fear him and will not sin." ²¹And the people remained standing at a distance as Moses approached the total darkness where God was.

Have you ever been with your friends or family, and someone wants to introduce a new board game to the group? Even if you are an avid gamer, if the new game has too many rules, you just seem to become disinterested and you may even regret your presence at the table. The more rules you must follow, and that you must remember with each turn, inevitably take away from the fun of playing the game. The rules become a burden to you.

As we read here in Exodus, God provided His people with some rules that they needed to follow. On the surface, most of these rules were fairly easy to abide by for the majority of the Israelites. Don't murder, easy. Don't steal, somewhat easy. As I read through this entire passage, the commandments seemed sort of easy to do on our own. If we fast forward though and read what Jesus explains in Matthew 5-7, the law seems impossible for us to follow, especially in verse 48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." These commandments, our means to have a right standing with God, are impossible for us to follow on our own.

Here is where hope arrives in the person of Jesus. He reminds us in Matthew 5:17 that He hasn't come "to abolish the law" by dismissing it and making it not matter but that He has come to fulfill it. Jesus' arrival gives us hope because He has come to do what we cannot, to fulfill the law and keep God's commandments, break the curse of sin, and provide a path back to God that hasn't existed since the Fall of Adam. By knowing and trusting in Jesus as our Savior, His righteousness becomes our own and we mysteriously keep God's law too. At Christmas we get to celebrate this truth, that hope has arrived for each of us in the person of Jesus!

ADULTS

1. In what ways do you try to follow God's law using your own strength and ability?
2. What has been the outcome when you have tried to do things on your own in the past?
3. Being reminded that Jesus is our hope to overcome rules we can't possibly follow on our own, how does that impact your need to be dependent on Him?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Why are rules good for us to have?
2. Since rules exist to protect us and for our good, which of the Ten Commandments can we focus on this week?

DAILY PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for sending Jesus to fulfill the law that we could in no way keep on our own. Help us to be more like You today.

Kelvin Reed, Associate Minister of Worship

JOSHUA 4:15-24

¹⁵The Lord told Joshua, ¹⁶“Command the priests who carry the ark of the testimony to come up from the Jordan.”

¹⁷So Joshua commanded the priests, “Come up from the Jordan.”

¹⁸When the priests carrying the ark of the Lord’s covenant came up from the middle of the Jordan, and their feet stepped out on solid ground, the water of the Jordan resumed its course, flowing over all the banks as before.

¹⁹The people came up from the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and camped at Gilgal on the eastern limits of Jericho.

²⁰Then Joshua set up in Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan, ²¹and he said to the Israelites, “In the future, when your children ask their fathers, ‘What is the meaning of these stones?’ ²²you should tell your children, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ ²³For the Lord your God dried up the water of the Jordan before you until you had crossed over, just as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up before us until we had crossed over. ²⁴This is so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord’s hand is strong, and so that you may always fear the Lord your God.”

As you are preparing for this Christmas season, are there special ornaments or decorations in your home that remind you of meaningful events in the past? In our home, we have a tradition of giving each child a new ornament each year. This unique trinket represents something special that has happened in their life during the past twelve months. In today’s passage, 12 stones representing the 12 tribes are placed at Gilgal to remind the Israelites of God’s miraculous provision. It is good for us to have reminders of God’s faithfulness. Take a moment and think of symbols or items that you may have, that remind you of God’s goodness.

As we know from today’s reading, this is the second time that God intervened in an amazing way as He parted the waters for the Israelites. The first time this happened was in Exodus 14, when Moses led the Israelites across the dry bed of the Red Sea. Do you think that it was easier for Joshua knowing that God had already parted the waters once before? As followers of Jesus, we are sometimes asked to do hard things, just like Joshua and the Israelites. It’s very possible that during this Christmas season God may ask you to do something outside of your comfort zone, something difficult. If He does, you can be sure that He will give you the strength to step out and go as He leads.

The beauty of today’s passage is found in verse 24 as Joshua points to the powerful hand of the Lord. The miracle of Exodus 14 and Joshua 4 allowed the Israelites to cross the sea, but even greater, it allowed all people to see the power of God. In other words, God has caused these incredible events to be written down and kept together in the Bible so that you can be reminded of His power and of the hope that is found in Jesus.

ADULTS

1. What is something difficult that you have overcome, that felt like God ‘parted the waters’ for you?
2. In looking around your home, what reminders do you have of Jesus and His provision in your life?
3. In thinking of vs. 24, do you have a friend, neighbor, co-worker that needs to know the power of the Lord? Christmas is a season where many are looking for a church family!

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. What is something that was hard to do that God helped you to do?
2. Why do you think those 12 stones were so important to Joshua?

DAILY PRAYER

*Thank You, Lord, for the miracles and wonders that You have done;
help me to keep these things always before me
so that I can remember Your goodness.*

RUTH 4:8-17

⁸So the redeemer removed his sandal and said to Boaz, “Buy back the property yourself.”

⁹Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses today that I am buying from Naomi everything that belonged to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon. ¹⁰I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, to perpetuate the deceased man’s name on his property, so that his name will not disappear among his relatives or from the gate of his hometown. You are witnesses today.”

¹¹All the people who were at the city gate, including the elders, said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is entering your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built the house of Israel. May you be powerful in Ephrathah and your name well known in Bethlehem. ¹²May your house become like the house of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring the Lord will give you by this young woman.”

¹³Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. He slept with her, and the Lord granted conception to her, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴The women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name become well known in Israel. ¹⁵He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Indeed, your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” ¹⁶Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and became a mother to him. ¹⁷The neighbor women said, “A son has been born to Naomi,” and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

In the fourth chapter of Ruth, we encounter the story of Ruth and Naomi. In a tragic unfolding of the story, Naomi loses not only her husband but her two sons also. Naomi is completely hopeless. Outside of the pain of this trauma, there were few things worse at this time than being a widow with no sons. But this is where we find Naomi—broken and hopeless with two daughters-in-law to care for.

Enter Boaz. Boaz becomes the Kinsman Redeemer for Naomi by buying the field from her. To fully understand this law, we must realize that there were some simple requirements for Boaz to qualify as a Kinsman Redeemer. First, he had to be “kin.” Boaz had to be related in some way to the family of Naomi. Second, Boaz had to be willing. We see in Ruth 8:6 that the first person who qualified to redeem Naomi was unwilling to do so. Third, Boaz had to pay the price in full. It was an all-or-nothing proposition.

This story is a foreshadow of Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. We found ourselves in a situation of hopelessness. As Romans 3 states, none of us have been found righteous but we are all guilty of sin, which has broken our relationship with God. Enter Jesus. Jesus became fully man when He was born into a manger in Bethlehem. He is our kin. Second, Jesus was the willing sacrifice. In John 10 Jesus states that nobody can take his life, but He lays it down. Jesus is the willing sacrifice. Third, Jesus paid the price in full. Romans 6 states that the wages of sin is death—and Jesus paid those wages in full—on our behalf! Because of the birth of Christ, we have hope!

ADULTS

1. If Jesus is our Kinsman Redeemer, what is He redeeming us from? And more importantly, what is He redeeming us to?
2. What is the significance of the line of David coming from this story of Boaz as the Kinsman Redeemer?
3. Have you ever been offered hope when you were in a hopeless situation? How did you respond?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. What does it mean for us that Jesus has redeemed us from our broken relationship with God?
2. How can we live in a way that shows gratitude for Jesus redeeming us?

DAILY PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for coming to Bethlehem 2,000 years ago to be our Kinsman Redeemer and please help me to live today in a way that honors the hope You have given me.



CHAPTER TWO

*The **Light** of Christ in Darkness*

LIGHT

ISAIAH 9:2

*²The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
a light has dawned
on those living in the
land of darkness.*

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

¹The Lord said to Samuel, “How long are you going to mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have selected for myself a king from his sons.”

²Samuel asked, “How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me!”

The Lord answered, “Take a young cow with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ ³Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will let you know what you are to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate to you.”

⁴Samuel did what the Lord directed and went to Bethlehem. When the elders of the town met him, they trembled and asked, “Do you come in peace?”

⁵“In peace,” he replied. “I’ve come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and said, “Certainly the Lord’s anointed one is here before him.”

⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature because I have rejected him. Humans do not see what the Lord sees, for humans see what is visible, but the Lord sees the heart.”

⁸Jesse called Abinadab and presented him to Samuel. “The Lord hasn’t chosen this one either,” Samuel said. ⁹Then Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, “The Lord hasn’t chosen this one either.” ¹⁰After Jesse presented seven of his sons to him, Samuel told Jesse, “The Lord hasn’t chosen any of these.” ¹¹Samuel asked him, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” he answered, “but right now he’s tending the sheep.” Samuel told Jesse, “Send for him. We won’t sit down to eat until he gets here.” ¹²So Jesse sent for him. He had beautiful eyes and a healthy, handsome appearance.

Then the Lord said, “Anoint him, for he is the one.” ¹³So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully on David from that day forward. Then Samuel set out and went to Ramah.

If we’re honest, we are more fickle with our affections than we care to admit. We have a bias towards people who look good, act good and make us feel good. Rarely do we take time to understand what is behind the appearance, actions, or decisions others make. We move quickly from appearance to judgement. Thankfully, God does not operate this way. To Him, our appearance neither defines us nor dictates our value. He starts with the heart and never changes the way he looks at us...no matter what we look like on the cover

In 1 Samuel 16, the Lord sends the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a king from Jesse’s sons. Based on appearance, it is likely Jesse’s older sons would have been prime candidates for king. One by one, Jesse’s sons pass before Samuel, but God rejects them all. Samuel and Jesse probably didn’t expect that to happen. Jesse’s older sons had the look of future kings. Samuel admits to being afraid. But the Lord explains to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Samuel and Jesse looked at the initial seven sons and saw what we would see today – good looks, success, age, experience, strength, authority. But the Lord looks deeper. He looks at the condition of our hearts.

The Lord chose Jesse’s youngest, David, who was out tending to the sheep. When David arrives home and is anointed as future king, he probably didn’t look very kingly. More than likely, he was a hot mess, having come directly from the fields! But that didn’t matter: God wanted his heart. When God looks at us, he doesn’t see the exterior, the accomplishments, and the reputation we have built, he sees the heart.

ADULTS

1. If the Lord values only our character, isn’t that where God would want us to focus our eyes?
2. Where are you investing your time in developing personally?
3. What steps are you taking to develop your heart?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Why is it so important to have a clean heart?
2. What are some ways to have a heart that pleases God?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, open my eyes to the condition of my heart. Search my heart and see if there is anything that does not please You, bring it to my attention and give me the courage to turn from it.

Kurt Fehlis, Student Pastor

ISAIAH 7:14

¹⁴Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign:
See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name
him Immanuel.

It seems like Christmas has started coming earlier each year. Stores begin decorating and promoting home décor in the middle of the summer. Hobby Lobby offers a few can't miss sales on Christmas trees in September. But I think for most of us, there is an element or a sign that we look for to signal the arrival of Christmas. When that sign comes, we know that it is time to get a little happier and a little more excited.

As we read this verse in Isaiah, God's people are looking for a sign too. They are looking for hope. They are looking forward to a sign that God is going to show up in their lives.

The word "Immanuel" used here literally means "God with us." It is one of the most used descriptors of Jesus around the Christmas season. But it stretches farther than just Jesus. A theme throughout the Bible is that God wants to be with us! Look at Abraham, Moses, Daniel and so many others. God told them that He would be with them and that He would go beside them. The prophet Isaiah is declaring that God is coming in the person of Jesus to be with us. Jesus is coming to be hope for us, to be peace for us, to be a light for us in dark places because He is going to be with us in those moments!

No one wants to be alone. Many of us can relate to that feeling as a child of waking up in a dark room scared and unsure of where you are. It is a terrible feeling! The reminder here in Isaiah is that through Jesus, we never have to face that feeling because we never have to be alone. Jesus is with us, at Christmas and in each and every moment of our days!

ADULTS

1. What are some ways you are reminded of God's presence with you each day?
2. We mentioned other places in the Bible where God reminded people that He would be with them. How did His presence and that reminder change or impact those people?
3. How can you help one another be mindful of God's presence and provision this week?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. How have you felt God being with you at school this week?
2. If you know that God is always with you, what kind of things do you not have to be afraid of?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, remind us of Your presence this week and help us to live courageously knowing that You are with us.

Meghan Goad, Girls Minister

ISAIAH 11:1-5

¹Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him —
a Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a Spirit of counsel and strength,
a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

³His delight will be in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge
by what he sees with his eyes,
he will not execute justice
by what he hears with his ears,

⁴but he will judge the poor righteously
and execute justice for the oppressed of the land.
He will strike the land
with a scepter from his mouth,
and he will kill the wicked
with a command from his lips.

⁵Righteousness will be a belt around his hips;
faithfulness will be a belt around his waist.

One of my favorite things to do in December is driving with my family to look at Christmas lights. We get hot cocoa, drive through neighborhoods with the windows down, and stare in awe at how beautiful colored and flashing lights can be. It makes me think of a song by Watermark called, Light of the World. Some of the lyrics are, "...Rescued us from darkness, praise the Son of God, Jesus, Light of the world, shine on us, word of life, spoken for love, breathe on us, Light of the world, King Jesus.

Looking through our reading today we see that the same Light begins to appear. Our passage in Isaiah 11 describes that a 'shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse.' Imagine a big, tall tree that's been cut down and only a stump remains. Once a tree has been cut down it's unlikely to bear any kind of fruit or grow strong again. Seems like a hopeless situation for that big tree. The scriptures say a shoot will come from that stump, and a branch from that shoot will bear fruit. This branch is Jesus. He will have the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, and the spirit of knowledge. The cut tree is the remnants of Israel, the remains of a wayward nation. God didn't just leave this nation in darkness; He used Israel to prepare the way for the Light of the world. The baby in a manger was to come and save the lost. Jesus' birth gave us hope, and His life gives us peace. The Light of the world has come to shine on us!

ADULTS

1. How is the spirit of wisdom and understanding different than the worlds view of wisdom and understanding?
2. Are there any areas in your life that you need to surrender to the Lord and put your hope in him?
3. What ways can you share the Light of Jesus with a neighbor, or a co-worker this week?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. In what ways do you see that the world drifting away from the wisdom we read about in the bible?
2. What is one way you can share the Light of Jesus with your sibling or a classmate this week?

DAILY PRAYER

*Lord, your power is made strong in my weakness.
Help me be a light for you wherever I go.*

Kevin Burdette, Minister to Senior Adults & Pastoral Care

ISAIAH 53:1-3

¹Who has believed what we have heard?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

²He grew up before him like a young plant
and like a root out of dry ground.

He didn't have an impressive form
or majesty that we should look at him,
no appearance that we should desire him.

³He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of suffering who knew what sickness was.
He was like someone people turned away from;
he was despised, and we didn't value him.

Have you ever been looking for something only to discover it was right in front of you? How many times have you looked for your keys, only to find them in your hand? Maybe you've looked for your sunglasses only to discover they were on your head. When this happens, you might say, "If this were a snake, it would have bitten me."

The book of Isaiah opens with a warning of the coming judgment for Israel. The kingdom was about to come crashing down because of their disobedience and rebellion against God. During the time of judgment, God offered his people mercy and restoration if they would return and follow him. It was during this time that God told the people that he was going to do "a new thing." As God restored the nation of Israel, He began shedding bright light on His plans for a new covenant. He was revealing to them their future hope with a coming Messiah.

Today's scripture is a prophesy of what the people will think about the Messiah God will send. The Messiah they were looking for would be a noble, mighty, warrior King. They could not believe the Messiah God would give them would be a scrawny, little, ordinary dude from a podunk town. It seemed impossible to them that a someone like this could save them. So, they would continue to look for what they wanted – meanwhile, they would miss what God had planned all along.

In other words, they will completely dismiss the Messiah God would send them. He would be despised and rejected. It was almost as if they would continue to look for something that would already be in their hands. The truth in front of them would be like a bright light revealing God's plan, yet they couldn't see it.

Are you looking for the Messiah today? Do you recognize him? Don't miss him as we celebrate his birth.

ADULTS

1. Why did the people reject Jesus as the Messiah?
2. What were the people looking for in a Messiah?
3. What does the way you live your life each day say about Jesus as Messiah?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Have you accepted Jesus as the Messiah – your personal Lord and Savior?
2. Can you think of ways in your life that you reflect or reject Jesus as your Savior?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, thank you for enduring the rejection and pain to save me from my sinful past. Please help me to shine your light bright in my life every day.

Debbie Stuart, Women's Minister

ISAIAH 53:4-9

⁴Yet he himself bore our sicknesses,
and he carried our pains;
but we in turn regarded him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.

⁵But he was pierced because of our rebellion,
crushed because of our iniquities;
punishment for our peace was on him,
and we are healed by his wounds.

⁶We all went astray like sheep;
we all have turned to our own way;
and the Lord has punished him
for the iniquity of us all.

⁷He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth.
Like a lamb led to the slaughter
and like a sheep silent before her shearers,
he did not open his mouth.

⁸He was taken away because of oppression and judgment,
and who considered his fate?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
he was struck because of my people's rebellion.

⁹He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
but he was with a rich man at his death,
because he had done no violence
and had not spoken deceitfully.

Isaiah 53 is about Jesus Christ, God's perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (see also Acts 8:26-40). This chapter teaches that the innocent Son of God died in the place of guilty sinners and paid the price for our sin. It was our pain He carried. He bore our grief, carried our sorrow, and was wounded for our transgressions, which means our rebellion. His suffering had purpose and it was redemptive. Through what He suffered, we were healed and have hope. We are reminded in Ezekiel 14:23b - "...and you shall know that I have done nothing without cause that I have done..." says the Lord GOD.

This passage refers to us as sheep who have gone our own way, to do our own thing. Sheep are known for being helpless and stupid. It refers to Jesus as an innocent lamb. He was submissive and not complaining about doing God's will. Not only was Jesus submissive, but John 10 tells us that Jesus laid down his life for us of his own accord. With great humility He was crushed, but He was also victorious!

Not much tests the Christian character more than to be hurt but not respond with words, action, or retaliation. It can be difficult at times to accomplish God's will when suffering and hardship are involved. This passage encourages believers to patiently endure their own suffering. Exodus 14:14 reminds us to keep silent and the Lord will fight for you. We do not understand all that was involved in that holy transaction on the cross, but we do know that it accomplished salvation for every person that believes and calls on the name of the Lord.

ADULTS

1. Reflect for a moment on your life and present circumstances.
2. How have you responded (acted) in times of hardship and suffering?
3. Are you fully committed (whole-heartedly devoted) to accomplishing God's will for your life? If not, what changes can you make, starting today to align your life with His Word?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. When hard times happen to you, what do you do?
2. Looking back can you see that good things came from hard times?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, I want to do your will and not go my own way and do my own thing.

Dustin Lee, Kids Pastor

ISAIAH 53:10-12

¹⁰Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him severely.
When you make him a guilt offering,
he will see his seed, he will prolong his days,
and by his hand, the Lord's pleasure will be accomplished.

¹¹After his anguish,
he will see light and be satisfied.
By his knowledge,
my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will carry their iniquities.

¹²Therefore I will give him the many as a portion,
and he will receive the mighty as spoil,
because he willingly submitted to death,
and was counted among the rebels;
yet he bore the sin of many
and interceded for the rebels.

Do you know that moment when the lights go out? That moment when suddenly, your cast from light into darkness? Maybe you were alone in a room or maybe you were surrounded by your family and the electricity went out. You can no longer rely on your eyes, but you must only listen and feel your way around the room as you try to find a source of light. You know that there is a flashlight in a drawer on the other side, you must find your way across the room. Or, if you're like me, you try and remember where you last laid down your cell phone. You know that all it will take is to light a candle, but you first must find the match. No one likes to be in darkness, we all feel uneasy in that moment, but we know from our experiences that if we can just find another source of light it will be sufficient until the electricity returns.

In the same manner, Jesus was called to suffer. He was called to lay down his rights, his authority, his kingship. He was called to lay down his life in order that he may find victory over death for his children. Jesus knew that on the other side of his death was life. Isaiah 53:11 says, "by His knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, and He will carry their iniquities." Jesus knew that through his submission, many would be justified. He chose suffering for our sake because of his great love for us.

ADULTS

1. Consider Jesus' final moments in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:40-46). Meditate on Jesus' prayer as He wrestled over submitting to the Fathers will.
2. What can we say in response to such love?
3. How do we share the light in darkness when life is difficult?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Name a time when the lights went out and you were in darkness. What did you do? Were you afraid? How did you find a light source?
2. What is one way that you can share the light of Christ in dark times?

DAILY PRAYER

Jesus, we thank you for your willingness to submit and give your life for us so that we may have eternal life with you. Help us to remember the weight of that sacrifice and to share your light with others.

Kelvin Reed, Associate Minister of Worship

JOEL 2:28-32

²⁸After this
I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity;
then your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
your old men will have dreams,
and your young men will see visions.

²⁹I will even pour out my Spirit
on the male and female slaves in those days.

³⁰I will display wonders
in the heavens and on the earth:
blood, fire, and columns of smoke.

³¹The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.

³²Then everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved,
for there will be an escape
for those on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,
as the Lord promised,
among the survivors the Lord calls.

It's hard to believe that Christmas is next weekend! Just as you are looking forward to the wonder of December 25, the prophet Joel, in today's passage gives a description of the amazing things that are going to happen in the future. If you are like me, parts of this passage are exciting to read and parts of it may make you feel uneasy. If you were to turn all the lights out in your home and spend the evening in the dark, it would be awkward and uncomfortable. The lights that we have allow us to see where we are going and what we are doing. In today's passage Joel lets us know that there is coming a day when the spirit of the Lord is going to move in a powerful and unusual way. In verse 32 we are told that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. We have so much to be thankful for, knowing that Jesus is the light of the world, and that He has the power to save.

Have you had a chance to drive around and see all the Christmas lights? In our family, we have a tradition of taking a late evening ride through the city looking at the Christmas lights and decorations. During this season as you see all the different lights displayed, may each flickering strand remind you that Jesus came just for you. He came to a world that was dark and in need of a Savior. As you see those lights shining brightly, may it remind you that God has great things in store for those who love Him and serve Him. The Messiah who was born and placed in a lowly manger grew up to live a sinless life, making it possible for you to be saved and to live a full life with meaning and purpose.

ADULTS

1. Why do you think Joel wanted the people to know about something that was going to happen in the future? Do you think it changed how the people acted?
2. What does it mean for the spirit to be poured out? Have you ever experienced something like that?
3. On the day you became a Christian, what happened to make you aware of your need to call on the name of the Lord and be saved?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the light of the world?
2. Who is someone that you could invite to church this Christmas?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, please move in the life of my friends and family who do not know you that they would call on your name and be saved.



CHAPTER THREE

The Joy of Christ in Sorrow

JOY
ISAIAH 9:3-4

*³You have enlarged the nation
and increased its joy.*

*The people have rejoiced before you
as they rejoice at harvest time
and as they rejoice when dividing spoils.*

*⁴For you have shattered their oppressive yoke
and the rod on their shoulders,
the staff of their oppressor,
just as you did on the day of Midian.*

Jeremy Jones, Minister of Church Development

ZECHARIAH 6:9-15

⁹The word of the Lord came to me: ¹⁰“Take an offering from the exiles, from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go that same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. ¹¹Take silver and gold, make a crown, and place it on the head of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. ¹²You are to tell him: This is what the Lord of Armies says: Here is a man whose name is Branch; he will branch out from his place and build the Lord’s temple. ¹³Yes, he will build the Lord’s temple; he will bear royal splendor and will sit on his throne and rule. There will be a priest on his throne, and there will be peaceful counsel between the two of them. ¹⁴The crown will reside in the Lord’s temple as a memorial to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Hen son of Zephaniah. ¹⁵People who are far off will come and build the Lord’s temple, and you will know that the Lord of Armies has sent me to you. This will happen when you fully obey the Lord your God.”

In today’s passage we travel a little over 500 years before Christ to a historical event in the history of the Israelite people. Within this passage, the prophet Zechariah is both achieving the Lord’s desire in Israel at this time as well as prophesying the coming of the Messiah. King Cyrus of Persia had only recently granted the captive Israelites permission to return home to Judah to begin to re-establish Jerusalem and the temple. Jerusalem and the temple were currently in ruins and Ezra tells us that the temple would remain in ruins for almost two decades after this point.

But within today’s passage, we witness Zechariah make a crown and place it on the head of Joshua, the High Priest, even though Zerubbabel was from David’s line of the monarchy. For the first time in the history of the Lord’s people, God united the monarchy and the priesthood. Before this point, no priest ever served as King. In fact, there was one king, King Uzziah, who tried to serve as a priest, and it did not go well for him. He immediately became leprous until the day that he died and was banned from the temple. (2 Chron. 26:16-21)

Within this historical event in the life of Israel is a prophecy about Jesus. The temple and the priesthood will be restored. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, will reign on the throne of his father David as both King and Priest. All authority in heaven and on earth are given to the one person who sits on the throne, Jesus Christ: King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And he will reign on the throne forever, fulfilling the covenant promise with David that he would always have an heir seated on the throne. (2 Samuel 7) Let us reflect on the joy that we have in knowing that Jesus sits on the throne as both King and Priest—and He came for us.

ADULTS

1. What is the significance of Jesus being both Priest and King?
2. What is the significance of the temple and the priesthood being restored?
3. How can we have joy today in knowing that Jesus sits on the throne as Priest and King?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. What is one way that we can be joyful today?
2. How can we help others be joyful?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, thank you for your goodness to us; help us to live today in a way that displays the joy that we have in serving a good King.

Jason Humphrey, Associate Missions Pastor

ZECHARIAH 9:9-12

⁹Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem!
Look, your King is coming to you;
he is righteous and victorious,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the horse from Jerusalem.
The bow of war will be removed,
and he will proclaim peace to the nations.
His dominion will extend from sea to sea,
from the Euphrates River
to the ends of the earth.

¹¹As for you,
because of the blood of your covenant,
I will release your prisoners
from the waterless cistern.

¹²Return to a stronghold,
you prisoners who have hope;
today I declare that I will restore double to you.

Have you ever met someone who was famous you admired? Maybe you built them up in your mind based on how you saw them on tv or in a movie, or you love their music, but when you met them, they did not meet your expectations. I remember meeting a Christian band in college and helped them load all their gear for a concert. I loved this band, and they were very well known in the Christian life. However, when I met them, I was let down. They were rude, disrespectful, and not at all what I had imagined.

Now focus your mind on Jesus and the joy that comes as you think of Him. As the prophets of old told of the coming Messiah, many believed the Messiah would come as King and establish his kingdom on earth, but in fact he came as a servant to usher in the Kingdom of God. This coming King will come lowly and riding on a donkey, which is exactly what happens when Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (John 12:12-15).

In the ancient world when a king rode a donkey, it was a symbol of peace. It meant that he was entering your city with peaceful intentions. Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to achieve peace by his blood on the cross. He was taking away the warhorses from Jerusalem and proclaiming peace to the nations (Zechariah 9:10).

(Aside: Interestingly, Jesus will return riding a horse (Rev. 19:11), which is a symbol of war in the ancient world. When a king enters your city riding a horse, he intends to go to battle. So, Jesus' first coming is an opportunity to make peace with God, but his second coming is a time for judgment and destruction of God's enemies.)

So, let us rejoice in King Jesus! What great joy we have in knowing that our King brings peace, our King defends, and our King saves!

ADULTS

1. Why is it important that Jesus rides in on a donkey?
2. How can we live for the Kingdom of God and not a kingdom on earth?
3. How can we share the peace of King Jesus at our workplace?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Would you rather see Jesus arriving on a donkey or riding on a horse?
2. How can we share the peace of King Jesus at our school?

DAILY PRAYER

Father God, thank you for bringing peace through your Son, Jesus Christ. Remind us today that you are good, loving, and faithful, because you deserve all the glory.

Todd Haymans, Discipleship Pastor

LUKE 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. ³⁰Then the angel told her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹Now listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."

³⁴Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?"

³⁵The angel replied to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶And consider your relative Elizabeth – even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called childless. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God."

³⁸"See, I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Have you ever felt like you aren't equipped for the task ahead? Perhaps you have become overwhelmed at the thought of accomplishing something because it seems unattainable. Maybe you have even felt you aren't worthy of achieving that which was designated for you because of your background or upbringing. If you can relate, there is a woman in the Bible who may be able to encourage you. Her name is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Mary was around fourteen years old, born into a family with no status, with little money and zero influence when God sent an angel named Gabriel to give divine revelation. He shared insight of what was to come for Mary. Mary's response shows her humility yet reveals her faith in God. Whenever she felt unworthy, God, through Gabriel, lovingly spoke truth to her. Mary felt deeply troubled, yet Gabriel called her favored and tells her not to be afraid. God's plan was for her to carry His son, Jesus. Mary questioned this and God affirmed that the Most High would take care of her and the baby. Mary had doubts yet Gabriel said, "nothing will be impossible with God." Mary's next words came from a heart of faith, trusting the Lord's plan for her life. She said "I am here to serve God. So, have your way."

There are times when the pressures of life try to minimize the promises of God. This world says, "You are nobody," but God says, "You are my child." The enemy might whisper "Shame on you," but God says, "shame off of you." We serve a God who equips us, loves us, and helps see us through the calling He has given us. Today, we can be grateful for the person of Jesus, His presence in our life and the purpose He gives.

ADULTS

1. What struggles in life cause you to doubt the goodness of God?
2. Like Mary, God is calling for us to trust Him. What area of life should you trust God more?
3. Are there things in your life that you should lay down in order to say "have your way" to God?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Mary was a teenager when God gave her a big assignment. Is God calling you to a big task?
2. The angel, Gabriel told Mary to not be afraid. What causes you to be afraid?

DAILY PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for giving us a glimpse of Mary's story and for showing us that we can be faithful, even when you ask us to do hard things. Help us to do what you're calling us to do with a joyful and faithful heart.

Kurt Fehlis, Student Pastor

LUKE 1:46-55

⁴⁶And Mary said:
 My soul magnifies the Lord,
⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸because he has looked with favor
 on the humble condition of his servant.
 Surely, from now on all generations
 will call me blessed,
⁴⁹because the Mighty One
 has done great things for me,
 and his name is holy.
⁵⁰His mercy is from generation to generation
 on those who fear him.
⁵¹He has done a mighty deed with his arm;
 he has scattered the proud
 because of the thoughts of their hearts;
⁵²he has toppled the mighty from their thrones
 and exalted the lowly.
⁵³He has satisfied the hungry with good things
 and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,
 remembering his mercy
⁵⁵to Abraham and his descendants forever,
 just as he spoke to our ancestors.

Isn't it interesting to see how people react to unexpected events in their lives? Some people will struggle to navigate each decision while others appear to thrive in their situation. This passage in Luke paints a picture of Mary's mindset as she is dealing with some unexpected events in her life.

These verses, often referred to as the Magnificat, give us a unique view into Mary's perspective. Remember, just a few verses prior that Mary finds out she will have a baby and that baby will miraculously be the Son of God. And let's not forget one more miracle, that Mary's cousin Elizabeth who could not have kids is suddenly pregnant. That is a lot of unexpected news happening! Yet Mary chooses to "praise the greatness of the Lord" and to list off the great things He has done. The temptation might have been to be frustrated or scared, yet Mary responds with peace and confidence.

Let's face it, many of us struggle during the Christmas season to not make it about us. Whether it is about gifts or family traditions or even the types of wrapping paper, Christmas can become very me-centric and focused on our own desires. We know what we want, we know how we want things to happen and by gosh, it will happen just like that. As I read this passage in Luke, Mary isn't concerned about herself or what is changing in her life. Her eyes, her focus is on what God (the Mighty One) has already done for her and she is trusting in the fact that He will continue to protect and provide for her for all of her days. Mary is confident that God has her, no matter what comes!

ADULTS

1. What are some unexpected things that have happened to you or your family this past year?
2. How have you seen God working in those moments?
3. How can you prepare yourself to have a mindset like Mary and to be able to praise God when unexpected things happen?

STUDENTS & KIDS

4. If you were to write a song like Mary, what sorts of things would you want to thank God for?
5. Make a list of the things you are thankful for and put that list some place you will see it every day. That might be on your nightstand or bathroom mirror or even your cell phone but make it obvious so that you can be reminded that God loves you and is providing for you!

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, remind me of the ways that you have provided for me and help me to focus on you in the days ahead, no matter what unexpected things may come my way.

Walter Ballou, Minister to Men & Singles

LUKE 1:67-80

⁶⁷Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and provided redemption for his people.

⁶⁹He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,

⁷⁰just as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets in ancient times;

⁷¹salvation from our enemies and from the hand of those who hate us.

⁷²He has dealt mercifully with our ancestors and remembered his holy covenant —

⁷³the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant that we,

⁷⁴having been rescued

from the hand of our enemies, would serve him without fear

⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness in his presence all our days.

⁷⁶And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High,

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

⁷⁷to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.

⁷⁸Because of our God's merciful compassion, the dawn from on high will visit us

⁷⁹to shine on those who live in darkness and the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.

⁸⁰The child grew up and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

This passage contains the first words of Zechariah spoken since the angel Gabriel told him that he & Elizabeth would have a son who would be great in the sight of the Lord. Gabriel told them to name him John because “he will be a joy and a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth.” His song of praise is also known as the Benedictus (Latin for “blessed”) which praised the Lord for the many Old Testament prophecies he was seeing come true.

Zechariah spoke a blessing over his son John, predicting he would go before the Lord and prepare the way for Him. The joy that inspired Zechariah's words came from two things. First, seeing God's sovereign hand leading to the fulfillment of prophecy in the Messiah and second, the joy of a parent knowing God was going to use his child for important work.

Take time to focus today on God's sovereign work in your life in the circumstances you are living and working in. Pray for opportunities to share the transforming hope of Jesus with those He has placed around you during this special Christmas time of year. Pray that God would let you experience the joy of seeing your children or others you have invested in do big things for the Lord.

The Apostle Paul gives us a clear directive as we enter the busyness of the Christmas season: “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is Gods' will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). I hope you will experience and spread this kind of joy over the next few weeks.

ADULTS

1. In looking back over your life, where have you seen God's sovereign hand placing you to be blessed or to bless others?
2. How have you found joy in seeing your children or someone close to you serve the Lord?
3. Who in your life could be crossing your path by God's design in order to hear your testimony of God's goodness?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. What has God done in your life to show Himself to you?
2. What blessings in your life can you, like Zechariah, praise the Lord for today?

DAILY PRAYER

Father, thank you for the work you've done in my life. Bring someone across my path who needs to experience the joy found in knowing you.

Taylor Gibson, Women's Ministry Associate

LUKE 2:1-7

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. ²This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.

⁴Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, ⁵to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

In one sentence we see the entire world change; "...and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son" (Luke 2:7). The longings the world had been feeling for a savior were finally being fulfilled. Jesus came into the world as a baby to reveal Himself to us and pay the debt we owed for our sins. There has never been a greater demonstration of love or a greater reason for joy.

The joy of this time of year comes from the celebration of Jesus' birth and what He has done for you and for me. It comes from the hope we have in His return. It comes in the first moments of discovering Jesus. The joy of Jesus is demonstrated even in the pain that this time of year can often bring, because Jesus is our ultimate joy.

Jesus came into the world as a baby on that joyful night in order that we may know Him. One of the best parts of knowing Jesus is experiencing the joy He offers. Psalm 51:7-12 reminds us that we find our joy in the Lord when we have confessed our sin and returned to Him. We cannot experience true joy in Christ until we are free of the weight of sin and shame. Jesus tells us in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." In order to experience abundant and joyful life, we must return to Jesus. He is waiting for you to return to Him today. He is waiting for you to experience not only the joy of the Christmas season, but the joy of Jesus.

If you have never given your life to Jesus and experienced the true joy He offers, take a few minutes today to confess where you have fallen short and ask Jesus to be the Lord of your life.

ADULTS

1. Think back to when you first discovered Jesus. What was that joy like?
2. Has it been a while since you felt the joy of Jesus? How can you go back to the joy you felt when you first met Him?
3. What things might you need to confess to return to the joy of the Lord?

STUDENTS & KIDS

4. How does Jesus bring joy to your life?
5. Is there anything you need to ask forgiveness for?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, renew in me the joy of my salvation and forgive me where I have fallen short.

Dustin Lee, Kids Pastor

LUKE 2:8-20

⁸In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: ¹¹Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger.”

¹³Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

¹⁴Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people he favors!

¹⁵When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

¹⁶They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

On Christmas morning 2020 my wife and I surprised our children with a basket. We had them sit on the floor and patiently wait as we placed the basket wrapped in a big tacky red bow in front of them, covered with a red blanket. Suddenly the blanket started to wiggle and move, and our kids jumped back in sheer surprise. When a cute little brown puppy started to roll his way out of the basket, the surprise turned into pure delighted joy. One child shrieked “Daddy! A puppy?!” The others just stared, and one started to cry in excitement. We had previously not agreed to a dog, so they were completely, joyfully, surprised.

Can you image the initial shock of the shepherds as they were met in the field by an angel? That shock then turned to joy as they were told that the Messiah had been born. Can you imagine the magnitude of joy when the heavenly host began to praise God? Later when the shepherds found Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus can you imagine the quiet joy in Mary’s heart as she pondered all these events?

It’s easy to be joyful on Christmas morning with presents or puppies around. It was easy for the shepherds to be joyful with angels singing praise to God in front of them. Joy is difficult when our presents are taken from us or, at times, when we feel praise is hard to find. Jesus himself is our joy and our salvation in him is what sustains our joy even in the most difficult times. Perhaps this Christmas will be filled with presents, family, and wonderful memories for you. Perhaps this Christmas is going to be your first one without someone you love, or perhaps the presents are few because your finances are sparse this year. No matter where this Christmas finds you, may your joy be found in Christ.

ADULTS

1. What brings you joy?
2. What helps you maintain joy in hard times?
3. What are some scriptures that bring you joy?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. Have you ever been truly surprised by a present?
2. How can you share the joy of Jesus?

DAILY PRAYER

Jesus, help us to trust in You no matter the circumstances and to find joy in our salvation. Thank You for the gift of a personal relationship with You.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Peace of Christ in Chaos

PEACE

ISAIAH 9:5-7

*⁵For every trampling boot of battle
and the bloodied garments of war
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

*⁶For a child will be born for us,
a son will be given to us,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
He will be named*

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

*⁷The dominion will be vast,
and its prosperity will never end.*

*He will reign on the throne of David
and over his kingdom,*

*to establish and sustain it
with justice and righteousness from now on
and forever.*

*The zeal of the Lord of Armies will
accomplish this.*

Debbie Stuart, Women's Minister

LUKE 2:25-35

²⁵There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel's consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, ²⁸Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said,

²⁹Now, Master,
you can dismiss your servant in peace,
as you promised.

³⁰For my eyes have seen your salvation.

³¹You have prepared it
in the presence of all peoples –

³²a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and glory to your people Israel.

³³His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary, "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed – ³⁵and a sword will pierce your own soul – that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Peace is not only a characteristic of God; it is who He is...The Prince of Peace!

On this day we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. In today's passage, we see Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple to perform what was custom. It was at this point that they encounter Simeon, who was promised that he would see the Lord's Messiah before his death. Luke tells us that Simeon had been waiting and watching for the consolation of Israel found in the Messiah. Consolation means comfort and hope, especially after a loss or disappointment. There was eager expectation of the arrival of the one who would bring salvation and redemption to all people.

Jesus tells his disciples in John 16, and it's true for us too, "In this world you will have trouble." Trouble is a guarantee in life. What is interesting is that just before this, Jesus tells the disciples, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace." This passage teaches us that Jesus, in whom we have peace, has come! Peace is the absence of disturbance, conflict, and chaos. It is the state of being tranquil, quiet, and calm.

When my mom lost a courageous battle with cancer at age 40, I was 23 with a 5-week-old baby boy. I felt lost and I was devastated. The last scripture she wrote to me was John 14:27 – "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." No matter your circumstances the Prince of Peace brings hope!

ADULTS

1. Is your life at peace? Is it well with your soul?
2. How can you rest in the peace of Christ today?
3. As we think about Simeon, what is one thing you are expectant of from the Lord?

STUDENTS & KIDS

1. What are two things that are bothering you or causing you to be sad?
2. Are you expecting the Lord to work in your life and through these circumstances?

DAILY PRAYER

Lord, help me see Your activity in my life and bring peace to my heart and mind.



CHRISTMAS

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