



Light
has
Come

2021 ADVENT DEVOTIONALS



BY SUGAR LAND STUDENTS
EDITED BY SCOTTY SWINGLER

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Thanks for checking out *Light Has Come!* I hope it is a helpful guide for you and your family as you read through Scripture and pray during this Advent season.

I am so proud of each student who wrote these devotionals. You will be blessed by their words. The wisdom, passion, and sincerity of Gen Z continues to amaze me. They are a true gift to the Church. Thank you for allowing them to be your spiritual leaders for the next four weeks; you'll be blessed by their leadership.

I want to thank Pastor Taylor for encouraging me to put this together, and Pastor Davey for his enthusiastic servant-hearted guidance and support. Thanks to my all-star student ministry staff, Jamar and Noah, for their contributions to this book and our entire operation; I couldn't do my job without them. Thank you also to Robert Cocheu, a legendary SLBC youth Sunday school teacher, for his devotional. And, as always, my biggest "thank you" goes to my wife Ambree for her constant support and her brilliant entry into this book, as well.

Glory to God in the highest! Light has come.

- Pastor Scotty

An Introduction to Advent

Scotty Swingler
Student Pastor

Scripture: *And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, “In the future when your descendants ask their parents, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.’ For the Lord your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The Lord your God did to the Jordan what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the Lord is powerful and so that you might always fear the Lord your God.”* **Joshua 4:20–24**

In antiquity, people would often stack stones on top of one another to create pillars of remembrance. These pillars of stacked rocks are called **cairns**. The cairn would stand in its place to remind a people of a significant event and/or place in that people’s history.

There are many places in Scripture where God’s people created cairns to remember something God had accomplished on their behalf. The cairn built by Joshua from 12 Jordan River stones stood at Gilgal as a reminder

to Israel that God had fulfilled His promise to bring them into the Promised Land, despite many obstacles that stood in their way. In particular, this cairn recalled the miraculous “drying up” of the Jordan River so they could safely cross into Canaan.

Starting November 28, Sugar Land Baptist Church and Christians around the world will begin looking to some “cairns” of our own; pillars of celebration in remembrance of what God has done. The Church has been celebrating Advent since the 5th or 6th century A.D. During the four weeks of Advent Christians 1) *remember* the arrival of Christ in the Bethlehem stable 2) *reflect upon* spiritual fruits the birth of Jesus inspires and 3) *anticipate* the Second Coming of Christ at the end of all things.

This devotional book is organized around four candles many Baptist churches use in worship on the four Advent Sundays leading up to Christmas: **Hope, Faith, Joy, and Peace**. Maybe you’ve lit these candles around a wreath in your home during the Advent season. We know that faithfulness, joy, and peace are all fruits of the spirit listed by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22, and Paul

famously says in 1 Corinthians 13:13 that the three most important virtues of the Christian life are faith, hope, and love. Come Christmas day, we'll finish this book on a devotional about the Love that entered the world on Christmas, the **God Incarnate** from Heaven who inspires hope, faith, joy, and peace on earth.

So, my friends, use this book each day during Advent to remember, reflect, and anticipate. God has done a miraculous thing, even more miraculous than parting a sea or river to allow a nation a crossing on dry ground. He has come.

Hallelujah! Light has come. And Light will come again. May we worship together at these cairns over the next four weeks.

Prayer: *Creator, help me use this devotional over the next four weeks to remember, reflect, and anticipate the good things You have done and will do. May these four weeks of hope, faith, joy, and peace serve as cairns in my life. I will not forget Your faithfulness. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.*

Week 1: Hope

Sunday, November 28

Hope

Ambree Swingler

The Student Pastor's Better Half

Scripture: *“The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.*

*“In those days and at that time
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.*

*In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.*

This is the name by which it will be called:

*The Lord Our Righteous Savior.’ **Jeremiah 33:14–16***

The Lord springs up hope from a diminished line of men and women who consistently fall short of the vision He has for them. The Voice translation states that righteousness will sprout from “the old stump of David’s lineage” and from that old cut down tree will spring forth new life. This tree’s roots come from a long line of God’s people and promises, but the hope He offers is an entirely

new thing. This hope will extend for generations to come—for those within the house of Israel and beyond.

My husband knows there is one thing that will always bring tears to my eyes in every sermon: the idea of restoration for humankind. To see a day when justice and righteousness (not our idea of it, but God's) makes everything right. For God's original plan for us to come to fruition and to see brokenness restored in all heights and depths of our world through the person of Jesus. As my favorite verse of O Holy Night says, "in His name all oppression shall cease."

Just as the people of Israel awaited a warrior-savior who would conquer their enemies with His banner held high, this is often our idea of justice in the world today. To conquer, to change by force, to take captive, and demand retributions be paid for what was taken or lost. To carry our large banner which says "Christian" and impose our own idea of what that means on others. Unlike the people to whom Jeremiah wrote, we have the privilege of knowing Jesus is the Prince of Peace. A God-man who shunned violence and ate with sinners. His kindness led

the masses to repentance, His mercy drew them to His side. Scripture bears witness to the way He turned the world upside down and made the last first and the first last.

Today we cling to the hope of His return. When He will liberate the captive and bring restoration to our world. We know the story of His life and resurrection and revel in the hope this brought our world—an opportunity for each of us to accept the gift of grace and enter into right living with God. And when we look forward, even more hope! To bear witness to the breaking of every chain, for crying to cease and pain to end, for addiction to be overcome and illness cast out, for the orphan to find a home and the widow to be reunified. What hope we have in Jesus! And when He comes to save the land and allows us to all dwell securely, we will point to the Lord and say, “He is our righteousness.”

Prayer: *God of all justice and righteousness, come soon. We see the pain our sin has caused in the world and want You to make everything right again. We have hope in the kingdom of justice You will bring to earth. Let us know You by Your righteousness. Amen.*

Monday, November 29

The Wait

Sophie Sandlin

Senior, George Ranch High School

Scripture: *As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:*

*“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’* **Luke 3:4**

I remember sitting just inside the unlocked door of my house, eyes glued to the road, anxiously awaiting the arrival of a navy truck. I’d moved to Sugar Land six months prior and hadn’t seen my best friends since. In anticipation, the house had been scrubbed clean and everything put in its proper place. Pillows were fluffed, blankets were folded, and fresh towels had been laid out. The house was ready. I was ready. I could hardly contain my excitement.

How much more exciting should the coming of the Lord be? When you look forward to someone coming over

for a visit, it's almost second nature to straighten up your house. Shouldn't we do the same for the Son of God?

Of course, this can be difficult because we have no idea when He's coming. If your best friend were to say, "I'm going to come visit sometime during the summer," you'd feel some frustration because you'd have no idea when to have the house clean and meals prepared. The simplest solution: be ready the whole summer. Still, what can be more frustrating is the fact that you're anxious to see them and would like to be able to count down the days until their anticipated arrival. Waiting is hard, especially when you don't know how long you'll be waiting for.

That's where hope comes into play in the Christian life. We don't know when the Lord is coming back, but we can wait with hope and excitement because He's promised He will. As we await His arrival in hope, we should do our best to keep the house ready and the door unlocked.

Prayer: *God, help me remember and be excited that one day You will come again. Allow me the strength to remain prepared. Give me hope.*

Tuesday, November 30

The Power of Hope

Cade Doherty

Freshman, Foster High School

Scripture: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Romans 15:13***

The greatest gift in life is hope. Hope is the thing that keeps us going through every hardship, every struggle, and every day-to-day battle. Hope brings us joy in times of sorrow and peace in times of trouble.

The Holy Spirit guides us and enables us to live righteously in a broken world, a world desperately in need of hope. When we put our trust in God, we find the blessing of hope in even the darkest corners of life; we find that we have more to live for in God than in our own repetitive sinful lifestyles.

The one thing God asks from us is to trust Him. When we do this, God's love will bring us hope not just for a better tomorrow, but a better eternity with Him in

heaven. To put our trust in God and believe in the power of hope is to put our trust in His promises and faithfulness. You can have wholehearted confidence that what He says will come to be.

Hope is important for many reasons, but one I think we can all relate to is this—life is difficult. There are many struggles in life that we don't have the power to overcome ourselves. Finding hope in God and His plan can help us through those struggles and pull us even further into reaching our full potential in Christ.

When life gets tough, we all must remember the God of hope brings us joy and peace and that trusting in God can fill us with His hope forever.

*As you navigate this week, **think about** how God has given you hope when you have needed it most, and what you might need God's hope for today.*

Wednesday, December 1

God Uses the “Nobodies”

Olivia Carlo

Freshman, Logos Preparatory Academy

Scripture:

*“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.” **Matthew 2:6***

Making the transition from middle school to high school is hard. It's even harder to navigate trying to decide who you are and who you want to be. You want people to see the real you but sometimes aren't sure if that's the best idea. Social media places the wrong ideas into your head telling you that you need to be something you aren't. We go through life comparing ourselves to others and trying to keep up with the latest trend or topic of conversation. But what we really want is to just be seen and heard in the world. To make our mark.

I've struggled with comparing myself to others (both online and in person) my whole life. When times get

really tough, I turn to the Bible. Just think of all the people that God used to accomplish His goals! They weren't necessarily the pretty popular kids, or the tough sporty ones. They were regular people. Many were outcasts. When the Jewish people heard of a Savior coming to rescue them, they thought of a king riding on a golden chariot or a warrior commanding powerful armies of men. They didn't think of a teen girl giving birth to a small, innocent child. The king of the Jews, God's only son, was an unsuspecting baby who had to be protected by His underage mother—just a wee child. Yet Jesus went on to save us from death and to spread the wisdom of God.

Meanwhile, Bethlehem was a tiny “nobody” town, but God's son was born there! If you feel down or like no one notices you, have hope during this season. Even if no one else notices you, God always will. If you have faith in him, He will show you His plans for you. Remember: if the Savior of the world was born to an unknown virgin girl, in a regular small town, God can use you even if you feel unknown. God looks out for the least of these. And He certainly has a big plan for you.

Use this prayer when you feel down or unseen:

Lord, please help me trust your path for me, even when it seems nothing is changing. I know that if you had a plan for a young girl like Mary, for a small town like Bethlehem, the time will come when you are ready to use me, too. My arms are open and willing to do your tasks. In your name, Amen.

Thursday, December 2

The Light of the World

Thomas Miller

Senior, Home School & Christian Perspective Classes

Scripture: *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." **John 8:12***

From the very beginning, God has declared His love of light. He created it first, before anything else existed. He spoke the words, "Let there be light," and there was light. He broke through that complete darkness. Right then, he provided light in a physical way. Can you imagine a world without light? How sad and different that would be!

In John 8:12, Jesus declared himself to be the light of the world. He was letting us know that He is the one and only source of true spiritual light and truth. We are meant to walk with Jesus in that light each day and when we do, He illuminates His ways for us. Can you imagine a world without Jesus' spiritual light? How sad and different that would be!

We are called to reflect that light to others. I remember studying astronomy some years ago. In one of our first lessons, we learned that the moon has no light of its own. The moon gets its light from the sun and then reflects it towards the earth. When we look up, we observe a well-lit moon in the darkness because of that reflection. It's just another of God's "object lessons" for us; I believe God wants to fill us with His light and His truth every day so we can then reflect that light to the world.

Praise God he sent physical light into our world. Praise God he sent His son, Jesus, to bring spiritual light and truth to us. And thank God that we have an opportunity to reflect that light to others. May we take the light, love, and hope of Christ into every situation in which we find ourselves today.

Activity: *This evening, light a candle in a dark room. Observe how one small source of light changes the entire room. When Jesus entered our world, He became the Light of the World. Give thanks for His gifts of physical and spiritual light. Then, as you go through the next few days, look for all the sources of light we use... Christmas lights, candles, etc. They help remind us of the gift of light God*

has given us. Look for the light reflected by fellow Christians and thank God for those who reflect His light. Then, dream up and pray about ways you might be a reflection of Jesus' light to others.

Friday, December 3

Faith in the Lord

Trent Smith

Freshman, Logos Preparatory Academy

Scripture:

*Trust in the Lord forever,
for the Lord, the Lord himself,
is the Rock eternal. **Isaiah 26:4***

Do your friends and family trust you? In other words, do your friends and family have faith in you to do the right thing? God will always do the right thing, for He is the Eternal Rock. You can place your hope in the One who is trustworthy. If we study God's word every day, we will learn to trust in Him.

How do we study God's word though? Here's one idea: in most months there are 31 days, and in Proverbs there are 31 chapters. If you read a chapter a day and meditate on it, you will begin to learn to trust in God.

A former youth pastor here named Ryan Musser said that "faith is a verb." That means faith in God isn't just

believing the right things. James 2:26 says, “for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.” Remember the powerful story of how Abraham put his faith in the Lord when he was about to sacrifice Isaac; look how he turned out! When you trust in the Lord, He will provide for you. And if you’re feeling short on faith, God will *help you* put your faith in Him.

One of the simplest and best ways to practice putting your faith and hope in God is through prayer. Here is a prayer that I have made to help you hope in God and put your trust in Him:

Prayer: *Heavenly father, help me hope in You, put my trust in You, and act on my faith so that others can hope in You too. Amen.*

Saturday, December 4

One of the Best Representations of Hope in a Single Verse

Esther Opiyo

Junior, Clements High School

Scripture: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **John 3:16***

John 3:16 is one of the most universally well-known verses from the Bible. Anyone who knows anything about the church has probably heard this verse at least once before. For me it was the first verse I ever memorized, and there's good reason for its overwhelming presence in the church's teaching of God's word. It is one of God's greatest reminders of His love for us; His promise of an everlasting life restores hope for our future.

However, if I'm being honest—when I was younger, this verse held little meaning to me. I know, I know—

gasp—how could I say such a thing, especially about one of the pillars of the Bible? But yes, for years upon years John 3:16 was always just some verse that Sunday school teachers and Bible study leaders would ask me to recite like a poem for school, so I never took the time to truly break down the verse and explore its meaning. But as I've grown older and made more and more mistakes in my life, I've started to ponder how a supreme and all-powerful god like our God could ever accept me.

But friends, that's exactly what allows this verse to carry so much weight in our lives. None of us are worthy of God's love—we all make more and more mistakes. Yet God has still made a jaw-dropping point to show us how much He loves us by sending His one and only Son, Jesus, and asking in return only for us to believe and accept him into our hearts as Lord and Savior. This is the only thing that allows for him to take away our sins so we may not “perish but have eternal life.”

Spend time thanking God for the hope He brought us when He sent his son, and for His wondrous love that we're clearly unworthy of, yet He offers openly.

Week 2: Faith

Sunday, December 5

Faith

by Robert Cocheu

Sunday School Teacher (Middle School Boys)

Scripture:

You turn things upside down,

as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!

Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it,

“You did not make me”?

Can the pot say to the potter,

*“You know nothing”?’ **Isaiah 29:16***

Faith is complicated. Faith can be hard. Scripture tells us that “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1 NIV). We rely on faith daily. We have faith that our careers will be able to provide for our families. We have faith that if we are diagnosed with a disease modern medicine will be able to cure us. We have faith that our friends will have our back in times of trouble.

The Jewish people in the time of the Roman empire had faith as well. They had faith in a coming Messiah. This

Messiah would come and restore the kingdom of Israel that existed during the time of King David. They were looking for a strong warrior-king in the mold of David who would overthrow the Romans and set up his throne in Jerusalem. The problem was Jesus didn't fit that mold. He talked about loving your enemies, standing up for the downtrodden, and even worse, hanging out with the sinners.

This past year I watched the series "The Chosen." There is a point where Peter confronts Jesus and says this isn't the way, it's too different. Jesus replies with "Get used to different." That quickly became one of my favorite moments in the series. Jesus was radically different than the Jewish people expected him to be.

We in our time are much like the Jewish people in that time. We have faith in Christ, but we often want to put Jesus into our box. We can only worship one way. The people that attend our church have to look like us. We have to vote or believe in a specific political ideology. On and on our boxes go. We have to remember that just like the ancient Jews, our expectations are not God's. God

turns all things upside down. The Creator who spoke the universe into existence with just one word became a helpless infant and then died in order to provide salvation. That is the ultimate paradox of our faith. Our faith calls us in this time of Advent to reflect on the upside-down nature of God. The nature that takes on the form of a lamb instead of a warrior-king. The nature that calls us to love the unloved and to pray for those that would do us harm.

*As you go through your day today find ways to **interact** with people that you normally would not and show them the love of Christ.*

Monday, December 6

Our Reward

Hibba Khalifa

Senior, Logos Preparatory Academy

Scripture: *Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

Hebrews 11:6

Christmas morning—the one day a year children could not be more excited to intentionally arise from their beds at the crack of dawn. They run to their parents' room and eagerly awaken them in order to open gifts. Their eyes light up and smiles grow big as they spot all the different-sized boxes beautifully wrapped under the tree. This moment is a special one for families as they bask in their children's pure joy and spend quality time together. All the hard work to go shopping, wrap and hide the gifts, and quietly place them under the tree is rewarded on Christmas day.

Our rewarding gift from God is His beloved son Jesus in whom we have faith. Has it occurred to you today that God wants to spend time with you? And that He'll reward you for spending that time with Him? The omnipotent Creator wants to spend time with you. Wow. That is an astonishing thought, is it not? God loves you and longs for you to know Him on a deeper level than anyone else. He wants to be revealed to you and show you just how great He and His love can be.

In order to please God, the writer of Hebrews says we only need to place our faith in Him. We trust that although we can't see Him with our eyes or hear him with our ears, we can get to know Him on a spiritual level. It takes faith because we cannot touch or feel him. But as we come to God on the basis of faith, He rewards us. He loves us and wants to make Himself known to us. It's rewarding to have faith and develop a relationship with God.

I encourage us all to have faith—to continue having faith in the One Most High who we cannot see with our physical eyes, but in whom a reward we can't begin to imagine lies.

Prayer:

Lord,

I come to you because I have faith

Faith in what I cannot see

And yet I still believe in You

Thank you for being my everlasting reward

I am yours

Amen

Tuesday, December 7

Knocking at Your Door

Connor Schultz

Junior, Travis High School

Scripture: *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.*

Revelation 3:20

Social media is one of the most influential yet destructive technologies in today's society. It has great power to control what is "acceptable" or "ideal," but unfortunately, this is usually reflected in material possessions. It's human nature to idolize another person based on the way they look or seem, and many believe that if they try and make themselves look more like that person, they'll be happier or more successful. We are so caught up trying to make ourselves look as presentable as the snapshots we see online that we often fail to focus on the things God says are important.

Much like us, the church in Laodicea to whom Jesus is speaking was distracted from God's true purpose for them. They were critical of other churches who seemed poorer than they, but in reality, they were only seeing those churches' earthly worth. The Laodiceans may have had more earthly possessions, but Jesus calls them out for being blind to what God values in us. They were ignorant to God's plea for them to have a relationship with him.

Too often, we fall into this trap as well. We trust that our earthly appearance will help us do great things in this world, but God wants us to put our faith in His power. If we focus on God's plan for our lives, it's evident that how we look doesn't matter in the end. What does matter is that we listen to what He wants us to do. Jesus is knocking at *our* door.

As you go through this season of advent, remember what God cares about: your relationship with Him. He is at *your* door. No matter what gifts we receive at Christmas, the greatest gift is standing at your door knocking, inviting, beckoning, and calling.

Listen and worship along with the song “Yes I Will” by
Vertical Worship

Wednesday, December 8

I'm Not Alone

Megan Waldo

Junior, Foster High School

Scripture: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. **Isaiah 7:14***

When I first moved to Texas this summer I felt very alone and scared for my future. It seemed like I had lost control of my life. Things changed for me when my family and I started attending church and making new friends. Surrounding myself with God-loving people helped me feel less alone. It also allowed me to realize God has remained in control over my life this entire time. I had no reason to feel scared or alone because He was always with me.

In a similar way, God reminded Ahaz and the people of Judah that He would always take care of them. He gave them a sign in the form of a baby being born of a virgin. God had planned to save Judah before Judah even

knew that it needed saving. God planned this to the point of naming the baby Immanuel which means “God with us.”

Often in life you may experience the feeling of loneliness or being out of control, much like I did. God shows us in this verse that He will always take care of us, and we can place our faith in Him. We believe in faith that God is always with us and is working in our lives even when we don't feel it.

Jesus shows us what a life with faith in God looks like. The celebration of the sign, the birth of Jesus, is just the first step towards that lifestyle.

Prayer: *Lord, help me see Your works in my life. Help me have faith that You are always with me.*

Thursday, December 9

Having Faith in God's Plans

Nathan Plunk

Senior, George Ranch High School

Scripture: *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old

age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.”

*“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her. **Luke 1:26-38***

God speaks to all of us in different ways.

Sometimes it may be directly through the Scriptures.

Other times it may be in times of prayer when we hear His voice the clearest. Or we may hear God through the conversations we’ve had with other people. No matter in what form God chooses to use, if we’re searching for it, we can find what God has to tell us.

The problem, however, is that sometimes our plan is different from God’s. All throughout life, things will not go how you expect, or even how you want them to. When you find yourself in these situations, it’s important to recognize that, and react accordingly.

In this passage, the Scriptures shows us the best thing we can do, just as Mary did herself. She remembered who she was – a servant of the Lord – and the purpose that God has given her. Instead of running or hiding, Mary states, “May your word to me be fulfilled.” In our own

lives, it's common to want to put our way over God's way. We may feel that we may know better and prioritize what we want over what God wants.

However, Mary's story serves as a great reminder to us that we are on this Earth to serve the Lord. Our will won't always align with God's, and it's important to remember to trust in the Lord. Life will throw you curveballs and things you don't expect. That's just life! But when you listen to what God has to say and what He has planned for you, He won't lead you astray.

Pray to God, that he might align your will with His, and give you the courage to go forward and fulfill His word.

Friday, December 10

Her Leap of Faith

Blake Templeton

Senior, Clements High School

Scripture: *And Mary said:*

“My soul glorifies the Lord

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud

in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.” Luke 1:46–55

Ever since I could remember, I'd wanted to go skydiving. The thought of being able to see for miles or being so high you could see the tops of clouds always amazed me.

So I'll never forget my 18th birthday when that dream came true and I jumped out of a perfectly good airplane. But I'd be lying to you if I said I wasn't nervous. The flight up was terrifying, and there were many times it crossed my mind to quit. Yet I stayed faithful all the way though, because *I wasn't going into the dive blind*. It was a leap of faith, but blindness was never a part of the moment; I knew what I was getting into. The result was an experience I'll never forget—the anticipation mixed with the adrenaline of the free fall, the howling and cold wind whipping at my face, along with the view of a lifetime—surreal.

But my experience is nothing in comparison to what Mary faced. Today's text is Mary's song or prayer to God, in which she glorifies the Lord after being met with the fact that she, as a teenager, was miraculously going to give birth to the Son of God. Like me, she wasn't just going

into this blindly; as staggering as the news was, her past experiences had allowed her to put complete faith in God.

Mary's deep relationship with God is evident in many moments. For example, in verse 49 she says, "for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name." She knows God has been good in her past and will be good in this situation too. Furthermore, in verse 50, she reflects about all the ways in which God has been faithful to her people through all generations.

In verse 48, Mary shares her joy for being chosen by God. Even so, I'm sure there were many days and nights Mary felt troubled and worried. Yet she remained faithful! May we do the same.

Make a list of the times and ways God has shown His faithfulness to you or your family.

Saturday, December 11

Blessed by God's Law

Gabe Perez

Junior, George Ranch High School

Scripture:

Blessed is the one

*who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.*

Psalms 1:1–2

I've been a Christian pretty much my entire life. I've gone to church and done my best to follow God and walk with him. I've been told countless times that Christians are meant to be set apart from wicked people and ways of the world and meant to act like Christ. It's tough to do so sometimes; occasionally I find myself "walking in step with the wicked" because I see many of my peers and even some of my friends doing things that genuinely look enjoyable, but are not God's best for themselves or anyone around them.

While other people may delight in worldly activities and lifestyles, we are meant to be those who are blessed by delighting in the law of the Lord.

We are called to be righteous, meditating on the law of the Lord night and day, following His commandments and striving to show love to others. We should do our very best to not get wrapped up with things that are “of this world and for this world,” because we risk losing sight of what our purpose truly is: following Jesus first and foremost.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please help me not delight in the things of this world, but delight in Your love.*

Week 3: Joy

Sunday, December 12

Joy

Jamar Mitchell

Associate Student Minister

Scripture:

*The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,
but will rejoice over you with singing.”* **Zephaniah 3:17**

God is more than the Creator; He is the LORD God who dwells amongst us—loving us, caring for us, protecting us, defending us, and the One who died so that we might have life and have it abundantly. God is mighty to save His people, not only from their enemies but from the curse of sin and death. Christ is the provision for our need, the remedy for our fear, the cure for our problems, and the antidote to sin. He is our protector and defender, and He is our victorious warrior.

God is not there to condemn us, but He delights to bring salvation to all who believe and trust in Him. Oh yes,

the Lord rejoices over all who believe in Him, and He takes joyful delight in those who trust His word and abide in His love.

God desires all His children to seek Him, to come to Him, to draw near to Him, to rest in Him, and to abide in His truth. For He is the God of peace and His is a peace that passes all understanding. He longs for us to receive His love and peace and joy and hope.

If you are God's child, you can know that God Himself *rejoices* over you with gladness, and *delights* in you with singing. God doesn't merely save us, repentant sinners, from destruction; He makes us His own! May we, in turn, find our *joy* and *delight* in Him!

Sing along with your favorite worship song as you delight in the joy of the Lord today!

Monday, December 13

Oh, the Joy the Lord Brings!

Sarah Batarseh

Junior, Logos Preparatory Academy

Scripture:

Sing to the Lord a new song;

sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, praise his name;

*proclaim his salvation day after day. **Psalm 96:1–2***

Joy is a feeling everyone longs for, even if they don't realize it. It's the feeling you get with people you love, singing around the campfire on a cold Christmas night. It's also the feeling you have when all your Christmas decorations are finally put up. When I think of joy, two things come to mind: Christmas and worship. There are many scenarios in which feelings of joy are obvious, but true joy comes from being in the presence of Jesus. You can be in the presence of Jesus in many different ways; reading your Bible, praying, and worshiping are all ways we intentionally enter into Jesus' presence.

In Psalms 96:1-2, we are called to sing unto the Lord a glorious song that proclaims His goodness to us and everyone around us. Jesus is the ultimate joy to which all of nature sings. It's no surprise that we are called to worship Him. The song "So Will I" by Hillsong Worship explains this very well. A lyric in the song says "for if everything exists to lift You high, so will I." The church is His body. We are the holy temple of our Lord. We were created in Christ as a new creation, sanctified as His people, set apart as His representatives on earth, and we have been given a glorious song of praise to sing of the One that shows us His everlasting grace.

I encourage us to join together and sing unto the Lord a new song of praise and thanksgiving and proclaim to the earth His wonderful salvation. Let us tell all of His wonder and praise him greatly for all He has done. This is our true joy.

Prayer: *God, help me lift my voice to You with joyful thanksgiving. Along with the rest of creation, I sing to You and thank You for Your goodness.*

Tuesday, December 14

Finding Joy in the Gift of Life

Karoline Joe

Sophomore, St. Agnes Academy

Scripture: *When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **Matthew 2:10–11***

During the Advent season, it's important to reflect on the joyous moments in the Christmas story of our Savior's birth. Jesus' birth is greatly celebrated by the wisemen who came to visit Him. They experienced great joy at the sight of Mary with her young son.

While life is full of hardships and victories, Jesus is ultimately the greatest gift God has blessed us with. Therefore, we should look to find joy in each moment of life. Jesus, through His life, has given us true joy as He bore our sins with His death on the cross. We can find comfort

during trying moments of our life knowing Jesus is by our side.

Just over a year ago, I experienced the loss of both my grandma and grandfather. As you can imagine, the loss of their lives weighed heavily on my family and me. However, I can look back on those difficult weeks and see God's presence through it all. He provided me with small joys to lift my spirits. I saw how He blessed me with friends to support me, opportunities to play sports, and ways to revel in my freshman year of high school. I was able to find light in a dark time similarly to how the Bethlehem Star revealed the joy of baby Jesus' birth in the dark sky.

Activity: *Look back on a difficult or dark time in your life. How did God give you small gifts of joy in the midst of that darkness? Thank God for that, and pray that in your present or future darkness, He will continue to provide you with moments of joy to sustain you.*

Wednesday, December 15

Joy Caught Them By Surprise

Ryan Hiegel

Sophomore, Fort Bend Christian Academy

Scripture: *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” **Luke 2:9–15***

Whether it’s meeting a new friend or trying something you’ve never done before, joy is a feeling that can come by surprise. One thing in my life that brings me

joy is leading worship at church. Sometimes the ordinary things in life, though, do not bring me joy, like having to stay up late doing schoolwork.

In Luke 2, the shepherds were just doing their ordinary job of tending to their flocks. They did not anticipate that this night would be particularly joyful; just another night of caring for their sheep. The occupation of a shepherd was not really something that people aspired to do, as being a shepherd was considered to be a lowly position—not something that would bring great joy. But God sent an angel to them, and they were terrified, but were told to not be. They heard the good news that Jesus the Messiah, our Savior, had been born, and were told to be joyful and tell others the good news as well.

These shepherds were just out tending to their flocks at night, doing their “ordinary” and “lowly” job. There’s no way they were expecting an angel of God to appear to them and tell them the news of the Messiah’s birth. Because of this news, joy caught these shepherds by surprise! They went to see Jesus, and then they told their friends, and they too were joyful and amazed.

At times when things are hard or boring—or just plain “ordinary”—and don’t really seem joyful to us, God can still bring us joy when we need it, because God has a plan for all of us. If things feel ordinary or mundane today, you are not alone! Pray that God will bring you joy through your Messiah, just as He did for the shepherds that night long ago.

Prayer: *Lord God, please give me joy in all things, so that I may better enjoy the abundant life that you have given me. Amen.*

Thursday, December 16

Open the Gates!

Luke Keasler

Freshman, Foster High School

Scripture:

*Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in. **Psalm 24:7***

In this verse, David tells the people of Jerusalem to make way for the arrival of the King of Glory into Jerusalem. Can you imagine if someone like the president of the United States or your favorite musician walked into your neighborhood? You'd want them to feel as welcome and celebrated as possible by everyone around you.

What would you do if Jesus walked into your neighborhood? Would you be overjoyed or scared out of your mind that you are in the presence of the Son of God? I know I would be a little scared, but we should instead be filled with joy! Jesus is the joy of God that He sent to save

us from our sins and provide everlasting life with Him in heaven.

As you go about the rest of the advent season, remember that as God has opened the gates of heaven to us, we should open ourselves to Him. As it says in Psalms, “be lifted up, you ancient doors, That the king of glory may come in.”

Reflect on this as it grows closer to the holidays: do not think of God as someone who is closing His gates off from you, but instead someone who wants to share His joy with you. Have you opened your gates in welcome for Him to come in?

Prayer: *King of Glory, show me where I've shut my gates to Your presence. Help me open my heart to You so that I may live in Your joy. Amen.*

Friday, December 17

Joy to the World!

Dena Batarseh

Freshman, Logos Preparatory Academy

Scripture:

*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendor. **Isaiah 61:1–3***

Christmas! A time of joy. When you hear the word
'joy' during Christmas, perhaps the first thing that comes

to mind is the song 'Joy to the World.' This popular song can be related to Jesus because Jesus was the joy given to us by God at Christmas to heal our broken hearts and our sorrow. "Joy to the world!"

There's no news better than the Good News which promises us freedom and joy. Jesus is the Anointed One who has come to preach the good news of forgiveness to all afflicted by sin so all may be freed from it. "The Lord is come, let earth receive her King!" This forgiveness ultimately brings joy to our very souls, and God causes this joy to sprout before all the nations through our acts of righteousness and praise as we revel in the Anointed promises of freedom. "Let heaven and nature sing!"

All those times in life that feeling of joy comes to you, think of Jesus in the same way. No matter if you're broken-hearted or in need of freedom, Jesus is the Anointed One who came down to heal us to spread His joy through the world. "Repeat the sounding joy!"

Prayer:

*Lord,
Thank you for your joy
The joy you have given us to spread to all
The joy of Jesus which heals
No matter what we may feel
May we continue to come to you
In times we need to
And times we think we don't need you
All in all
You are the Anointed One
In your name we pray
Amen*

Saturday, December 18

Rejoicing in the Midst of Suffering

Samantha Doherty

Junior, Foster High School

Scripture:

*Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior. **Habakkuk 3:17–18***

Habakkuk is a dialogue between the prophet and God written around 600 B.C., just before the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon. Habakkuk saw the wickedness in his own nation and the growing power of their ruthless neighbor and found himself wondering where God was. In chapters one and two, Habakkuk questions why God would allow such calamity, violence, and wickedness to prevail—he wants God to intervene.

***What struggles are you experiencing
in which you want God to intervene?***

We often look at trials as something to be avoided entirely, unpleasant experiences we want to get out of as quickly as possible. Like Habakkuk, our prayer in times of suffering is usually a cry for deliverance.

***Do you get discouraged when God doesn't
seem to answer your cries for deliverance?***

What Habakkuk realizes in chapter three is that God had not abandoned Israel; He was right there with His people even through seasons of calamity! Habakkuk declares his confidence in the Lord, and in the Lord's power to save Israel. And then he gets to the part none of us like... in verse 16, he resolves to "wait patiently" for deliverance.

When it comes to overcoming the trials that befall each of us in this broken world, we usually want God to get on our timetable. We want God to hurry up and make

it all go away so we can rejoice in our deliverance. But the truth Habakkuk declares in verses 17 and 18 is that yes, we can rejoice in deliverance from our suffering, but by God's grace we can also "rejoice in the Lord" throughout trials and seasons of suffering.

We can rejoice in the midst of our trials, struggles, and hardships because:

- God is refining and strengthening our faith (James 1:2-3)
- Christ is glorified in our suffering (1 Peter 1:6-7)
- God walks beside us in our struggles (Psalm 23:4) and walking with God through the hard times is infinitely better than walking alone through the good times

Challenge: *Identify the challenges in your life you want God to take away. Now declare to the Lord your confidence in His power to overcome your struggles. Next, thank God for enduring the struggles alongside you. Finally, try this week to find joy in the knowledge that the God of the universe is doing amazing (and sometimes unseen!) things through your trials. Take up Habakkuk's declaration: "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my savior."*

Week 4: Peace

Sunday, December 19

Peace

Noah Waters

Associate Student Minister of Worship & Production

Scripture:

*He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they will live securely, for then his greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth. **Micah 5:4***

When I think of the holiday season, the last thing that comes to mind is the word “peaceful.” It typically feels like, instead of a break, the month of December is nothing but a different kind of busy. Running around, buying presents, and visiting friends and family are wonderful things, but they can wear you down all the same.

Biblical peace isn’t necessarily the same warm fuzzy feeling we get when we’re able to have a good rest. It isn’t the feeling that you get while curled up and sipping

hot chocolate in front of a fire (if it ever gets cold enough in Texas to enjoy that). It's something more.

Biblical peace transcends the simple sense of comfort experienced in a fleeting moment. Let's take a look at the verse that headlines this section: "He will shepherd his flock ... and they will live securely." This is great news! We are told that God will shepherd us and that we will have security; we will have safety. But it's tough to feel that same sense of security in the Lord day by day; it's not as if everyone is constantly feeling the presence of God and the safety that comes with it. That's where peace comes into play. I don't think we are meant to blindly have peace just because it's the churchy thing to do. Real peace is based on God's promise to us—the promise that He will shepherd us, that we may live securely in Him. Beyond that, peace is based on trust—how would we accept God's promises otherwise?

Trusting in God is another vague church idea that we don't always define or practice very well. But what I want to stress here is that it's not always meant to be easy; some things find their value in the hard times rather

than when things are going well. If we hold on to God's promise, and trust that He will provide and protect, we will truly experience peace.

But where do we get that trust from? If you're like me, you're looking for a tangible example besides what's constrained to concepts. Well, I have Good News for you! The birth of Christ is part of the fulfillment of God's promise—He sent His son (the shepherd) into the world to be with us and lead us to the peace that we were promised. We can trust God because He sent His son to live with us and lead us “beside still waters, restoring our soul.” (*Psalm 23:2–3*) There's a reason we sing “peace on Earth” when celebrating Christmas.

The birth of Jesus in the manger displays why we can put our full trust in God. And when we've placed our trust in God, in both the good times and the bad—when we can pause in the midst of turmoil and say, “I trust you,”—then we will truly experience peace that surpasses all understanding. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayer: *Lord, in the midst of troubled times, give me a peace that surpasses understanding, and the strength to trust in Your promises.*

Monday, December 20

God's Perfect Peace

McKinley Helms

8th Grade, Cornerstone Christian Academy

Scripture:

You will keep in perfect peace

those whose minds are steadfast,

*because they trust in you. **Isaiah 26:3***

Martha was bullied at school. She didn't want to go to school, she didn't have any friends, and this caused her lots of anxiety and fear. Even though she went to a hospital and needed lots of counseling, she always believed in God. Martha knew that God's peace was always with her, and God was never going to leave her side.

According to the prophet Isaiah, everyone who keeps their minds set on God, who can "remain in" God, will have access to His perfect peace. If you trust that God is with you and you know that God's love for you is eternal, then you can access God's perfect peace.

Having perfect peace with God implies that you've accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, holding him in your heart. It also means you welcome God's peace into your mind, allowing His love to fill you and dominate your thoughts. People think you can have peace of mind through money or doing something you love. These might make you feel peaceful for a short amount of time, but not forever. God's peace is everlasting. He's the only way to have perfect peace at all times.

God will give His peace to whoever relies upon God's love. Through His love, God has given us the ability to have a personal relationship with Him.

Prayer: *God, please be with me through this day and let me know that Your peace is always with me. When I am struggling or when I am afraid let me know that You are there, and You love me. Help me trust You throughout today and help me remember that You will never leave me. Amen.*

Tuesday, December 21

The Lord, Our Shepherd

Trinity White

Sophomore, Foster High School

Scripture: *For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. **Ezekiel 34:11–16***

This is one of my favorite passages of Scripture, and one of the most important in the Bible. A shepherd must care for his sheep and keep them safe from harm. He

doesn't *have to* do this, but he chooses to keep them all safe because he cares about them.

Just as the shepherd cares about his sheep and keeps them safe, God will look after us and keep us safe. He cares so much about each and every one of us and will protect us from harm.

Ezekiel relates a shepherd preparing a good grazing pasture for his sheep to a home in heaven awaiting us. God is preparing a perfect place in heaven for us that is amazing. There will never be anything to worry about, for God will take care of all our sin and doubt.

Ezekiel talks about how God will “search for the lost and bring back the strays.” He saves us from our sins; when we wander away from Him, He comes for us and helps us come back to Him. There are times I start to wander away from God and lean more on worldly things, and I hear a voice in my head saying, “What would Jesus do in this situation?” When I hear this voice, I know that God is telling me that I should focus on what He would want me to do. I am the sheep that is lost and wandering

around, and God finds me and helps me come back to Him! And the Good Shepherd does the same for you!

Prayer: *Lord our Shepherd, please help me when I wander off lost and alone. Lead me back to You and help me fight the temptations of sin. Thank you, Lord, for saving an amazing place in heaven for each and every sheep, including me. Amen.*

Wednesday, December 22

A Peaceful Mindset

Hadleigh Helms

Sophomore, Houston Christian High School

Scripture: *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used
to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness. **Philippians 2:5–7***

Often when we are going through a “life storm,” we search for how the world can rescue us from the storm and give us peace—yet as we read the Bible, we may quickly find that the peace Jesus provides and peace provided by the world are completely different. As Christians, our lives are not promised to be peaceful, easy lives, but we know the good news: God’s peace is available to all of His followers. To find this peace, we should have the same mindset as our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Some people try to gain peace through worldly views. At my school I've heard students say, "We live on a floating rock." The term basically means that we are one person living in a whole universe, so why worry? Someone may use it when they fail a test or don't want to finish their homework. This may cause them not to worry for a little while, but ultimately their actions do have consequences. It does not bring about the peace that only Christ can give.

Having a Christ-centered mindset will cause you to live differently than those around you. In Philippians 2, Paul calls us to obtain a different kind of mindset. He wrote to the Christians in Philippi about how Jesus became nothing and took on human form to become a servant to every single person on this earth. A sense of peace can enter your life when you know that Christ did not abuse His power over us, but instead used it to free us.

I encourage you today to try to achieve this mindset Christ has, through prayer and through others that will motivate you to be like Christ.

Prayer: *Father, give me a motivation and mentality like Jesus, and I pray that through this journey, I will find peace.*

Thursday, December 23

Seek God's Will

Lee Hamblet

Freshman, Logos Preparatory Academy

Scripture:

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this. **Isaiah 9:6–7***

When reading this verse, I think it's vital to reflect on both the context of the chapter and the reasons behind the words used. This entire chapter is about the oppression of the Israelites, and their hope for a savior.

This hope is thought of by the Israelites as a hope for physical salvation. However, they did not see the true meaning of what God was showing them. When the Messiah, Jesus, came, he did not bring physical salvation but spiritual salvation. His plan was something they never imagined and often resisted. However, God's plans would be carried out despite His people's resistance.

When looking at the significance of the chosen words, each of us must look at both the volume and meaning of the names given to him. He is given four names in a single verse, and each one signifies that he rules supremely with the Father. Looking more closely at "Mighty God," it even says that He is God, not just a prophet or judge as they had been given before. The words give emphasis to the nature of this savior. He was to be above all just like the Father.

As I read these names for Jesus, I believe it's our proper response today to humble ourselves before God. To achieve peace, each of us must submit to God and seek His will. His plan continues whether we resist it or not, no matter the situation. If you work against God's will instead

of alongside God, you will spend your life fighting a losing battle. However, if you seek to fulfill His will you will find yourself working alongside the God who has complete and total sovereignty.

Nothing in life is more fulfilling than working alongside God's will—according to Paul in Ephesians 2:10, that's why you were created! When you feel lost, you can find peace in trying to live by God's will and not your own will.

Reflect upon the nature of God and the importance of following His will.

Friday, December 24

Peace in the World Through God's Image

Katin Moore

7th Grade, Logos Preparatory Academy

Scripture:

He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

*I will be exalted in the earth." **Psalm 46:10***

Sometime, about two thousand years ago on Christmas Eve, was the last moment before we had a Savior. A relationship with God was governed by the laws of the Old Covenant of the Jewish People. The only relationship with God to be found was through sacrifices and priests. But this night changed the paradigm. It ushered in the promise of a Kingdom, the reality of a personal relationship, and the baby who would conquer death.

This Psalm recognizes the Gentiles, the non-Hebrews and non-believers, and utilizes the term *raphah*

which means “to release.” It directs the forces of chaos (46:2-3) and the nations (46:6) to stop raging and recognize God. They were to release their anger and find Him in their peace.

In the writings, we see a way to peace. It isn't by our own doing but rather by the power of God. Christmas Eve is just a glimpse into this peace, a momentary time to look forward to the times to come. And one day, Jesus the Messiah will come back and will be the bearer of peace and the protector of the earth.

The people two thousand years ago missed that Jesus was born because no one expected him to be an infant born into poverty. In the second coming, nobody is going to miss God's power and might be shown in its full exaltedness among the nations on the earth; then Jesus will come and speak over everything, making peace.

In this holiest of nights, find time to make peace. Find the time to talk with those with whom you have differences. Find time to heal broken relationships. Then, when all is prepared for His second coming, exalt Him. Play your favorite rocking Christmas—turn it up to 11! —and exalt

Him at the top of your lungs. I recommend “Little Drummer Boy” by for KING & COUNTRY.

Saturday, December 25

God Incarnate

Scotty Swingler

Student Pastor

Scripture: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. **John 1:14***

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the word ***incarnate*** has two definitions:

- a) invested with bodily and especially human nature and form
- b) made manifest or comprehensible

On the day Jesus Christ was born in a Bethlehem stable to the virgin Mary, God did both of these things: God took on human nature and form, and God made Godself comprehensible in a way the world had never before known. The Word became flesh.

We will never be capable of grasping just how much Jesus laid down to come to earth as an infant. Jesus,

the very agent of creation according to John’s Gospel, chose to *limit Himself* to the form of a human infant with all the vulnerabilities and basic needs an infant possesses. I don’t believe it was a mask or a facade; I really believe Jesus gave up His supreme power as Creator King of the universe to come to us as a baby! Paul teaches us in Philippians 2:5–7 that with this self-limitation, Jesus is the all-time best example of humility.

Why would Jesus do this? You certainly wouldn’t give up the throne of all creation to become a helpless infant! Neither would I! What motivated Jesus to do such an incomprehensible thing?

Love.

Jesus loves you so much, He wanted to know what it was like to live in your shoes. So, He came to our broken world to experience all of human life—infancy, childhood, puberty, adolescence, adulthood, and death—just like we do. The anonymous writer of Hebrews teaches that because Jesus did this, He empathizes with you in every aspect of your life. He *gets it* because He’s been there, too.

Jesus loves you so much, He wanted you to know what God is really like. It's all too easy to read the Bible and walk away with misconceptions or fallacies in our beliefs about God. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) After centuries of sending judges, kings, prophets, and scriptures, God decided the best way to reveal Godself was to live amongst us, face-to-face. You don't have to wonder what God's character looks like, what God's voice sounds like, or what God's priorities are; look at Jesus and you will see the clearest depiction of who God really is. Light has come!

And yes, Jesus loves you so much, that He not only limited Himself to an infant's body and vulnerabilities, but also unto death upon a Roman cross. Yet I fear we are often in such a hurry to rush to the cross that we miss the equally sacrificial display of Christmas. By coming in human form, Jesus gives us a "new Adam" according to Paul; a "New Way to Be Human" as my favorite band Switchfoot sings. Whereas Adam failed to live life as a perfect human, Jesus succeeded. Before Jesus there was no human example of how to live rightly, but with Jesus

you can now see what it means to be *fully human*. Your life, like Adam's, is corrupted by sin; Jesus reveals a way to live that will free you from sin. Jesus wasn't only human, but He's the human who can show you what God intended for you to be when you were created.

Light has come!

Love has come.

Jesus loves you so much. Don't believe me? Look at Christmas. Why else would a perfect and all-powerful God lay in the manger? He loves you. There is no better evidence than God Incarnate.

Today as you open gifts, eat with your family, sit by the fire, and watch your favorite Christmas movie, don't forget to sit and bask in God's love. The Love that steps into the darkness as brilliant light. The Love who knows you, shows Loveself to you, and invites you to follow in Love's example. Delight in this Love today.

Merry Christmas! Christ is born!

Light has come. Amen.

Prayer: *God Incarnate, today as I celebrate Christmas, help me reflect on your great love. Thank you for loving me, King Jesus. May I reflect your love and your light to those around me. Amen.*