

FPC ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2021

Sunday, November 28th

Titus 2:11-14

What more can be said that the Scripture hasn't already proclaimed? How marvelous, how wonderful, how amazing is God's grace. His grace is our salvation - by grace we have been saved. His grace has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us to His kingdom of light.

Yet, it doesn't stop there! His grace NEVER abandons us. His grace continues that supernatural, mysterious work to change us, to move us closer to Him, to transform us in ways that we ourselves are powerless to do. His grace is the manna, our daily bread from heaven that we so desperately need to live. His grace is our past - present - and future.

This advent, and always, may we live by His grace and look to our hope for this age and the age to come, our LORD Jesus Christ. Amen.

Keith Harrison

Monday, November 29th

Philippians 1:3-11

“And this is my prayer: that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best... ..”

“Do you see how important discernment is?” my instructor asked during the training session for spiritual directors. “Yes” I replied tentatively. I answered hesitantly because what I knew in my head was not fully integrated into my heart and my living. Discernment has not been one of my best practices. After all, it is so much easier and safer to make a plan and then strive for it, or create a set of rules and routines to live by rather than think and pray continuously about how I am living and what I am doing every moment.

The story of God's incarnation in this realm is a story full of discernment. Mary must discern whether or not to consent, Joseph must discern whether or not to trust, the inn keeper must discern whether or not to be kind, the wisefolk must discern whether or not to be curious, the shepherds must discern whether or not to stay at their jobs, Herod must discern whether or not to fear..... all this discernment because God decided to make an appearance.

Those who discerned out of an overflow of love and not fear, discerned well. I wish I could say love was the guiding principle of my own discernment, specifically a love for God and all God's creation, but more often than not it has been self-preservation, party politics/peer pressure or resistance to change.

God appears in our lives everyday.... every moment.... do you see it? Do you know this to be true? For those who discern Love's presence in the moment, freedom to move freely into knowing what is best and how to live fully is experienced. God's love frees us to love. This is the importance of discernment.



And so, my friends, this is also my prayer for you and myself, that our love may overflow more and more, so that we may discern not only what is best, but also know and see God with us this Advent season and every season of our living.

May God be with you.

Amy Shutt

Tuesday, November 30th

Micah 5:2-5

“Two makes it true”

This particular verse in Micah is another Old Testament foretelling of the birth of The Savior, “their peace” and “rescuer.”

Reflection at first seems very simple and straightforward, it was foretold and it happened. Just like every other one...

Ah! Therein lies the rub. What’s the point of having everyone foreshadow this event; isn’t one enough? Why is the Bible so repetitive?

Because “two makes it true.”

I like to think I came up with this pithy little line; I am sure I did not. But, I love to live by this. Does this leftover meal smell like it’s starting to sour? I ask my husband, if he agrees, bye bye burger. The Peanut in a peanut M&M basically counters out the chocolate so it’s a net zero, I proclaim. My 4 year old agrees! We finish the bag.

Two makes it true, and in the case of the foretelling of the Savior, two dozen makes it true. (And probably more than that! I just don’t want to count anymore.)

Not only is it important to keep being reminded, as we humans have this short attention span and we tend to forget things. But the more people that corroborate a story, the greater truth that story holds. God didn’t want any doubt over this one, so it is said over and over again.

When my daughter was born, we were gifted The Jesus Story Bible, with a tagline “every story whispers His name.” I roll my eyes at the wording choice of this but the sentiment is correct. The Old Testament is Just act 1; something bigger is coming! And we have the prophecies to prove it.

Merry Everything!

Katie Chandler



Wednesday, December 1st

1 Corinthians 1: 3-9

*For each and every joyful thing
For twilight swallows on the wing,
For all that nest and all that sing,*

*For fountains cool that laugh and leap
for rivers running to the deep
For happy, care-forgetting sleep,*

*For starts that pierce the somber dark,
For morn, awaking with the lark,
For life new -stirring "neath the bark,*

*For sunshine and the blessed rain,
For budding grove and blossomy lane,
For the seet silence of the plain,*

*For bounty springing from the sod,
For every step by beauty trod,
For each dear gift of joy, thank God!*

Florence Earl Coates from Better Than Gold

Thursday, December 2nd

Isaiah 12:2-6

When I looked at this scripture, a song started running through my head. What is that??

For those of you who don't know me, I sing in the Chancel Choir and have been in church choir since I was six years old.

Grabbing my hymn book, I started looking for "Surely it is God who saves me," a response Kerry introduced to us in Bible Study. Sure enough, there it was, #71 in Glory to God, the hymn book in our pews! What I knew as a short response was a hymn, complete with verses and an explanation of the text at the bottom!

Please take time to read the scripture, and the words in the hymnbook, which is a paraphrase of Isaiah's words. I was particularly drawn to the last part of verse 6,

"...for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

This was God's promise of salvation, given to His people through the prophet, more than eight hundred years before Christ's coming in person. Looking further ahead in my Study Bible, Zephaniah reminds the people of God's promise.



The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17 NIV

Let us all remember the promises given to us by God and sing with joy this Advent season of 2021.

Jane Eyres Barndt

Friday, December 3rd

Philippians 4:4-7

What this verse means to me is that God is always with you. He guides you through the road of life. Sometimes you might get into a bumpy road, but God will help you through all your troubles. Sometimes he'll put you onto a straight road, to spend time with family and friends and be happy with yourself. And no matter how many times you sin, the Lord will never stop loving you, no matter what. If you're anxious or worried about something, give it to God, and you will be happy once again. That is what the verse means to me.

Evan Deegan, 14

Saturday, December 4th

**Psalms 126
A Song of Ascent**

In this challenging time with the pandemic still around us, Psalm 126 speaks to me as a message of hope in the midst of trials and uncertainty. It is the story of a group of people remembering a time of great joy and hoping for it to return. The psalm looks at joy and sorrow together in our lives, as no one has only joy or only sorrow. "The Lord has done great things for them." "The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad." We live in our days, dealing in the here and now; the ups and downs and looking forward to a coming glory. As good as our past was, the best is yet to come in heavenly glory. Thanks be to God!

Rob Land

Sunday, December 5th

Matthew 25:1-13

These verses are about the parable of the ten virgins. They were waiting for the bridegroom. Some made foolish choices and were not ready when the bridegroom came.

We are looking to celebrate the birth of Jesus this Christmas season, but Jesus promises us that He will come again. Are you making foolish choices? How are you living your life?

Verse 13 says, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Are you ready?

Kay Vogt



Monday, December 6th

Isaiah 25:6-9

The feast is coming! The day of Salvation is coming – soon! The promise is before us: God Himself has promised! As we anticipate the birth of the Messiah, we, too, prepare a feast of our most deliciously soul-satisfying food and drink. We, too, give gifts – a small imitation of God’s gift of His Son. We, too, speak words of peace and good will. And for this short time, as we celebrate the gift of our Christ, we enjoy the most celebrated holiday on the planet. For a moment in time there seems to really be peace on earth and good will toward men. This is the fore-taste of the Great Day when He comes again to finally restore His peace on earth.

Lord, let me speak peace – Amen.

Gayle Hall

Tuesday, December 7th

Psalms 113

What a beautiful picture of our God this Psalm paints. Exalted above the heavens and the earth, praised through all eternity, and yet he stoops down to the earth to show his love for us. He came down to the earth and sacrificed himself for us. He healed the sick, raised the dead, and set us free from the curse of sin. He defied the establishments that oppressed the weak, and established a new covenant built on faith and love. He suffered and died to change the world forever. The Psalm asks “Who is like our God?” Who indeed, with all glory and power and praise, needing nothing and owing nothing, would sacrifice themselves to save those who don’t deserve it? In our world full of selfishness, who would be so selfless?

Lord, we pray today that you would raise the poor from the dust. We pray that you would right the wrongs of this world, healing the sick, bringing family and community to the lonely, justice to the oppressed. May you empower us, to live out that same love through the power of your Spirit. May we bring your selfless and sacrificial love to those near and far, living out your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen

Kim Wheelles

Wednesday, December 8th

Romans 15:13

The Characters of Christmas

During this Advent season, let’s contemplate each of the characters in the Christmas story and examine what they teach us. (Borrowed from SoulShepherding.org)

Zechariah

You probably don’t have Zechariah (John the Baptist’s father) in your Nativity set! (We actually do!) But you could say that the Christmas story begins with his silent waiting. Nine months without uttering a word. Nine months of remembering his lack of faith in the angel’s promise. And nine months of anticipating the birth of his son and the Messiah he was to herald! (Luke 1:5-25, 67-80). Perhaps God is inviting you also to withdraw from the noise and business of the Christmas season to enter into a time of quiet prayer? Be still to anticipate Christ’s coming with Zechariah and you too will burst forth with joyous Christmas praise when your tongue is set free!...



Mary

Mary offered the prayer that receives the Christmas miracle: "Let it be to me according to your Word" (Luke 1:38, NKJV). She was God's chosen vessel to give birth to the Messianic dream that God's people had been waiting hundreds of years for. But as any mother knows, it's painful to give birth! And in her case she had the added trials of being scorned as an immoral woman and riding 90 miles uphill on a donkey just before giving birth to her son in a cave full of dirty, loud, smelly animals! (Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-7, 19-20). Perhaps you can relate to the promise and challenge of giving birth to God's dream for you? Is there something special that you hope to give birth to this Christmas season? Ponder and treasure this God-dream in your heart and pray for the Lord's guidance and blessing...

Thursday, December 9th

The Characters of Christmas continued...

Joseph

Joseph's daring faith in the Lord is sometimes missed in the Christmas story. He believed in Mary's virginity when no one else did and he endured a lifetime of ridicule for doing so. He bet his life on words that an angel spoke to him while he was sleeping. He accepted the daunting challenge to raise the Messiah as his own child (Matthew 1:18-25). Maybe you too are facing a challenge? Do you need God's help to prevail in an overwhelming struggle? Pray for God's wisdom and strength to help you to obey him in the midst of the stress...

Innkeeper

The Innkeeper probably thought he had a good excuse for not finding a room for Jesus in his inn and for sending Mary, who was in labor, to go into the cave with the animals to have her baby (Luke 2:7). At least he did provide the cave. And yet, we can imagine that when he heard that the newborn child was the Messiah, he probably regretted that he wasn't more hospitable to him! Perhaps you can relate to the Innkeeper's predicament: your schedule is overcrowded, and you don't have enough room to give the time and attention to Christ that he deserves (and that you need!)? How could you make generous space in your schedule and your heart for Christ this Christmas season? Talk to the Lord about your schedule this Advent...

Angel

What joy was Gabriel's and all the angels who announced the Christmas gospel! What a glorious message they sang from the skies just above the shepherds' heads! (Luke 2:8-15). Maybe this Christmas season you know that you need to cultivate a heart of worship for Christ? What do you especially appreciate and admire about Christ? Let the angels lead you in praise to the Son of God...

Friday, December 10th

Luke 1:5-25

How difficult is it to stay faithful and focused when in a place of struggle or sadness? When confronted with failure and disappointment, how hard is it to believe that "all things are possible with God" (Matthew 19:26)? Zachariah and Elizabeth are examples of that amazing faith. "Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly" (Luke 1:6).



Although faced with the disappointment of having no children and being well beyond child bearing age, they persevered. Zachariah remained a righteous, obedient priest performing his duties serving God and God's people. Elizabeth continued on as a loving, devoted wife and homemaker. And then the impossible was promised! And God delivered on His promise. They were given a son, John. John, the prophet, preparing the world for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.

The impatience, the questioning, the doubt...all human responses when seeking God's plan in our lives but, ultimately, we are required to believe, to trust, to carry on. By reshaping and refining us, God works His will. Our role? We persevere. We remain God's patient servants...supporting others, feeding the hungry, seeking justice, loving our neighbors and being the people God created us to be. We wait in the glorious anticipation of His will being done, even when it seems an impossibility, even when it takes a very long time. Amen

Donna Force

Saturday, December 11th

The Characters of Christmas continued...

Shepherd

Imagine the thrill that the shepherds felt when the angels sang the news that the Messiah, the King of kings had just been born in Bethlehem! No one would've ever picked the shepherds to be visited by Christmas angels. They were poor. They were societal cast offs. And yet that's exactly the point of the Gospel: the last shall be first, the poor shall be rich, the least shall be the greatest, the humble shall be exalted. Probably the shepherds marveled at God's generosity and kindness and felt unworthy (Luke 2:8-20). Is it hard for you to accept that God bestows his glory on you? Are you confident in God's acceptance of you? If you struggle to esteem yourself as God does then lift up your head with the shepherds and let the Lord honor you with the gift of Christmas...

Lamb

Probably some lambs went with the shepherds to see the newborn King (Luke 2:7, 16). Imagine a little lamb skipping with delight across the fields to go see the baby Jesus in a cave on the outskirts of Bethlehem. Then see her smiling with joy to stand right next to Jesus as she peers into his manger. Perhaps this Christmas what you'd like more than anything else is to accompany the shepherds and their sheep to get closer to Jesus? What would help you to be closer to Christ? Talk to Jesus about your desire to have a closer relationship with him this Advent season...

Magi

The three magi studied the stars and the ancient prophecies, risked their lives to take an arduous journey across the desert, and dealt with the murderous King Herod - all to give their gifts to the newborn king. Who ever heard of kings worshiping another king? These wisest of all wise men wanted to give their best gift to Christ (Matthew 2:1-12). Maybe you are drawn to follow the wise men's example of giving a gift to Christ? We give Christmas gifts to many people, but may forget to give one to Christ! Follow the magi's example and tell Jesus what you want to give to him from your heart...



Sunday, December 12th

Psalm 91:11

Angel-Filled Advent

Wouldn't it be wonderful
if Advent came filled with angels and alleluias?
Wouldn't it be perfect
if we were greeted on these December mornings
with a hovering of heavenly hosts
tuning their harps and brushing up on their fa-la-
las?
Wouldn't it be incredible
if their music filled our waking hours
with the promise of peace on earth
and if each Advent night we dreamed of nothing
but goodwill?
Wouldn't we be ecstatic
if we could take those angels shopping
or trim the tree or have them hold our hands
and dance through our houses decorating?

And, oh, how glorious it would be
to sit in church next to an angel
and sing our hark-the-heralds!
What an Advent that would be!
What Christmas spirit we would have!
An angel-filled Advent has so many
possibilities!
But, in lieu of that,
perhaps we can give thanks
for the good earthly joys we have
been given
and for the earthly "angels" that
we know
who do such a good job filling
our Advent with alleluias!

by Ann Weems from Kneeling in Bethlehem

Monday, December 13th

Romans 8:22-25

Throughout the world, and also in our personal lives, we are constantly faced with challenging events that find us anticipating life with some degree of anxiety. We are forced to face the unknown. As with the birth of a child, we have to wait for the actual event. However, along with joy and excitement, we must exercise patience! This season of Advent highlights the anticipation, excitement, and joy of the birth of the Christ child. We also must have patience as we look forward to what is to come in His kingdom, both on the world scene as well as in our personal lives. Expectation and patience are the passwords to a full life.

Sandy Allebach

Tuesday, December 14th

Luke 1:39-45

What an incredibly joyful visit this must have been! The soon-to-be mother of John the Baptist visited by the mother-to-be of Jesus - can you imagine being a fly on the wall in Zechariah's home that day? As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, baby John leaped in her womb! Was it a coincidence or was it true joy? Our Christian faith puts it on the side of true joy.

So, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, may we too experience that sense of true joy for the gift delivered to us by Mary - our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Have a blessed Advent and a joyful Christmas!

Jane Sample



Wednesday, December 15th

Luke 1:46-55

Luke's *Magnificat* is sometimes described as the "oldest Advent hymn." Bach and Vivaldi, among others, transformed Mary's words into well-loved liturgical settings that fill churches around the world during this season. Mary's song is surely one of joy for herself and her relative, Elizabeth, and the beginning sentiments sound very similar to her response to Gabriel, earlier in the chapter. But, if we continue to read past the best-known lines, we encounter a very different Mary than appears anywhere else in the Gospels. Here, Mary sings: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (LK 1:52-3). This is not the quietly smiling Mary of Christmas devotional art; this is a powerful and passionate Mary, whose words could have been plucked from the lips of modern protestors.

This song - the longest passage spoken by a woman in the New Testament - has echoed with marginalized communities across history as they looked to cast down their oppressors. This song brings a melody of hope to the struggle: Mary has confidence in God's justice for her present and future because she is part of a people who have seen it in action.

Mary's song challenges us to move beyond the comfort of Advent. As someone with a comfortable life and privilege beyond Mary's wildest dreams, this song certainly challenges me and, maybe, it doesn't always sound like good news. But it is good news for the young Mary, her family, and the generations between us who are drawn to her confident claim: God intends justice, security, and love for every single one of us. And Mary's son, as yet unborn, will begin his ministry in the spirit of his mother's song, proclaiming his call to bring good news to the poor, the captive, and the oppressed.

May Mary's boldness go with us this Advent season, and beyond.

Liz Remelius



Zechariah's Song

NO FAKE NEWS HERE

THE MESSIAH IS COMING!

In an historic turn of events, A high priest had his speech suddenly restored after naming his son John. About nine months ago, Zechariah was performing his priestly duties when he was visited upon by the Angel, Gbriel. Gbriel had been sent by God to announce that Elizabeth, Zechariah's wife, was pregnant and would bear a son who was to be called, "John." John's life was to be devoted to preparing the way for and proclaiming the good news of the coming Messiah.

Naturally, not being fully graduated from the "Yahweh School of Faith Through Training," Zechariah doubted Gabriel citing his and Elizabeths advanced age, and that Elizabeth was barren. He asked for a sign so he would know these things were true.

He had been unable to speak and, by some accounts unable to hear ever since the encounter with Gabriel.

Since then, his wife has delivered a healthy baby boy and Zechariah not only speaks, he sings!

Medical experts have no explanation for either Elizabeth's pregnancy or Zechariah's miraculous recovery.

What Did He Say?

Reportedly, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and praised God for salvation, redemption, promises made and kept throughout history, and the freedom to worship without fear. He also praised God for future promises kept, the greatest of which is the coming Messiah.

When asked about his son, the new father said that John shall be called the prophet of the Highest, that he would go before the Lord and prepare his ways. He will share knowledge of salvation by forgiveness of sins and declare Him to be the Light that shines on all those who live in darkness.

Elizabeth could not be reached for comment

AD

Yahweh's School of Faith through Training located across the river from the School of Hard Knocks

OP/ED

When I got the assignment for these verses my initial reaction was one of doubt. I didn't doubt my ability to complete it, I doubted my willingness to do it. It's a long passage that required some study and knowledge of the back story. Through my journey I was able to do some reflection on who I am called to be as a preparer of the way. That reflection is the light that shines in the darkness the Holy Spirit who works and acts in my daily life, in everything I do and am. My reluctance has been replaced with confidence that God keeps his promises. The greatest promise is coming. The world is about to change and nothing will ever be the same again. Let us go and prepare the way!

Lord I pray that I may share the knowledge of salvation, walk in the path of peace and prepare the way of the Lord. Amen.

Advent Extra



Friday, December 17th

Luke 2:1-14

This is the moment. Right here is where Charlie Brown's Christmas special turns from light-hearted holiday propaganda to touching moment of true spirit. Charlie Brown and his friends round out their account of these verses with Hark the Herald Angels Sing. I love that hymn. But for me, the story of the birth of Jesus is a very Angels We Have Heard on High moment. Once we get beyond the understandable alarm of the shepherds, to picture this event is pure magic. The angels, glowing in ethereal majesty, their voices booming through the night sky. The mountains, "echoing their joyous strains." It is that moment when the music may be a little louder than is considerate to your neighbors, but you cannot help relishing the way it vibrates through your core right into your soul. It captures the hearts of the shepherds, creating the first followers of the new King. The message from the angels is in itself amazing. Their combined voices radiating through the stratosphere, for me, is what brings the shivers.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO. And on earth, let there be peace.

Megan E. Zeigler

Saturday, December 18th

Isaiah 40:25-21

Anyone who has spent time with young children knows first-hand how they can be overwhelmed by frustration or anger and unable to mask or hide these emotions. They haven't had the practice that comes with time and the internal feelings burst forth in the form of a tantrum. Frequently, adults pacify young children by asking them to count to ten.

Similarly, this passage is our reminder to count to ten when we are overwhelmed by doubt or find our faith lacking. While counting, look around at the daily reminder and evidence of God's miracles, even in the child in the middle of their tantrum - or better yet, wait until they are peacefully asleep! How can we not believe and trust in God if we take the time to look?

Beyond what we see, we can trust in the unfathomable order and complexity of the universe. As we resurface from our tantrum - fueled by daily worries, frustrations, or disappointments - there is a promise that our faith in God will renew us, just as Easter is a celebration of Jesus' life renewed.

Dear God, please forgive us for doubting your strength and presence in our lives. Let us calm down and release our worries so that we can renew our faith in you.

Lauren Hoyt



Sunday, December 19th

Hebrews 10:10-18

I have to say that these bible verses are not easy reading for me, but I am able to understand and meditate on 10:16..."This is the covenant that I will make with them...says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds" ...

I am thankful every day for God's presence in my life, and I start out each day with this prayer:

Thank you Dear Lord for this wondrous world and all that's in it, for You have made it and it is good (arms raised to the heavens), and for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (arms stretched out to sides), Love come down to show us the way to Your heart (bent over with hands close to the ground), and for the Holy Spirit that lives in each of us (arms stretched out to sides).

And I repeat the same movements with these words: This is the day that the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it. I pray that I'll do something for someone on this day, with an open and listening heart, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thank You Lord God...

Barb Longstreth

Monday, December 20th

Angel Gabriel came to Mary and gave her an important message
Decorations like trees, lights, candles that make us feel happy
Violins and violas in the choir that play beautiful music
Expecting and the excitement of the arrival of the birth of Jesus
Never forgetting that Jesus is the reason for the season
The love of Jesus never drifts away

...and so during ADVENT we prepare are our hearts for Jesus and look forward to this special time

Emma, Hank, Landon, Liam and Alicia (Music and Rec)

Tuesday, December 21st

Luke 3:1-6

This passage prompted me to learn more about John the Baptist. I decided to see how he and Jesus followed a similar path. They were "older" when they started teaching, both preached in the desert (John more), religious leaders sought out John but were less threatened because he talked of a Messiah, Jesus met religious leaders but threatened them because he WAS the Messiah, both had Disciple's, they both referred to each other as "prophesied" in the scriptures.

John's death foreshadowed Jesus. Jesus said, John was Elijah and "they" didn't know it and what they did to John they would do to him (Jesus).

The words of Isaiah I learned because John's preparing of "the road" compared historically to ancient people (and in today's world too!) getting roads ready for important visitors. The message to me is that the Bible tells us so much, but often we need interpretation to make it clear.

Diane Shallcross



Wednesday, December 22nd

Malachi 3:1-14

What a rough passage for Advent. Can't you just hear the Lord shouting at His people? So, what do we make of this message? It seems to me that the Lord Almighty is preparing the way for Jesus, if you read it that way. "I am going to send my only son to you in the future. Will you pave the way for him? Will you stop behaving arrogantly and stop denying me and start living your life FOR Me instead of against Me?"

Two parts, specifically, spoke to me. First, the idea of Jesus refining us like silver. Chad and I know we have faults. We have conversations about them and we actively work to fix those tarnished parts that need fixing. Our hope is that by always being aware of those parts and working toward living life as God would have us live it, that we will be ready and aware to hear the lessons that God and His Son teach us as we move forward through life.

Currently, I have everyone trained at work to use the word "pleasing." It is one of my all-time favorite words and they are so used to hearing me say it, that they say it, too. A friend of mine at the office said that when she uses the word now, she feels like her mood is elevated because she is so aware of the thing that is "pleasing" whether it be a shiny apple, or a perfectly neat closet, or a warm cup of coffee that someone brought in for us. By recognizing the little things, aren't we refining our eyes to see the Lord's blessings and, thus, honoring HIM?

On the flip side, if we turn our eyes away from God and fail to acknowledge Him, fail to give of ourselves for His kingdom, fail to continue to refine ourselves the way He asks us to, where do we end up? Do we just end up being cynical and mean and unable to see the "pleasing" parts? There are too many in our world who have turned away from the Lord. Life is better living WITH God than without Him. Glory be to God, the Father Almighty.

Karen Stacks

Thursday, December 23rd
Unexpected by Ann Weems

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Even now we simply do not expect
to find a deity in a stable.

Somehow the setting is all wrong:
the swaddling clothes too plain,
the manger too common for the likes of a Savior,
the straw inelegant,
the animals, reeking and noisy,
the whole scene too ordinary for our taste.

And the cast of characters is not better.

With the possible exception of the kings,
who among them is fit for this night?
the shepherds? certainly too crude,
the carpenter is too rough,
the girl is too young.

And the baby!

Whoever expected a baby?

Whoever expected the advent of God in a helpless child?



Friday, December 24th

Luke 3:7-18

John the Baptist has throngs of panicked people coming to him, seeking the path to redemption. They know they need to change, but don't know where to start. John gives each of them ways to live a life of service to their fellow man.

In this season of advent, we may not be driven by panic, but we are reminded of the ways we can live a life of service, to be gracious and giving – of our time, our talents, and our money. The opportunities are numerous – donations of food, clothing, toys; time spent with elders; baking and cooking for those in need.

Advent season and these verses are a reminder of our calling – a calling that knows no season – a calling we can hear and practice all year long. Be gracious, be giving, be kind, be content.

Deb Mohollen

Saturday, December 25th

A Savior is Born!

What a night and day of wonder! How can we put in words the ineffable mystery and wondrous grace that God has come down and pitched His tent among us in Jesus Christ! The eternal Word has become mortal flesh - "and we have seen his glory." In the baby Jesus, we see how vulnerable God is willing to be in revealing and declaring God's love for us. May we bask in the wonder and joy of this day - and then join the shepherds, wise men, and angels in sharing this astounding and good news with others.

“Down in a lowly manger
The human Christ was born,
And God sent his salvation
That blessed Christmas morn
Go tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere;
Go tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born!

Kerry and Carter Lester



