

DECEMBER 6-27, 2020 DEVOTIONS

The devotions prepared for Sundays include scripture, questions for your discernment and prayer.

Devotions for Mondays-Saturday include a variety of scriptures, poems, and hymns sung during Advent. I hope that after you complete your readings on those days, you will take a few moments to contemplate them and discern how they might be speaking to you during this season.

May you find joy and peace as you experience the Advent season. - Pastor Diane

Additional resources used:

Advent, Worship & Activities for Families, Margaret Anne Huffman, Abingdon Press, 1998.

Alive Now, November/December 2007.

Feasting on the Word: Year B., Volume 1: Advent through Transfiguration (Feasting on the Word: Year B volume), David L. Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor, Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

Holiday Treasury, Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1983.

Joy to the World, Kathleen M. Base, Liguori Publications, 2010.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2020

Isaiah 40:1-11 NRSV

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.*

A voice cries out:

*"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for
our God.*

*Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of
the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field.

*The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.*

The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;

lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,

lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, "Here is your God!"

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him;

his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

*He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.*

Times of unexpected tragedies and times of challenge (including our current circumstances) can threaten our normal existence, make us feel numb, afraid and hopeless. They can threaten our faith in God, and other beliefs that provide order in our lives and the world in which we live. Isaiah 40 reflects the time following the invasion of Judah, destruction of the temple and much of Jerusalem, followed by the exile of many to Babylon. Within this poetic text, we find a life-giving vision of restoration for their homeland, and people living together once again in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel laid blame for the catastrophe upon the sinfulness of the people, but Isaiah avoids blame and accusation, and chooses a different direction. Hope, joy and comfort for the people are rooted in God's always faithful word and knowing that God will lead them home. God comes in strength, not to avenge, not hard-hearted, nor with harsh judgement. Rather God will again gather them in love, tenderly and gently. We know that God gathered together again those who were exiled, and Jerusalem was rebuilt and restored.

I believe that Isaiah speaks to us during this Advent season and our current times of challenge as well. Heed Isaiah's word. God will gather us, and God will lead us toward the restoration of our lives. May you and yours experience God's love, tenderly and gently.

Questions to Ponder

- How will I share God's love with others during Advent?
- How will I share the message that God will lead us toward restoring our lives?

Prayer

God of hope. We look to you as we experience times that challenge, knowing that you are there and that our lives will be restored. With joy we anticipate and celebrate the birth of the Christ child also born into challenging times, our Savior. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2020

from Kathy Oehler...Christmas Party for Special Friends

For about 50 years, the first Saturday in December at North Church was the Christmas Party for Special Friends. Our guests were adults with special needs from the Indianapolis area. Many of the guests had been coming to the party for their entire adult lives. It was a highlight of the season for them. The party was huge. There were usually close to 200 guests, about 100 North Church volunteers, a live band for dancing, a visit from Santa, a separate party for parents of the guests, and hundreds and hundreds of home baked cookies.

There are so many precious memories regarding this event. The joy radiating from the faces of the guests from the moment they arrived at the church. The gentleman who rode his bicycle from his home in Beech Grove because he didn't want to be late to the party. The wonder on the faces of many of the adult special friends when Santa entered Fellowship Hall. The members of the band (not members of North) who volunteered their talents every year, saying that this party was the highlight of their Christmas season. The happy engagement of North Church members as they danced with the guests. For me, this annual event epitomized the spirit of the Christmas season - hope awaited, joy experienced, and love shared.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2020

Word of Salutation by Mary McCall Kulberg...

An angel spoke the word to Mary
then to Joseph, and they trusted God.
Shepherds received the same word
and hurried to witness their Savior's birth.
Peter, filled with courage by the word,

left the boat and walked on water toward his Lord.
Surprised into joy, two women at the tomb
also heard the word and knew their teacher lived again.
Jesus came himself in glorious revelation
and brought the reassuring word to John.
And in these troubled days, our anxious hearts
listen for Christ's greeting of arrival and return:
"Be not afraid!"

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2020

Mark 1:1-8 NRSV

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his
paths straight,'"
John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for
the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the
people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river
Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather
belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who
is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the
thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the
Holy Spirit."

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2020

from Linda Mansfield...

*I love that moment when all the lights are out except for the ones on the Christmas tree.
The tree, the lights, and the ornaments make me catch my breath and revel in the sheer
beauty of the holiday season.*

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2020

Advent gives us a chance to meditate on:
Hope - for deliverance;
Expectation - for the coming of one who will bring justice to an unjust world;
Preparation - so that we may prepare our hearts to receive Christ, who is
Light - the light of the world.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2020

from Doug and Lela Russell... A November December Event of Long Ago

The Doug Russell family has been a part of our North Church family for over 50 years. Some of you have been long time friends. For others the friendship has been shorter. A few of you know this story and now the rest will hear it for perhaps for the first time. Forty nine years ago during that November year, Doug suffered an aneurysm of the brain. Eric was part of the family at that time...Jared was still to come. The event was a horrible disruption in our lives which led to weeks and weeks at Methodist Hospital first in ICU and then into what was then called Constant Neurological Care.

The road back to health was not guaranteed. Where would our lives be taken. What direction were we being tossed. The road took us through the rest of November and into December with hospital visits made daily, the extended Russell family taking over the care of Eric. Where would the road take us was waiting to be declared in a time we could not define. I didn't know what to pray for that morning but I remembered thinking...Just be with us. The doctor assigned to us, Julius Goodman, fresh from medical school being the first in his class of neurosurgeons walked the walk with us. At one point when Doug was not progressing as planned, surgery was done to release brain pressure. It was a very bleak time but persistence would prevail. Near the end of December, Doug was released from the hospital and the beginning of 3 months of rehabilitation was the road taken. Doug slowly gained mind and strength, returning to work in April.

Now the Christmas part. Did I shop for gifts, and trees and food and all of the other trapping of the month. No. What mattered most was life leading to health, was enough. A neighbor brought a tree and the North family continued to pray for us as they had from the beginning. That family came through. The realization that all would be well no matter the outcome was the nonreturnable gift we received that December.

That long ago November and December will always be remembered as one where our church stayed with us in pray and support. A gift not to be forgotten.

We experienced an unexpected different Christmas many years ago. For you today, this may be a unexpected different one as well. Visiting family may happen in a different way. Perhaps fewer gifts around the tree. Staying focused on knowing that we are loved by our church family and that praying for each other, a call on the phone or an email message sent will continue to remind us that our arms are around each other. Feeling alone may come and go but all will be well. We might not have words to pray and know where our road will take us but stay the course. We are walking along side each other, not alone.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2020

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 NRSV

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.
They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.
For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing;
I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with
them.
Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the
peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has
blessed.
I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe
of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to
spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise
to spring up before all the nations.*

Within this scripture we find words of reassurance - justice, hope, and deliverance, all reminding us that God was and is in the midst. While Isaiah spoke to the people of another time, we cannot deny that there continue to be oppressed, brokenhearted, captive, imprisoned people living in our modern world, all awaiting God's transformation. This time of Advent is a time of waiting and anticipation as we wait for God to transform the world through Jesus Christ. In Isaiah we hear the surety of God's promise.

How is God's promise revealed to us now? How is God working through our lives that offers hope and restoration in a broken world? During Advent we can become sidetracked by the transformation of the material world - bright lights and decorations, music and pageantry. We often become exhausted from the flurry of activities as we ready ourselves to celebrate, and may be blinded to how God is transforming the world before us.

Isaiah challenges us to see the injustice that surrounds us - poverty, abuse, hunger, war, oppression. Observe how God is transforming our lives and the world, and perhaps then we too can participate in bringing hope and restoration into our broken world.

Questions to Ponder

- How can I avoid becoming distracted during the Advent season?
- How will I respond to God working through me to bring justice, hope, and deliverance into the world?

Prayer

Holy One. We celebrate the birth of the Christ Child who changes us for the good. Help me to avoid being distracted by the celebrations of the material world so I can bring your promise and reassurance of justice, hope, and deliverance into the world. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2020

from Jill Lyday...

When my younger brother and I were small children, our dad was the “music man” at Franklin Central High School on the south side of Indianapolis. He taught marching band, dance band, and all the various choral groups, including the Franklin Central Singers, an elite singing group. Every Christmas morning around 5:00 a.m., he would leave our house to meet the FC Singers at the school to travel around the district singing Christmas carols in various neighborhoods. My mom kept my excited brother and I corralled in my bedroom, reading Christmas books to us. Of the two of them, my mom had the harder job. We were two antsy children excited to see what Santa Claus had brought us. It always seems like an eternity before Dad returned home, out of the cold. When he arrived, he would light the Christmas tree, and we would make a mad dash into the living room to see what Santa had left us. My parents were both exhausted. My brother and I, on the other hand, were wide awake and crazed, as we ripped open all the colorfully wrapped presents!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2020

Matthew 1:18-25 NRSV

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2020

Christmastide by Christina Rossetti

*Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine;
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine;
Worship we our Jesus:
But wherewith for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.*

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020

from Jessica White...

When I was 13 my father suffered a heart attack right after Thanksgiving. Forced to remain at home to heal, my mother took on the responsibility of running the pharmacy they owned. She worked long hours while continuing to care for my father and me. I had asked for a new bowling ball, bag, and shoes that Christmas, as I had joined a bowling league near our home. Of course, with my father ill and having to hire a pharmacist to take his place at the drug store, my mother told me I shouldn't expect much for Christmas this year. I understood and accepted the fact that I could bowl in the league with rented shoes and ball just fine.

When I awoke Christmas morning and headed to the kitchen for breakfast, I couldn't believe my eyes. Under the tree was a new bowling bag, ball, and shoes, the very ones I had asked for. Somehow my mother, with little time to spare and many worries to shoulder, had managed to purchase them knowing all the unexpected expenses they were incurring. I was so touched and treasured those items. My father was improving as well. To this day, I remember that as my best Christmas ever!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2020

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time

came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2020

from Angie Kattmann

When I was in 6th grade, my family moved to Kentucky, very far from our extended family. We didn't have much those years. We got connected with a very small church, which just by its size, was limited in resources.

Although we didn't have much, we were able to harvest a giant Christmas tree from our farm to put up in church. My Mom organized the crafting of styrofoam (recycled meat trays) & glitter ornaments. The tree was magnificent with its white lights and glittery ornaments when the church lights were down during Christmas Eve service.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2020

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 NRSV

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.”

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a

house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

This scripture is the pinnacle of God's promise to Abraham. The people could claim the land as their home and live in peace. Yet there is a tension that follows. King David expresses to the prophet Nathan that because he has a house, he will build a house for God. Consider for a moment that David doesn't ask God if he wants a house to be built. Prophets usually advise kings of God's will, not the opposite. David seems not to need neither God nor advisors, and yet Nathan tells him to go ahead with his plans.

God speaks to Nathan with instructions to tell David there is no desire for a house along with a warning, and reminder for the very human David, of his place as God's servant in God's kingdom and lessons to remember.

We have all behaved liked David. Sure we can make decisions on our own without advice from others, without seeking the advice of God, but will they be the best decisions? How easy it can be to forget that we too are God's servants. We also need advice. We also need to be reminded where God found us, and where would we be without God's grace?

The Holy One saves more than us, the world is reconciling to God as well. In a short time, we will celebrate the birth of Christ. How will we serve Emanuel?

Questions to Ponder

- Do I remember to seek and follow God's advice?
- What are examples of God's grace in my life?

Prayer

God of grace. You know us so well, better than we know ourselves. We are not without fault, so we seek your advice for our lives that will lead us to serve you. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2020

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus by Charles Wesley

*Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.*

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2020

from Linda Mansfield...

The other moment, and the one that means the most to me each Christmas, is when all the candles are lit during the Christmas Eve candle-lighting service and we sing "Silent Night" together. There is something so magical about how the church looks during these few moments, both as the candles are lighted from pew to pew, and when everyone is holding his or her own lit candle and singing a simple song written for a single guitar. It makes me think about how Jesus's birth spreads the love of God throughout the world and throughout the centuries, both in the past, in the present, and in the future to come.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2020

As we near the celebration of Jesus' birth, what is your favorite Christmas memory?

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2020 - CHRISTMAS EVE

A Christmas Star by Tom Krause

A bright Christmas star
sits high on a tree
shining its light
for the whole world to see

reminding us all
of a night long ago
when a star in the sky
guided wise men below

to a small town stable
where a gift from above
was born on that night
to bring the world love.

The light from the star
shone down on a child
asleep in the manger
so meek and so mild.

Shepherds and wise men
who came to draw near
then spread the good news
that the savior is here.

Now the Christmas tree star
still leads us today
to the birth of a miracle
that first Christmas day.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2020 - CHRISTMAS DAY

Joy to the World lyrics by Isaac Watts, music by George Frederic Handel

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing*

*Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found
Far as the curse is found
Far as, far as the curse is found*

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2020

From the movie *The Polar Express*

"Just remember, the true spirit of Christmas lies in your heart."

How will my heart carry the spirit of Christmas through the year?

How will the Spirit that lies within my heart lead me?

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2020

John 1:1-14 NRSV

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

The wait is over. The long-expect Jesus, the Messiah has come. He is the Light, the One who will transform our lives.

In this Scripture, John is concerned that we don't know Jesus as our Creator who claims us as his own. To help us, John reminds us he was present from the beginning, the Logos, the Word that became flesh, Jesus of Nazareth. Through Jesus' living, dying and rising, God is revealed. Jesus Christ is the living Word from the beginning of the cosmos, will be there at its completion, and alive today.

The Word surrounds us. We meet the Word at the Table, and in the ordinary moments of our lives at home, work, and in our communities when we look into the eyes of those we encounter.

Questions to Ponder

- Where have I met Christ today?
- How has Christ transformed my life?

Prayer

We give thanks to you God for gift of Jesus so great a gift that mere words are not sufficient. Amen.

