

# Advent Christmas Season Devotionals

## **About :**

This has been adapted from content original created and used in 2012 at Sunnyside Wesleyan Church. The devotionals are written by staff and members of Sunnyside Wesleyan Church. The material was original used in connection with a sermon series during the 2012 advent season.

## **How to use:**

1. Turn to the day you are on (ex. Day 1)
2. Open with a short pray
3. Read the scripture text then the devotional
4. Spend a short time in reflection and listening for God's voice.
5. Pray.

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# Day One

By Brent Russett

Is. 40:1-5

40 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. 3 A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. 5 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Reflection:

Today is the first day of Advent. Advent is a time tested way of helping disciples of Jesus come to know him better. Advent is a time to prepare our hearts to receive Christ in fresh and new ways, and to allow his life to go deeper into our life.

In our scripture today the people of God were in exile. They were not in the place that was given to them by God. They were a displaced people who pined for home. But there were rumours. The Lord was on the move. Get ready to receive him. Make it easy for him to come to you. As the people of God do this, God's glory "will be revealed." (Verse 5)

Advent is a time for us to prepare the way for the Lord. There will be times in this season when you will feel God's call to worship, and God's call to repentance, and God's call to prayer, and God's call to connect with his people. Whenever you heed these calls, you prepare the way. God's promise is that if you do this you will see his glory.

## Day Two

By Brent Russett

Is. 52:7-10

7 How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" 8 Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices; together they shout for joy. When the Lord returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. 9 Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Reflection:

The picture in our scripture today is a runner running across the mountains declaring that the war has been won, that peace has come, that the Lord reigns. When the watchmen who are stationed on the city wall, see the messenger cheering and smiling they break into celebration themselves. The reason why they are cheering is that they have felt abandoned by the Lord. But this news declares that the Lord is blessing his people once again.

Romans 10:15 quotes this passage. Instead of reporting back from war, the New Testament messenger is reporting that God has come close and that we can have a personal relationship through Jesus Christ.

As the people of God we are called to bring the good news that the war against evil has been won, that peace with God is within reach and that the Lord reigns. There are other times when we are the watch people on the wall and we need to be reminded of this good news. This Christmas season is a chance for us to both proclaim and receive the good news once again.

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## Day Three

By Brent Russett

Is. 40:9-11

9 You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" 10 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Reflection:

The great news in this scripture is that God is on the move. His rule and reign is coming. Justice will occur. Evil will be banished. Don't be afraid. Proclaim who God is to the people of God around you. But God not only comes for the community he comes for the individual.

He rewards those who have lived for him. He comes and feeds his people. The young and the weak and the feeble he carries and holds close to his heart.

"Your God is coming!" (Vs. 9) This is the promise of God to the people of God. It is helpful to remember this in times of struggle, and pain, and confusion and hurt. It is helpful to remember this when things around you look bleak. Jesus came 2000 years ago. He comes to us now in the person of the Holy Spirit. He will come again in power and great glory. The good news of Christmas is that God is on the move.

## Day Four

By Darren Dicks

Genesis 3:8-15 (NLT)

8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man[a] and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. 9 Then the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

10 He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”<sup>11</sup> “Who told you that you were naked?” the Lord God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”

12 The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”<sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?” “The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

14 Then the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild.

You will crawl on your belly,    groveling in the dust as long as you live.

15 And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,    and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike[b] your head,    and you will strike his heel.”

Reflection:

You may be asking, “What does this passage of scripture have to do with Advent?” I see two connections. The first connection: this passage is the reason behind why we celebrate Advent - why we mark and prepare for the coming of Jesus. This is the story of sin entering the world. It also foretells the coming of Jesus, Eve's descendant, who will one day conquer evil and the consequences of sin – at a cost. This is what we pause to remember in Advent; Jesus coming and paying the high cost of the cross and death to crush the head of evil and sin.

The second connection: because of Jesus we no longer have to hide in shame as a result of our sin when we encounter God. We can confess our sin and be restored to God because of Jesus' coming. We also look forward to new life and hope of everlasting life as we prepare for his coming again. This Advent let us search our hearts. Let us listen for God's voice calling. Let us not hide in shame but run to the Father's embrace as we accept the gift Jesus' death and resurrection.

## Day 5

By Gina Byun

Gen. 15:1-6

15 After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” 2 But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” 4 Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” 5 He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” 6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

### *Reflection:*

Did Abraham get it? God said “...I am your shield, your very great reward.” God was offering Abraham a very great gift. Himself. But the Abraham complains about what he doesn’t have. Don’t we do that too, sometimes? God I know I have you, you are great, but but but, can’t I have this one desire of my heart.

Maybe he did get it, that God was offering himself to Abraham. Maybe all he wanted was in line with God’s will, a child to share his love with. A child to rear in God’s ways, one who would continue to serve God in this world after Abraham left. His heart to trust God’s promise was credited to him as righteous.

Have you accepted God’s gift of himself? Are the desires of your heart the desires of his heart?

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## Day 6

By Matthew Laker

Deut. 18:15-19

15 The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. 16 For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." 17 The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. 19 I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.

### *Reflection:*

A prophet of God is someone who reveals God and speaks for God. A prophet communicates to people the truths that God wants them to know. Both Peter (Acts 3) and Stephen (Acts 7) used this passage to speak about Jesus. Jesus in Luke 13:33 speaks of himself as a prophet. God has something to say to us through Jesus. Found in these verses is God's desire to speak to his people. Jesus has come with the words of God. He speaks to lead us to life and not death. Whose voice will you listen to this advent season? Where are you hearing God in your life? Where is he pushing into your life? Why is this happening? What is next? What are you going to do?

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## Day 7

By Stephanie Vizi

Ps. 89:1-4

- 1 I will sing of the Lord's great love forever;  
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known  
through all generations.
- 2 I will declare that your love stands firm forever,  
that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.
- 3 You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one,  
I have sworn to David my servant,
- 4 'I will establish your line forever  
and make your throne firm through all generations.'"

### *Reflection:*

Are you wearing your crown today? You are a daughter or son of the King. Did you know you are royalty? You were chosen. In the midst of this busy day, stop and remember you...were...chosen. You were created to live at this time, with your set of gifts, in your body to share God's love with those you encounter. So, pull on your wool socks and winter boots. Reach for your down-filled jacket, and warm scarf, hat and gloves. Wait, you one piece is missing. Before you head out the door, place your invisible crown on your head as a reminder: you are a crowned child of the King. How is God calling you to share his kingdom today?



## Day 8

By Stephanie Vizi

Is. 11:1-10

11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. 10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

Reflection:

Let's turn-off the 24/7 loop of holiday songs on the radio, stop wrapping the looming mountain of gifts and take a break from the mad dash of parties, recitals and shopping. And pause. Breathe. Let's remember the little king who lay in a manger. The little king who came to love the weary, brokenhearted and hurting. Babies will crawl beside poisonous snakes unscathed and calves and yearlings will be safe among lions in his presence. Is there someone hard to love in your life this season? Let Jesus work through that with you. Has some one taken advantage of your Christmas cheer? Is someone asking for too much of your Holiday spirit? Surely, if wolves and lambs can be friends in this little king's presence, you and I can learn to love someone who is hard to love. Enter the little king's kingdom today, delight in his presence. How are you going to show God's love today?

## Day 9

Malachi 3:1-6 (NLT)

### The Coming Day of Judgment

3 “Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

2 “But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. 3 He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. 4 Then once more the Lord will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.

5 “At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

### Reflection:

The coming of Jesus is not always comfortable. He always brings change. If we believe that God is good and just and that Jesus is God's son, then the change he brings will be good - even if it means we need to be refined by fire; by having our character changed through difficult and somewhat painful circumstances. After all, when Jesus came the first time he came not to judge the world but to save it John12:47 - but in doing so he had to suffer much. There is also a sense that we can avoid some of the pain and coming judgement if we heed Jesus' teaching from the first time he came. If we hear and obey his teaching and endeavour to live like him, we need not fear the coming judgement upon his coming again. Advent reminds us to prepare for his coming. Reminds us to heed his teaching and learn to love and live like Jesus. In his first coming Jesus gave us an example of how to live. In his coming again he will be examining us to see how we followed his example.

# Day 10

By Gina Byun

John 1:1-8

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

Reflection:

Jesus is coming! The one who was with God at the very formation of the world, the one who has power with just his words. He's the one whose brightness can shine into every darkness and he's good, he's pure and powerful and full of mercy. Advent is a time to remember Christ's first coming as a child in the manger, and it's a time to look forward to when he will return to take his people home. This passage reminds me that he's gone for now, but hasn't forgotten us, nor does he want us to forget about him. His fingerprints are all over creation because "without him nothing was made that has been made." It's all him! And he sent a witness, he said John is the one testifying about Jesus! How many more testimonies do we have of Jesus now? Take a minute to reflect on your experience of Jesus, what is your witness about him? Have you experienced him through reading or hearing the Bible, through nature, or through the testimony of others?

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# Day 11

By Miranda Valentini

John 1:9-18

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. 14 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. 15 (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") 16 Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and[a] is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Reflection:

As the days become shorter I sense the physical reality of living in darkness. Sometimes the light feels like such a brief reprieve and I long for those hours of the day when the sun is pouring in my window. Skip back to verse 5 for a moment, "The light shines in the darkness..." During this time of year it can often feel like the dark envelopes us. It is dark when we wake up and it is dark well before we lay our heads down to sleep. Just like a candle lights up the night Jesus came to be a light in the darkness of a spiritually dark world. And we too are called to be a light in the realms of our life that are filled with darkness; amongst our friends, in the workplace, extended family, and for some of us within our homes. We have all received grace and are to be an extension of God's grace in the world, to offer hope and wholeness in Christ. As you reflect on this passage ask God to extend His grace in your own life so that nothing would inhibit your light to shine brightly in the darkness.

## Day 12

By Matthew Laker

Mark 1:1-3

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way”—

3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’”

Reflection:

God is at work throughout history. Often we look at our current circumstances and feel overwhelmed. We wonder where God is. Will he ever come? Our passage today comes on the heels of Jesus beginning his earthly ministry. Some wondered at the time will the Messiah ever come. Mark starts his gospel reminding us about the greatness of God. God was at work. The prophet Isaiah spoke of the coming of Jesus hundreds of years before he came. God was at work in the day-to-day circumstances of life all those years. God is at work in the day-to-day circumstances of your life. Perhaps you do not see how it will all be, but God is guiding his people. In choosing to follow Jesus, you have entered his family and his spirit will guide. God has not left us alone.

## Day 13

By Gina Byun

Luke 1:5-13

5 In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6 Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7 But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old. 8 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13 But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

Reflection:

Elizabeth and Zechariah were living life "right" verse six says so. They were really good people who didn't break the law, they were good neighbours, kind and thoughtful, Zachariah sort of equivalent to a leader in the church. Verse seven gives us that big "but" standing right in the way of them being absolutely perfectly at peace. "But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old." How long they must have had the desire to have a child and here they are, all of their friends are becoming grandparents and even great grandparents. They were good people, why couldn't they have a child?

Have you ever felt like this? God knows our inmost desires and needs. His timing isn't always clear, but his will is perfect. What is a desire that you have? Tell God that you trust him with your desires.

## Day 14

By Valerie Ryan

Luke 1:18-25

18 Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

19 The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

21 Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. 22 When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

23 When his time of service was completed, he returned home. 24 After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. 25 "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Reflection:

Are you like Zechariah? I know that I am. How would you have responded to the angel? I confess that I probably would have said the same thing that he did. I can relate to Zechariah's doubt, can you? Although we all want to say that we "walk by faith, not by sight", it is so much easier said than done. Sometimes its so hard to see beyond our current physical circumstances. Life is hard and sometimes its hard to believe God's promises for us. This passage reminds us that God wants us to take our eyes off of our current situation, no matter how impossible it might seem in the flesh, and to see through His eyes, to see the possibilities that He sees.

The Bible tells us that Zechariah and Elizabeth had no children because Elizabeth was barren and they were now very old. We don't know how old, but we can assume that they were both beyond childbearing years. I am guessing that they had probably prayed for many years to have a baby and had probably accepted that it was now physically impossible and that they would never have children. So, it is quite understandable that

Zechariah doubted the angel's words to him because in the flesh, it seemed impossible that they would be able to have a baby. Even though he was a priest and the Bible says he was righteous in God's eyes, Zechariah still doubted. The angel's words to him must have seemed too good to be true. I don't blame him for doubting. I probably would have too.

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## Day 15

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Reflection:

Is it hard for you to see beyond the situation that you currently find yourself in? Have you given up hope that things will change? Are you tired of praying the same prayer over and over again? I don't know for how many years Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed for a baby, but I am sure that it was for many years. I don't know if they had given up hope of becoming pregnant, but I probably would have. Especially if I was past my childbearing years and it was physically impossible to become pregnant. But God reminds us again and again throughout the Bible that His timing is always perfect. Even though Zechariah doubted, God was gracious to him by telling him that the angel's words would come true at the proper time.

As I reread this passage several times this week, I was reminded at how kind and gracious God is with me. He forgives my doubt when I don't believe His promises and He forgives my impatience when He doesn't answer my prayers right away. So often I want to rush God. I want God to answer my prayers in my way, in my timing. But, that's not the way He works. His timing is always perfect and His ways are not my ways.

I hope that as you reflect on this passage yourself, you will be reminded of God's faithfulness. Keep praying even when God is silent. He does hear our prayers and He will answer them in His way, in His timing. Often in ways that we least expect!

## Day 16

By Darren Dicks

Luke 1:39-45 (NLT)

39 A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town 40 where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. 41 At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. 43 Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? 44 When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. 45 You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."

Reflection:

The response of Elizabeth at the greeting of Mary highlights two things in her Spirit filled response. 1. The coming of Jesus brings joy. 2. Believing that God will do what he says makes us blessed. As we reflect on this in Advent, remembering Christ's first coming and preparing for his coming again, we can be filled with joy. Why? If we believe that God will do what he says, then He will come again and make all things new. It may not seem like that now, but will we have faith and trust like Mary? And when the hope of our faith has come to fruition how can we not respond with joy? Mary was blessed because she had faith. Elizabeth and baby John had joy because of a good greeting with regard to the Messiah. May we have faith as well and look forward to the day when we too will know the joy of Christ's coming to us. May we also look forward to leaping with joy when the hope of our faith is fulfilled in Christ's coming again!

## Day 17

By Gina Byun

Luke 1:46-56

46 And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.” 56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Reflection:

Mary’s rejoicing in the coming of Jesus is reflective of our season of rejoicing in his coming as well. She was blessed to carry the Son of God for nine months until he was born, and she was pleased for it. She sees the blessing he will be to the world and what a difference the love of God can make in a single person’s life and in a nation and in generations. She was happy that she was pregnant, despite that her people were looking down on her, she doesn’t even mention that their judgments bother her. She proclaims God’s justice and mercy, and is aware of the big picture. List some reasons why you are happy that Jesus came on that first Christmas, and some reasons why you are happy that he is coming again. Reflect on your own life and how you can make Mary’s song your own.

## Day 18

By Matthew Laker

Luke 1:57-66

57 When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! He is to be called John."

61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name."

62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "His name is John." 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. 66 Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him.

Think about the faith Elizabeth and Zechariah had grown into through this experience. In this passage, the issue of trust comes up. God has called them to name the boy John. Tradition and culture calls them to a practice. What are they to do? God has revealed himself to Elizabeth and Zechariah. There is a call upon their lives as there is upon the boy. Will they put trust in God or the pressure of the time? Will they choose to value what the culture does, or the leading of God? This Christmas who will you follow? What is God asking you to do?

## Day 19

By Stephanie Vizi

Luke 1:67-80

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: 68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. 69 He has raised up a horn[a] of salvation for us in the house of his servant David 70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), 71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us— 72 to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham: 74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, 77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven 79 to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” 80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Reflection:

Life can be hard. Life can be confusing. Life can be unsettling. God is good. God is truth. God is merciful. God has called us higher. Be a light.

We can serve God without fear. What are you afraid of? What is stopping you from living fully in the gift God has given you? Are your basic needs met? Is there a burden on your shoulders today? Let God meet your needs. Let Him lift the burden. Stand up and receive the redemption that is already yours. Claim it. Live it.

Start fresh today. It's a gift. Spend time in His word. Spend time thinking how “you will tell his people how to find salvation” (v.77). John knew he was called higher. The Bible says he grew up and became strong in spirit. John allowed God to work in him in the wilderness, then began his ministry in Israel. You can hold on to who you are or you can allow him to change you on the inside. Let your walls down.

This season we celebrate the greatest gift. The gift of salvation; the gift of everlasting life.

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## Day 20

By Miranda Valentini

Luke 1:26-35

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 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, 33 and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." 34 "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" 35 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.

Reflection:

As a child I developed a fear of my parents' basement. What was hiding down there? Monsters? Murderers? Mad men? I would tread down the stairs in fear and trepidation ready to bolt at any sign of movement. Perhaps my fears have "matured" since then. They encompass things relating to money, my children, and relationships. And somehow they seem justified, as if the things I feared as a child were frivolous but these are not. Can you relate? Mary is approached by an angel and offered words of praise. The Scripture says, she is "greatly troubled by his words..." I can only imagine. The word terrifying comes to mind. Yet as we move through the passage we see Mary, yet fearful, handing her future to an ever-loving God. In verse 38 Mary says, "I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled." We may be tempted to justify our fears but in light of the One who we serve they become "light and momentary troubles" (2 Cor. 4:17). I would encourage you to be like Mary, while still fearful, surrendering yourself and your fears to our ever-merciful God. He *can* be trusted.



# Day 21

By Steph Vizi

Is. 9:2-7

2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. 3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder. 4 For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. 5 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. 6 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. 7 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.

Reflection:

I attended a high school focused on the arts in Kitchener, ON, much like Canterbury here in Ottawa. I performed in all sorts of plays and musicals. The most important part of performing (besides having talent), was finding your light. This means learning how to position your face so that it would be lit by the spotlight while performing on stage. If you didn't find your light, you would be left in the dark and the audience wouldn't be able to see you.

I want to remain in the light. I yearn to feel God's light on my face. Sometimes I forget to find the light and I walk in darkness, skirting the edges of the land where death casts its shadow. I want to seek the light. Sometimes it's hard, nearly impossible.

I pray that you find God's light today. Take time to find it. Bask in its warmth. Be filled by its goodness. The goodness of a child given to us by God's grace. He is called the Prince of Peace. Peace. What would it look like for you to find peace today?

## Day 22

By Darren Dicks

Matthew 1:18-25(NLT)

18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement[a] quietly.

20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,[b] for he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

23 “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,

and they will call him Immanuel,[c]

which means ‘God is with us.’”

24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. 25 But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

Reflection:

The other passages I wrote about had themes of enduring difficulties, faith, obedience, and change. In this passage we get a brief glimpse into the experience of Joseph and his part in the coming of Jesus. We see he had to deal with all of these themes. The coming of Jesus meant potential embarrassment or even shame for Joseph. As it would seem his betrothed has been unfaithful – the only explanation offered is that God did it! That is a big pill to swallow – it required faith. That faith is confirmed in the dream – but Joseph has a choice to obey or not. He has to wrestle with obeying God, enduring some embarrassment or keep his dignity. Yet as a result of his obedience his life was forever changed with the privilege of being a father to the Son of God. Jesus’

coming is not always an easy thing as it will bring challenges to who we are, our faith and it will require a response. This is what we prepare for in Advent. May God bless you with dreams and grace as you faithfully seek Him and the great changes He desires to bring.

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## Day 23

By Matthew Laker

Luke 2:1-20

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." 15 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." 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Reflection:

Jesus came to reach those who were far from God. Jesus came to restore our relationship with God that we may live in wholeness. Often God reveals himself to those who are far from him. In our text, God revealed himself to the Shepherds and they found great hope. Then out of their great joy of meeting their messiah, they share it with others. They shared their experience with anyone they met. I am sure for years the story of that night was shared with many people. This Christmas, what might you

share with those around you about your experience with Jesus. What if you invited someone into your home for dinner and took an opportunity to share with them your experience with Jesus?

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## Day 24

By Gina Byun

Matthew 2:1-2

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Reflection:

We are in a season of preparing and looking forward to the coming of Christ. We do this by remembering his birth and time on earth, and by looking forward to his second coming. The Magi found Jesus after he was already born, but they were seeking him for some time before they found him. They followed God’s glory, in the form of a star, to a place of worship. Deeper study shows us that the magi may have been descendants of the wise men that were under Daniel’s care. They were likely seeking the star because of the knowledge of a messiah that had been passed down from the teaching of Daniel. Let’s take a minute to reflect on some of the things that have drawn us to worship Jesus, and look forward to his coming which we celebrate this evening. The Magi would have had to take a major step out in faith to leave their homeland to follow a star in search of a king they didn’t know. What are some areas that you need to step out of, so that you can enter into the worship of your saviour?

## Day 25

By Brent Russett

Luke 2:21-35

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived. 22 When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.” 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” 33 The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35 so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

Reflection:

Our story today happens after the birth of Christ. As was the custom, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple to declare his name and to go through the rituals prescribed by the law. Something fantastic had just happened. A baby born of a virgin who was announced by a choir of angels and whose name declared him to be God with us was born, and Mary and Joseph were going through the rituals. But it was in while going through the rituals that God spoke into their life again through Simeon.

Christmas time is often an extraordinary time in that our schedules are interrupted by celebrations and shopping and worship and best wishes. But in this

extraordinary time it is good to remember to do what was commanded. We need to pray. We need to read scripture. We need to give thanks. We need to worship.

God knows that as humans we need the kind of structures that these things bring into our lives. In the middle of a busy time, don't forget the rituals that deepen the meaning of our lives, God may just speak into our lives through them.

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