



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

WRITTEN BY THE IMMANUEL CHURCH FAMILY



CHRISTMAS AT IMMANUEL

IMPORTANT DATES

- 11/27:** Advent Begins (2nd Service Begins at 10:30)
- 12/15:** Senior Adult Breakfast (9am in Cafe)
- 12/16:** Immanuel Youth Christmas Party
- 12/17:** Immanuel Young Adults Progressive Dinner Christmas Party
- 12/18:** Immanuel Kids Sing in Service
- 12/21:** Longest Night Service (7pm in Worship Center)
- 12/24:** Christmas Eve Services (Services at 4 & 6pm)
- 12/25:** Christmas Sunday (One Service at 10am)
- 1/1:** Online-Only Service at 10am

IMMANUEL CHURCH

Sunday Mornings at 9 & 10:45 In Person & Online

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Unless specified, all scripture passages are from the New International Version (NIV)

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Sunday, November 27th

He is the Wonderful Counselor (Advent Sunday: Hope)

Bubba Snodderly

"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."

Isaiah 9:6

The US national average of adults with a diagnosed mental illness is 19.86%, which is equal to nearly 50 million people. This number does not include the millions of people who are silently suffering from depression, anxiety, and various other mental health issues.

From a worldly perspective, the Lord has called and empowered professionals to counsel those who need help. Lives are changed daily through the knowledge and care of mental health professionals.

However, it wasn't by chance that this prophecy was spoken about Jesus in the book of Isaiah. Isaiah reminds us of God's gift of Jesus as our Wonderful Counselor. In his divinity, he is all-knowing. In his humanity, he understands. When we are tempted to cry, "But you don't know what I am going through!" we need to know that Jesus has walked in our shoes. He faced temptation, pain, loss, betrayal, and even death for our sake. He knows, cares, and understands.

By coming to live in our world, Jesus has shown the depths of his love. And, as God, he has the power to accomplish his purposes. He is the wonderful counselor. No one will ever be better than He. Seek the Lord today for direction and counsel. Talk to him with honesty and allow him to guide you in humility.

Lean into the Wonderful Counselor, and he will give you hope. During this first week of Advent, we are reminded of the hope that Jesus has brought to us and the world. With Jesus, we do not need to be overcome with our fears, anxieties, shortcomings, and issues. With Jesus, we have the hope, the guidance, and the love of the Wonderful Counselor. Choose to live in this freedom and hope today.

Monday, November 28th

He is Caring and Compassionate

Jamie Flore

"You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you."

Psalm 32:7-8

As we continue to celebrate this Advent season, we may want to consider the aspects of care and compassion from our Lord who determined Advent be bestowed upon us this year. In the words of the Psalmist for David, Psalm 32:7-8 reminds us of the care and compassion our Risen Savior has toward us in that the Lord is our hiding place, protects us from trouble, and surrounds us with songs of victory! Indeed, our Father God Himself says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life." God will advise us and watch over us. What astounding care and compassion He has toward us ...even now while He is seated in heaven.

Although as humans we sometimes think we are only stumbling through our lives, as we fix our eyes on Jesus, we get to know and acknowledge God cares for and has compassion toward us as is evident throughout His Word.

This season of Advent we are in is a perfect time to reflect on the great care and compassion the Lord showed us when He gave us Himself to save us from eternal damnation. God not only gave us His only begotten Son, born of a Virgin who fulfilled God's commands and requirements for holy living, but we remain with His eternal Word and the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us on paths of righteousness and as His chosen we get to experience the great love and power of the Holy Spirit while the Lord prepares a place for us in the eternal kingdom of heaven! Oh, how marvelous and wonderful!

As Christmas Day nears, I hope we are all considering giving gifts to our family and friends near and far, but it's also important we remember that the gift of salvation we have already received is by far the greatest of all gifts... it far outweighs all material things we use. Salvation is more valuable than every dollar we have (or don't have), and it's more precious than things seen on earth or gifts given to others. Salvation is a divine inheritance and was given to us by the grace and mercy of God, not by our works to earn it; it was freely given, lest any man should boast.

Yes, we work hard and at times our lives can be difficult; nonetheless, the care and compassion our Lord has toward us have never ceased, nor will His love ever fail us. God is perfect and His compassions fail us not; His care for us continues day to day, we only need to acknowledge and obey Him who has forgiven us our many sins in love and compassion for His own who accept the gift of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

Tuesday, November 29th

He is the Provider of Rest

Tasha Holmes

"Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'"

Matthew 11:28

I remember my doctor saying that an adult should get somewhere between 7-9 hours of sleep per night, and I thought okay, I think I get at least 7... but I'm still tired. That's because there's a difference between sleep and rest. One definition of rest is "to cease work or movement to relax, refresh oneself, or recover strength."

In The Passion Translation, the latter portion of this verse reads, "I will refresh your life, for I am your oasis." Jesus wants to give us rest, to refresh us from the struggles and burdens of this life. Jesus knows that sometimes life can get overwhelming. Balancing work, household duties, parenting, and being a wife, a husband, a partner, and a good friend... all of those things can get exhausting. Some days it feels like the duties just keep piling up higher and higher, getting heavier and heavier. I know in those moments, I feel like I need a mental break or just a moment to reset. That is what Jesus wants to be for us and give to us. Our place of rest. Our oasis. A place to take a moment to recenter our focus on Him.

As you go through your day, tackling one responsibility after another, try to take a moment to just rest in Jesus. I know our daily responsibilities can be so much and sometimes it feels like there isn't enough time in the day, but I challenge you today to make God bigger than everything else and come to him. Take a break from the things you have to do and the thoughts zipping around your mind of unfinished chores and spend time with the Lord. Sing one of your favorite worship songs. Sit/walk and talk to Jesus undistracted without multitasking. Meditate on today's scripture. In whatever way you like to connect to Jesus and allow Him to give you rest.

Wednesday, November 30th

He is the Holy Navigator

Barbara Beaudry

"Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; He's the one who will keep you on track."

Proverbs 3:5-6 (MSG)

If you are on a road trip and are the designated navigator, your job is to give directions to the driver; point out the route, and direct carefully and safely. One benefit of Jesus' coming to earth is to help us navigate this life of ups and downs, hills, curves, and obstacles. Before asking Jesus to come into our lives and to direct our paths, we relied on our own experiences and best judgments, however flawed they may be. When I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 2007, the path forward was mostly in the hands of the trained oncologists who treated me. But there were times throughout the many years of treatments when we had to rely on the Lord to navigate the next step, even when it was in opposition to the medical professionals. He has never failed us!

Can you look back on your life and see how God was directing you through different challenges or times of confusion, not knowing which path to take? You trusted Him to give you clear direction and He did. If you find yourself right now at a crossroads, remember His faithfulness and look to Him for the right path.

Galatians 5:25 tells us "since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." This is what it means to allow God to be our Holy Navigator.

Thursday, December 1st

He is the Grief Comforter

Dan Flore

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Psalm 34:18

Nannie's Christmas tree cookie

I found the last of
Nannie's cookies
before she died
I put my fingers on it
as if I could reach
through the cookie
and touch her hands
kneading the dough

This poem is true. After suffering the loss of my grandmother, I discovered one Christmas tree cookie left from her last Christmas of baking in the kitchen. There was only one left because they were so good! But what was I going to do now? This single cookie looking lonely in the decorative Christmas tin embodied all my grief for losing my Nannie. All I could think of was her hands. I wanted to reach out through the cookie and touch those hands to show her all the love and mourning I was going through.

Some losses you never “get over,” but as it says in today’s verse, the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. I felt that somehow through writing this poem that somehow, I did reach my Nannie’s hands. By putting my grief into words, the Lord saved my crushed spirit and let me feel that all the love and loss I felt had meaning and wasn’t in vain. I know the poem meant something to my Nannie because as it also says in scripture Blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall be comforted. (Mathew 5:4) and I felt comforted by this poem and getting my feelings out. I believe in my own way I did touch my Nannie’s hands and not only her hands but Jesus’ too because I felt comforted just as the verses say.

Friday, December 2nd

He is Wise - James 1:5

Sherona McFadden

"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking."

James 1:5 (NLT)

Help me with my words. I speak to you my God because you have given me room to breathe.

A prayer of wisdom:

You, my God, have taught me that my life is not my own.

My God's wisdom visited me in the midnight hour when I needed him the most. My Lord, your honesty has prevailed. Your wisdom does not entertain my reason for being right nor does it make excuses for my behaviors of a carnal mind in my moment of weakness. Your wisdom is forever true.

The spirit of the Lord stands strong for me with devotional wisdom followed by the horizon knowledge to know how to apply it to my journey. I understand that when I ask for your wisdom, I ask for it with the mindset of knowing that it is the truth, Your truth, and not my own. When I receive it, I receive it with the knowledge that I will be completely free to be what and whom you have called me to be, not with perfection in my strength but in yours.

I am bold and secure in your words that you have spoken through Your Son, Christ Jesus that I can ask and not close my eyes with shame. I am open to all possibilities. It is in you, oh Lord, I put my trust. Amen.

Saturday, December 3rd

He Sees You Where You Are

Nate Kindt

"Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 19:1-10

In this story, it isn't by accident that the short Zacchaeus sees Jesus and then climbs up a sycamore-fig tree. A sycamore-fig is notably different from an original fig tree; a regular fig tree produces fruit that is sweet and easy to harvest, whereas the fruit from a sycamore-fig is usually left untouched since it is bitter and more difficult to harvest. This fruit is usually left on the tree or the ground for the homeless to try to harvest and eat. The rind or peel on the sycamore-fig is very tough and takes labor and struggle to get the fruit out, just for the fruit to be bitter and not worth the effort.

The reason that this is interesting is that Jesus seeks out Zacchaeus almost like a dog on a scent. Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector, the lowest of the low as far as biblical culture is concerned; but that doesn't concern or stop Jesus. Jesus pushes through the crowd and seeks this tough, bitter, little fruit (Zacchaeus) out of a tall, difficult situation (sycamore-fig tree).

Jesus, through this biblical passage, is saying that if you turn your attention to me, I will find you and seek you out where you are. He pursues you through whatever circumstances and life trials, through whatever society has branded you, even through who you are and what you have done. Through all of that, he invites himself in and starts the process of having you walk with him in faith.

Sunday, December 4th

He is Mighty God (Advent Sunday: Joy)

Andrea Sawtelle

“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.”

Isaiah 9:6

The Advent Season is filled with so many things that bring joy. Driving by houses lit up by tiny twinkling lights, smelling the sweet scent of freshly baked Christmas cookies, placing ornaments on a tree that tell stories, watching little ones walk through the season in wonder, and setting up nativities that remind us of the true meaning of this season are just a few of those things.

But if we're honest with ourselves, sometimes it's hard to find joy in the season. In a post-pandemic world where finances are tight, war is a reality, natural disasters have devastated communities, and loneliness is its own pandemic, joy can feel miles away. Our losses, disappointments, fears, and brokenness can leave us feeling weak and helpless, stuck in a state of sadness.

What if we saw Advent as a season to create space to cultivate joy? What if we chose to wake up each morning with a posture of gratitude? What if we began to recognize God's goodness and faithfulness, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in? What if we began to cultivate joy?

Here's an amazing truth this Advent season: you don't have to cultivate joy in your own strength. In fact, it's impossible. Joy is a byproduct of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. That means, the closer we do life with Jesus, the more our hearts will start to reflect his. The more time we spend this season, reflecting on what Jesus has done and is doing in our lives, the more we will cultivate a life of joy.

Nehemiah 8:10b says, “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” We serve a God who is mighty. He promises us strength when we are weak and joy when we're in the middle of what is difficult. We can cultivate joy because of who God is and what he continues to do. This Advent season let's not be people who stay stuck in a state of sadness and disappointment. Let's be cultivators of Joy, knowing we serve a God who is not only mighty but who has come to do life with us, Immanuel, God with us.

Monday, December 5th

He is the Mighty Warrior

Tasha Holmes

"For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, we will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

Zephaniah 3:17

Growing up, I loved superheroes. I admired the way they would throw themselves into dangerous situations, just to save someone else. Now I know there are Superman and Batman lovers, and some may even want to throw in Captain America... but I was always drawn to the X-men. These heroes were rejected and cast out from humanity, but still fought to defend it. I know the X-men aren't real, and no matter how much I prayed, I would never grow up and be Mystique, but there was something about the concept that stayed with me.

As I grew older, I came to realize that heroes were real, but instead of X-Men, they looked like firefighters, nurses, teachers, and moms and dads. And the greatest superhero of them all was God. And that may sound cheesy, but that is what this verse feels like to me. Zephaniah three is talking to the children of Israel, who have yet again turned away from God to do their own thing, only to land in a pile of trouble. And even though they have done the wrong thing over and over, God, our Savior and Mighty Warrior, was continually ready to save them again.

The thing that makes God better than any made-up superhero, is that he is real! His love for us is so great that he doesn't just save us and then run away to the next city or next problem; he celebrates over us. He rejoices over us with joyful songs. To rejoice means to feel or show great joy or delight. God does that, for us! Even after we've turned away, done things our way, or rejected his plan and path for us, He is among us, he delights in us and our God is mighty to save!

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for your mighty hand and your great love. Thank you for loving us even when we aren't loving you back. Open our eyes and our hearts so that we can feel your joy and see reminders of your love all around. Thank you for saving us, for being our Mighty Warrior against battles seen and unseen. You are worthy of all our praise and love, and glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Tuesday, December 6th

He is Almighty

Savannah Lanyi

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come,
the Almighty."*

Revelation 1:8

Take a moment. As you go through your day, what are you thinking about?

Heavenly things (Colossians 3:2)? Pleasing God? God's beauty expressed? His work in your life? Or your painful past full of regrets and heartbreak? Your present; what you saw in the news, a friend's illness, getting your work done? Your future; graduation, an upcoming election, taxes due? Oftentimes our mind isn't on God and gets swept up in the chains, whirlwind, and pressure of the world. That's the main reason why people take retreats, to spend time reconnecting with God away from the stress and business of it all. It's nice to be able to relax and feel God moving in your life. But what if you could feel like God is in control of every day?

God says He is "who is, and who was, and who is to come". If God is who was, is He not greater than your past? After all (2 Peter 3:8), is He not greater than what you're going through now (Philippians 4:13)? And why not trust God with your future (Jeremiah 29:11, 1 Peter 5:7)?

The song, "Always" by Chris Tomlin says, "You always will be God". That's true. But your worries aren't forever. Try your best and give God the rest.

There's nothing that God can't handle. You must give it to Him. I've seen Him set me free from even the darkness of depression. There are so many ups and downs, maybes, and what-ifs in life. But God says He is the Alpha and the Omega. So why not put Him first, and let Him have the final say?

God is the Almighty. Don't rely on the world to hold you up, and don't let it get you down.

Wednesday, December 7th

He is the Promise Keeper

Jamie Flore

"For no word from God will ever fail."

Luke 1:37

As we consider and acknowledge our Mighty God this 2022 Advent season, may we remember and reflect on the undeniable fact that our God is a promise keeper whose Word has never failed. According to human history and the Holy Bible, God indeed fulfilled all His promises to the Jews from the Old Testament and His second coming will be the final fulfillment of His New Testament promise to come again soon. (Revelation 22:20)

The promises were given to Jews and Gentiles alike when God sent His Son Jesus Christ to walk the earth. Jesus lived and ministered on earth for 33 years, willingly died, was buried and conquered death when He rose again. Keeping His promise, He delivered Himself in perfect fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. His shed blood for us on the cross has sanctified us and Jesus Himself promised He will come again soon.

As human beings, we naturally struggle with doubt and disbelief; but as we do, it's helpful to meditate and remember the divine character and nature of our Holy God. He is a promise keeper. God cannot lie nor does God ever deceive or abandon us. His perfect love casts out fear and the lies we hear in the world are the work of the enemy who comes only to steal, kill and destroy. God does not abandon His children in times of trouble, but delivers us, frees us, redeems us, sanctifies us, and reconciles us to Himself through the work of the Holy Spirit present in the lives of we who believe. As we unify in the body of Christ by the mighty work of the Holy Spirit, we are continually moving closer to God, not further from Him, by our acts of repentance, trust, faith, and good works, though none of those save us. It is only our acceptance of Christ as the atoning sacrifice for our sins that is our God-given salvation.

This Advent season, let us remain faithful in honoring God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who in His might and power never changes, never fails, cannot lie, and always keeps His promises as written. We honestly acknowledge our human sinfulness which separates us from God, and we gratefully get to place our trust in the Holy Spirit who unites us in love within our church and by our God-given salvation!

Thursday, December 8th

He is God of the Impossible

Elaine Wallace

*"Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and earth by your great power and our-stretched hand.
Nothing is impossible for You!"*

Jeremiah 32:17

So, what does impossible mean to you? Not able to occur, not able to exist, not able to be performed? This helpless baby Jesus would live only thirty-three years but would impact our world like no other. As you search the accounts of Jesus' miracles you notice that He never did things once. He fed the 5,000 men then fed 4,000 along with women and children more than could be counted. He calmed storms, walked on water, cast out demons, and raised the dead. He healed more people than we can imagine without the use of one doctor, hospital, prescription, lab test, or miracle drug. He opened blind eyes, restored hearing, and never feared touching a leper. It is recorded in Luke 5:1-11 and John 21:1-14 that fish responded to his commands and swam into fishermen's nets.

Two thousand years have passed since his sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension and He through his powerful Holy Spirit is still doing the impossible for us, sometimes even before we have turned our lives over to his care. Nothing in our sad world is off limits to His loving intervention. Nothing in our frail lives is far from his loving touch. He puts his arms around our shoulders when we are lonely. He woos our loved ones into His kingdom. As we quiet ourselves and put distractions away, He is whispering promises to us, sure hope for our present and future lives.

What is the impossible situation you're facing? Do you struggle with a lack of peace? No father or mother to nurture you, no siblings, no family, no husband, or a wife? You have a choice, choose a healthy church family to draw strength from, to do life with. Do you feel less worthy than your peers, not as blessed with education, finances, or physical abilities? Ask God to add to your life as He sees fit, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and doors will be opened for you," (Matthew 7:7).

Nothing is impossible for our God!

Friday, December 9th

He is the Ultimate Creator

Don Milhouse

"Through him, all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made."

John 1:3

"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him"

Colossians 1:16

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The Hebrew word bara means “to create something out of nothing.” We see that God spoke and said, “let there be light!” and so it was. In a moment, He divided the light from the darkness. God said, “let there be a firmament amid the water,” and above the firmament, He called heaven. He said to let the dry land appear, and it was so. He called the dry land “earth” and the gathering together of the waters “sea.” God said, “let the earth bring forth grass and herb-yielding seed and the waters to bring forth abundantly moving creatures and every fowl of its kind.” God said, “let us make man in our own image and give him dominion over all creation.”

Man’s ideology is only a theory that leads to much confusion, and this comes from the creation of sin. In the book of Isaiah, we see what happens when another tries to take the role of Ultimate Creator from the Lord. Satan revealed his true colors. Lucifer became so impressed with his own beauty, intelligence, power, and position that he began to desire for himself the honor and glory that belonged to God alone. He attempted to exalt his throne above the stars of God. Here you see that creature was trying to be like the creator.

Emotion, will, and knowledge is the image and likeness of God. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and earth. All things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things and by Him, all things are made. Nothing and no one will ever be able to take the place of the ultimate creator!

Saturday, Dec. 10th

He is Holy Empowerment to Us

Kadie Stade

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

Matthew 28:16-20

As we grow in our faith, God will show us just how powerful He is. God is constantly looking for opportunities to lovingly show us more of Himself in our day-to-day lives. He craves for us to know Him as if we are getting to know a close friend (but way better!). In this relationship, we are bound to discover how mighty His power is.

He might reveal His power through a spirit-stirring sermon, through the wisdom of a friend in a moment of need, in the inspiring lives of others, through His Word, or through the simple sunsets that we see on the way home from work or school. Truly, His power appears in any and all places if we have the eyes to see it! Even the breath in our lungs is living proof that God is all-powerful.

If you are reading this, take a moment to focus on your breath. Dwell on this with me: Every inhale is a miracle handcrafted by the Lord. Every exhale reveals that God is not done with you here on earth yet, and His powerful plan for your existence is still in the works! All the while, our God is beautifully and mysteriously at work in the most intricate details of the lives of billions of others too. How can we fathom a greater power than this!

Okay, we get it. God is powerful. But why does God show us His power in these ways? He is already more powerful than man can understand. He is the creator of the heavens and the earth. He doesn't need to show us His power every day. But why would He do it anyway?

Maybe He uses this knowledge of His power to equip us and give us strength. Each instance that we get to see God's power is a "tool" that goes right in our "tool belt" for safekeeping. We use these "tools" for a little extra help when we need them. In our darkest days or the days, we simply need a reminder, we can look back to all the ways God has shown us that He is all-powerful, at work even when we're sleeping, and bigger than any obstacle - and feel empowered to face the giants of life.

This advent season, start collecting these glimpses of God's power for your "tool belt". Let His power and authority in this life, in the biggest ways and the smallest moments, empower and strengthen you to know that He is our powerful God, and He is in control. Let this knowledge empower you to be all that He is leading you to be. Let it inspire us to make way this Christmas season, for the King is coming; and He is worthy of all our praise.

Sunday, December 11th

He is the Everlasting Father (Advent Sunday: Love)

Bubba Snodderly

“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.”

Isaiah 9:6

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). This is the powerful first verse of the Bible. Not only does it signify that God has created all things that were and will be, but it confirms for us that before there was life... God was. Before the existence of the universe as we know it, the triune God lived. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, existed long before he was born on this earth. Before the world existed, he lived in eternal glory and had perfect communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He was not created; he is one with the Creator. As John 1:3 says, “through him, all things were made, and nothing was made without him.”

Jesus was then sent from the right hand of the Father to dwell on the earth, eventually taking on the weight of the world to provide atonement for our sins. You see, while Jesus is the Son, he is still the embodiment of the Father. As Jesus said to Philip, “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Jesus, the Everlasting Father is a tangible, relatable reflection of our Heavenly Father. When we try to picture God the Father, we don’t need to look any further than Jesus. Even better than that, as we get to know Him, we can better recognize the Everlasting Father at work around us.

This Christmas, as you turn your thoughts and hearts to the arrival of Jesus, lean into the loving arms of the Everlasting Father. Trust in Him, knowing he is always there for you. Allow him to comfort and care for you. Receive the unconditional love of the Eternal Father today.

Monday, December 12th

He is the Perfect Father

Barbara Beaudry

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:48

One definition of perfect is “entirely without any flaws, defects, or shortcomings.” Wow! That seems like an impossible command, doesn’t it? Most of us would say that our earthly fathers fell short of being perfect. They may have had some near-perfect moments or advice or action, but always? Probably not. And unfortunately, many fathers were either totally absent, irresponsible, or even abusive. Regardless of your experience with your father, you have a heavenly Father who never leaves you, is always there to listen to you, wants the absolute best for you, protects you, leads you, comforts you, and loves you unconditionally. He is the true definition of perfection.

When we recite the Lord’s Prayer, it is a reminder that God, our Father, is perfect, good, just, and holy. We lift our praise to Him as our Redeemer. Of course, we want His will to be done here on earth, but through us—His fallible, imperfect children—it seems like an impossible task. We can find comfort in the fact that the apostle Paul struggled also, but then he concluded “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25)

I conclude with this poem written by our son to his dad many years ago. May you feel safe in the cathedral of love that your Perfect Heavenly Father has placed you in.

Stone piers soar, silent and sturdy
Vaulting webs above my head, high above
Tree-like and alive, ribs envelop all of me
Unmovable structure, a masterwork of masonry
Defined engravings correct, advise, love
In this magnificent cathedral, I am sleeping safely.

Tuesday, December 13th

He is the Loving Father

Barbara Beaudry

Read Luke 15:11-32.

Although the parable in the above scripture is generally referred to as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it could be titled the Parable of the Forgiving and Loving Father. It is a beautiful picture of God's love for us as sinners. The Old Testament Hebrew word "hesed" is hard to define in English but can be expressed as loving-kindness, or steadfast love. Hesed is faithful, it is loyal, it is love put to action. Hesed is the unfailing love that God has for YOU! We are probably more familiar with the term "agape" love, which we see in the New Testament. It is God saying to us "I love you, not because of who you are but because of who I AM."

So, we see in the parable that because of the father's unconditional love, when the younger son asks for his inheritance, his request is granted. He is basically saying that he wished his father was dead as that would be the reason for giving an heir their inheritance. During the entire time of the son's wanderings, the father has been waiting and hoping for his return. It shows us that God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will search for us and give us opportunities to respond.

The hesed of our loving Father is a picture of One bending towards us in lovingkindness, a gesture of such amazing, gentle, all-encompassing love, like a warm blanket covering us. Who could resist? His great love reaches out and finds sinners no matter why or how they got lost.

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lam. 3:22 ESV)

Wednesday, December 14th

He is the Only Father

Willie McFadden

"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves."

John 14: 6-11

This conversation that Jesus is having with Philip is a very common interaction that we as Christians today have with Christ the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this transaction, Christ is giving a very compelling account of why Philip should believe. If you've noticed that Christ is using the term "believe" and not saying to Philip to have Faith. Why? Because in God's wisdom, Jesus the Son with the power of the Holy Spirit is speaking to Philip in a manner that he can understand. Showing Philip that he is meeting him right where he is without mystery or complication.

This is how Christ loves us; by being patient with us and taking the time to explain things so that we may understand, gaining wisdom and not shallow knowledge. This also reveals the mustard seed of faith analogy when Jesus says to Philip in verse 11b of the 14th chapter "Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do". Sometimes we say, "I have to see it to believe it." Because there is something powerful and convincing about witnessing something that allows us to believe. This was a logical human thinking attempt that Christ knew that Philip would understand to assist him to believe Christ is the only Father.

We've all witnessed some type of miraculous event; there is no denying the existence of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, I implore you, do not only believe in what you see but to rest in Faith that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Jesus. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Thursday, December 15th

He is the Eternal Father

Bubba Snodderly

“Before the mountains were born or before you brought forth the whole world. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God.”

Psalm 93:17-18

I am fascinated by space. The solar system is both never-ending yet simultaneously always expanding... how does that even make sense? And don't even get me started on time. Time is only a human construct to help us attempt to fathom the past, the present, and the future. How does something that is technically nonexistent impact all that I do and define almost all of my existence on earth?

Even though these concepts are a lot to understand, time and space both have one thing in common: forever. Forever is a difficult concept to grasp... even more difficult than the idea of time or space. Yet even the things we know to last “forever” are still fleeting. There is an ending to all things, even to the universe.

And yet, before the mountains sprang up, God was. Before the earth took its shape, God was. Even before the universe itself began, God was. And long after all these things

God will still be. When time began, he was God. When time as we know it comes to an end, he will still be God. He is the eternal Father... from everlasting to everlasting.

As John 1:1-3 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made.” This is the God who made you and the God who called us into an eternal relationship with Himself. How great is our eternal Father!

Friday, December 16th

He is the Father to the Fatherless

Don Milhouse

“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.”

Psalm 27:10

Our God is triune in nature and exists as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus, who often prayed to his heavenly Father while on earth, is the greatest father ever.

In John 14:8-9, Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

Jesus is our example of a loving father; the head of the family who leads, teaches, guides, and protects. It’s comforting for some to be able to compare this example to your good earthly father, but if your father is deceased or unknown, this father figure analogy is foreign and sometimes painful.

Jesus’ heart was always for the poor, the less fortunate, the widows and orphans, and the fatherless or motherless. Across America, there are approximately 18.3 million children who live without a father in the home, about 1 in 4 US children with absent fathers.

The US has the highest rate of children living in single-parent households. In 2021, 23 percent of children were living with one parent and no other adults. The US stands over 3 times the world average of 7 percent of children raised by one parent compared to 3 percent in China and 4 percent in India.

God often touches the heart of married people to adopt children and raise them as their own. According to the most recent federal data, there are currently more than 400,000 children in foster care in the US ranging in age from infants to 21 years old. The average age of a child in foster care is more than 8 years old and there are slightly more boys than girls. Some children and youth enter foster care because they have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by their parents or guardians. On August 15, 2022, a horrifying new research claims that since 1991, United Nations soldiers from 12 different nations have fathered and then abandoned thousands of children. This is an overwhelming number of abandoned children in the world, but the Good News is God will be a father to the fatherless.

I am blessed to know God as my father and mother. When I was 2 ½ years old, my mother died, and my oldest sister took my siblings and me in to live with her nine children. While I would love to report that my childhood was fun living with my sister and her family, it was quite the contrary. Favoritism was the theme that resonated in her household. My siblings and I were treated unfairly. At the age of 16, I moved out of my sister’s house to go live with another sister. At the age of 22 years old, I met my father for the first time. I didn’t want to meet him I just wanted to see what he looked like. I wanted to hate him, but I found myself feeling sorry for him.

Looking back over my childhood, I can see how God has kept me safe from all sorts of danger. His hand has always been on my life in the absence of my mother and father. He is truly a mother to the motherless and a father to the fatherless.

Saturday, December 17th

He is the Father Revealed

Elaine Wallace

“No man has seen God, but Jesus, who is himself God, He is one with the Father’s spirit, He has revealed God to us.”

John 1:18

In Jesus, God the Father revealed his nature and essence in a way that could be seen and touched.

In the Old Testament, God chose the Jewish nation to reveal himself to the world. They were given the Ten Commandments, He guided them to the promised land past the armies of many nations to fulfill his promise to them. The Prophets, King David and King Solomon, were favored by God to raise the Jewish nation to great heights. The common person followed, as best they could the Levitical laws, they sacrificed offerings and took part in yearly festivals to keep God’s favor but many walked away when distracted by other nations. God became silent for four hundred years before the birth of Christ. Father God was preparing the greatest prophet, king, and savior, the long-anticipated Messiah.

Then, there He was. “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son. And shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14) Jesus, God with us. Jesus was sent to reveal Father God through a new covenant of grace and mercy,” I will reveal the Father to you.” (Matthew 11:27)

Matthew 5:16 “Glorify your Father in heaven”.

Matthew 6:9 “ Our Father, who is in heaven.”

Matthew 6:14 “ Your heavenly Father will forgive your sin.”

Matthew 7:11 “The Father gives good gifts to those who ask Him.”

John 4:23 “True worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth.”

John 6:65 “The Father will draw you to Me.”

John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.”

John 10:38 “Believe that the Father is in me and I in Him.”

Revelation 3:21 “ I am set down with my Father on his throne.”

Jesus revealed the Father to us through his obedient life and teachings straight from the Father’s heart. Even in his final hours Jesus prayed, “ Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” and finally, “Father into your hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46)

In all that Jesus did and said He reflected God’s perfect love and forgiveness.

We are eternally grateful!

Sunday, December 18th

He is the Prince of Peace (Advent Sunday: Peace)

Ann Hanson

“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.”

Isaiah 9:6

Peace.

This time of year, it seems like we see and hear that word everywhere. Go to Home Goods, TJ Maxx, or Target and you can find the word, “Peace” on pillows, paper plates, coffee mugs, wrapping paper, wooden signs, T-shirts – you name it! Busy parents just trying to find a quiet moment to wrap gifts, decorate their homes, or prepare for holiday guests simply long for some “peace and quiet” while their kids are just getting more and more wound up as Christmas morning approaches!

During this fourth week of Advent – we’re focusing on the name Isaiah gives to Jesus: Prince of Peace. This Prince of Peace shows up in the Christmas story not only to bring temporary comfort during a frenzied season and external circumstances, but he also invites us to experience a settled, permanent peace, deep inside of us as we learn to trust in Him and receive his gift of salvation.

Jesus IS our peace.

Jesus doesn’t just give us peace; He IS our peace. Before his death on the cross, we were enemies of God – at war with him because we were living in sin, but his crucifixion provided the only way for us to be reconciled with God – winning the war so that we could be at peace with God and be called his children and his friends. (Ephesians 2:13-14 NIV; Romans 5:11 NLT; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 NLT)

Jesus BRINGS us peace.

One of the greatest benefits of being in a relationship with Jesus is enjoying the peace that He brings during our trials and in our relationships as we are controlled more and more by the Holy Spirit. Isaiah confidently promises us that anyone whose thoughts are focused on God and who trusts in Him will be kept in perfect peace. (Isaiah 26:3)

Jesus WILL BE our peace.

One day, all the things that rob us of peace will be no more. During Advent, we not only celebrate Jesus’ coming to earth for the first time, but we look forward to the day when he will come again. On that day, Satan will be conquered, and the rule of Christ and His peace will never end!

Monday, December 19th

He is True Peace

Dan Flore

*"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.
And be thankful."*

Colossians 3:15

*"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with
all of you."*

2 Thessalonians 3:16

A poem-

THOUGHTS On Grammy's Last Visit to Church

I remember my dad saying something about Grammy's last visit to church before she died. I have this vision of her walking up the steps into the stone building. The funny thing is it doesn't make me sad. I see her floral print dress and high heels. Maybe she was getting ready to meet God. One thing I know is she met Him when she entered that church. Actually, she met Him long before that. I don't know how, but I see it like this – on a beach with the wind blowing rapidly through her hair. "Pol," I hear God whisper, "I have been waiting for you." She responds to Him as naturally as the tide washing on the shore.

When I think of the peace of God, my Grammy comes to mind. She was a woman filled with joy. And in reflecting on her life in this poem I see the peace of God throughout her walk with Christ. She naturally followed the Lord. You could just see it in how she lived. When she was on her deathbed she cried because she wouldn't get to see her beloved family. I know the strong woman of faith she was and her only peace during these terrible last days could only come from the promise that we would be reunited in heaven because of the death and resurrection of Christ. I use my faith in times of trouble, and I remember the only peace my Grandmother had when all she had was her faith. When it all comes down to it our faith is all we ever have.

Tuesday, December 20th

He is the Exceeder of Human Understanding

Willie McFadden

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:6-7

There is a song titled “Don’t Worry Be Happy” by Bobby McFerrin released as the first single from his fourth album, Simple Pleasures (1988). It was the first a cappella song to reach number one on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, a position it held for two weeks. Many of you know the tune, and if you don’t, you can google it later. However, when I read these verses, this song came to my mind because it’s filled with words of encouragement, like the song which this chapter is about. How many of us living in this current chapter of our lives are using words of encouragement to get us through our days?

Furthermore, how many of us are praying for and about everything? If you had God personally say to you “Don’t worry about anything, pray about everything. Tell me what you need and thank me for all I have done. Then you will experience My peace, which exceeds anything you can understand. My peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Would you, do it? This is not a trick question but if you said Yes in your heart or maybe undecided.

If you did not realize what just happened, that was God’s way of personally asking you. I love the Lord Jesus Christ, because of his wise counsel and ability to allow the gift of the Holy Spirit to give us discernment; we do not have to worry about using our own understanding, which gives us His peace, which ultimately makes us happy.

I say to you all, do not make it complicated. In fact, don’t worry, be happy... but most importantly, don’t worry about anything, pray about everything.

Wednesday, December 21st

He's Our Shalom

Sherona McFadden

*"I am leaving you with a gift, peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give.
So don't be troubled or afraid."*

John 14:27 (NLT)

How often do we resist these words? Lord, Let your spirit fill me and take over my life. In so many ways that we can say this monologue, it sounds the same coming from our mouths. Oh Lord, teach me to align my spirit and my mind as one. We should practice saying this in prayer.

Heavenly Father, through your gift I accept your peace, your peace of mind which sounds so good rolling off my tongue reading from your word. But Lord, teach me and help me to let go of the things that would stop me from moving forward to achieving perfect peace in you. Teach me to let myself die so I can get a full experience of the gift that you have given me so when I encourage my spirit with your word I am filled and truly set free through the Holy Spirit which is your perfect gift through your son Jesus Christ.

Thursday, December 22nd

He Embodies the Fruits of the Spirit

Frank Malfi

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things, there is no law.”

Galatians 5:22-23

I read this book about people's behaviors in consuming food. It was quite interesting to hear about the psychology behind how we think about food and how we can be easily tricked into consuming more than we need to live a well-balanced and nourished life. The author would later provide a couple of reengineering strategies to help us maintain a better diet. The first was to dish out 20% less to ourselves because we “probably won’t miss it.” The second strategy was to think 20% more if you are replacing “bad for you” food with fruits and veggies. (Ok, well, maybe you don’t like the veggies so much, but you must love the Fruit!)

And that’s exactly how we should think about the Fruit of the Spirit – you just have to love the Holy Spirit! God gifted to each of us the Holy Spirit to encourage us to replace not just 20% of the impurities in our lives, but 100% of them and to use the power of the Holy Spirit to be better friends, better neighbors, better volunteers, and better disciples of Christ. When the Holy Spirit is stirring in us and shaping our thought patterns, we can’t help but have these “fruit blossoms” — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control — appear and grow into more substantial fruit.

An apple tree doesn’t decide to grow apples; it is created to do so, and under the right conditions, it produces lots of good and flavorful fruit. An apple tree doesn’t give us Philly cheese steaks or bagels; it gives us wonderful apples. The Holy Spirit doesn’t produce jealousy, bitterness, or selfishness. The Spirit produces love, joy, and peace.

When we’re looking for hope in the world, for God’s goodness, there is no purer expression than these traits that result from God working in us. And when we see these traits in others, it is a gift to name them because sometimes we need someone else to remind us that we are producing fruit ... especially in a world that may not be as kind.

And it’s there that we’ll see God’s goodness — through the people around us who are producing the Spirit’s fruit and telling of the Goodness of God in their lives.

Friday, December 23rd

He Calls Us to be Peacemakers

Amy Brandis

“But the wisdom that comes from Heaven is first pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.”

James 3:17-18

O' to be one called such a peacemaker
Wrapped in thy heavenly gaze
To bring others before you,
My King
Through exampling thy unfathomable ways
Thy peace shed to me
That others may gain to see
'Tis grace and love through thee
Which allows us to be

God calls us to be peacemakers. Those who show his unending and perfect peace to others. He calls us to do so without bias, and through the sincerity of our hearts, promising that if we do so we will be granted the good result of our right living. As we prepare ourselves for Christ's return, this advent, we must display God's perfect, inhuman peace for all to see. Be it through taking a deep breath to calmly intervene in the morning chaos, letting a sibling have just five more minutes to finish a video game without causing a scene, or even donating money or gifts to other households to lower their chaos and stress. Everyone can give a little bit of God's gift of peace to the world, especially during this time of year. It is my prayer that God stirs our hearts to example His great peace, bringing others closer to Himself through us.

Saturday, December 24th

He is the Returning King and Ultimate Champion

Kadie Stade

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelation 21:3-4

We celebrate the coming of Christ with the most beautiful traditions. We spend days creating our best dishes for Christmas dinner. We break out the Christmas wrapping paper, swaddling each gift in the biggest bows and ribbons. We empty our bank accounts to splurge on expensive gifts for our loved ones. We clothe our homes with flashy lights, inflatable snowmen, that creepy Santa statue who stares at cars driving by, and don't even get me started on the interior decor... from HomeGoods of course. At Christmas time we truly go all out with food, gifts, decor, fun, and traditions. It's a celebration for Jesus, after all! He is worthy of the biggest party!

What strikes me the most about the Christmas story in the Bible is the humble way in which Christ chose to enter the world. He didn't choose to make a gaudy entrance, ascending from the heavens with flashing rays of light and a sea of clouds surrounding Him. He didn't choose to enter as a member of the religious leaders, already in power. He didn't choose to boast, be prideful, or show off. He chose humility. He chose to become one of the least of these.

He chose to enter the world in the humblest way imaginable, as a baby. His parents, Mary and Joseph, couldn't find an inn in which to stay. They traveled by donkey. They were young, broke, and just trying to make it by. So relatable! They found the nearest shelter in Bethlehem in a small stable, surrounded by farm animals (and we know how farm animals smell!). Jesus was born and laid to rest in a manger.

Jesus is Lord. Yet, he chose to enter amongst the dirt and animals, and into an average family as an infant. This is so vulnerable and so human. This Christmas Eve, let us enjoy our celebrations, our decorations, our expensive gifts, and our best dishes. But let us also be reminded of the simplicity and vulnerability of Jesus' birth. Let us be reminded that the character of Jesus does not command power and rule - He simply asks for our hearts because He cares for us. He asks us to come into His presence just as we are - whether we have a lot or a little.

Jesus sought no status, so let's not either. Jesus lived and broke bread amongst the least of these, so let us do the same. Jesus was gentle in approach, so let us be kind and warm to others. All hail King Jesus, the God of humility, relationship, and everlasting gentle love. For it is this gentleness and great love for which we are all saved. Jesus, in His loving nature, is our ultimate champion. I can't think of a better king to serve than our kind and gentle King Jesus!

Sunday, December 25th

He is born, Isaiah 9:6a

Pastor Mark Prugh

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...”

Isaiah 9:6a

Recently, I came across an acrostic for HOPE—HOLD ON, PRAY EXPECTANTLY. I love that.

HOPE is the message of Isaiah 9, but you'd never know it by the way the chapter begins. The nation of Israel was in “darkness and despair” (v1), was humbled by its enemies (v2), and were walking in darkness (v2). Doesn't sound like a great time to be living in Israel, does it?

But despite these circumstances, God gave Isaiah a message to shout from the mountaintops— “Though your world now seems dark, your future is bright.”

How could God say that when everything felt hopeless? The answer is found in these 13 words: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (v6).

For—Despite the many struggles you are facing

To us—God cares for you and is here to help.

A child is born—That's why Jesus was born, the promised child; God's son, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

To us a son is given—He is the first and best Christmas present. On this Christmas day, we celebrate the one given to YOU, for the forgiveness of YOUR sins, for the cleansing of YOUR heart, for the sanctifying of YOUR life, and the fulfillment of YOUR purpose.

Because of Jesus, you're never without hope so hold on, and pray expectantly.

Merry Christmas from Pastor Mark and Holly.

