



**SUNCREEK**  
United Methodist Church

Living, Growing and Serving in Jesus Christ to change lives and the world.

# Sunday, November 28

## Jeremiah 33:14-16

14 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 15 In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'



The past year has been difficult for most people in one way or another. Many of us have felt the burden of worry, sorrow, uncertainty, and loss. We live in a divided world, a world that is full of pain and unrest and a time when it seems more people are turning away from God and away from the church.

At the time of Jeremiah's prophecy, life was pretty dark. The Israelites, God's "chosen people", were facing judgment and occupation by the Babylonians. They had turned away from God and fallen into disbelief and disobedience. Jeremiah was sent by God to share the news that life as they knew it was about to change. But even in the midst of this time of coming darkness, Jeremiah also spoke words of hope and promise. He reminded the Israelites of God's promise of an "heir of David" that would bring justice and righteousness to save them. This promise was a gift of hope. It was the gift of Jesus.

As we live through times of darkness and despair, we too can cling to this promise from God. We can be thankful and find hope through the gift of Jesus Christ.

Dear Heavenly Father, help us to see the light and hope in you, even during dark times. Help us remember your promise. The promise that you are always there for us. Amen

By: Eli Cramer

Read further: Isaiah 11:1

# Monday, November 29

## Psalm 90:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Lord, you have been our dwelling-place  
in all generations.

<sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.



Throughout my life, I've experienced my fair share of worry and anxiety. As a teenager, I worried about how I looked and what others thought of me. As a college graduate, I worried about getting a job, and whether or not I had picked the right career. As a young mom, I worried about all the ways I needed to protect and care for my new baby. And of course the pandemic has caused much worry about me and my loved ones' health.

But no matter what's happening, I remember to take comfort in God's faithfulness. God has always been there, even when I haven't felt it. And when I reflect on God's unwavering presence and love, I can let go of my worries, and experience a sense of peace.

Dear God,

When life feels uncertain, remind me to seek your presence. Help me to trust that you are always there, guiding me throughout every day of my life. Thank you for being my dwelling place.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen

By Sara Stewart

# Tuesday, November 30

## 2 Samuel 7:18-21, 25-26

18 Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, ‘Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? 19And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord God; you have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come. May this be instruction for the people, O Lord God! 20And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God! 21Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have wrought all this greatness, so that your servant may know it.

25And now, O Lord God, as for the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it for ever; do as you have promised. 26Thus your name will be magnified for ever in the saying, “The Lord of hosts is God over Israel”; and the house of your servant David will be established before you.



At first reading, David’s prayer may seem rather conceited, as if in versus 25-26 he is demanding that God keep His promise to make David’s descendants God’s favorites among all people. But a closer reading reveals the prayer to be one of thanksgiving and humility. David gives thanks to God that He has chosen David and his family line to make known to all of Israel that He is their mighty and forever God. He is humbled that God would use him in this way.

God sees the big picture. It’s often difficult for us to see beyond our current situation and to see what the future holds. Surely David didn’t foresee that from this promise and his faithfulness to God, would come the birth in the manger we are about to celebrate. David did have the faith, however, to trust that God had a plan for forever. Through that plan, and the birth of Jesus, we all have life forever.

Take a moment to reflect upon the blessings - the good things - in your life, then lift a prayer of thanksgiving for them. Confess to Him that you do not know why you have them when others do not. Then pray that God will show you how He wants to use you and your good fortune as a part of His body, the church. Pray also that your eyes will be open to see the opportunities you have to fulfill your role in His plan to bring healing, hope, peace and salvation to the world.

By: Randy Sandifer

# Wednesday, December 1

## Luke 11:29-32

29 When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, 'This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. 30 For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. 31 The queen of the South will rise at the judgement with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here! 32 The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!



Advent is a time that specifically pushes us to engage with the messiness of the world, rather than retreat from the world. This text is a perfect example. It is strange and discomforting. Jesus says to stop looking for signs, but to attend to what is happening now, just as God told Jonah to stop running from the world and to pay attention to what God was doing in unexpected places and way.

Consider the sign of Jonah through these two pieces of art depicting the reluctant prophet. Think about the connections Jesus draws to Jonah beyond the simple 3 day connection (which Jesus does not even mention). What really is this sign of Jonah? Could it be about not running away from the world? Or could it be about prayer in desperate times? Or could it be about repentance?



By Art in Clay



By Rembrandt



# Thursday, December 2

## Luke 1:68-75

68 'Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.  
69 He has raised up a mighty saviour for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.  
72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,  
and has remembered his holy covenant,  
73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,  
to grant us 74that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear, 75in holiness and righteousness  
before him all our days.



Zechariah's soul revealed an overwhelming union with the Holy Spirit when he affirmed his song of praise to a trustworthy God who promised redemption, salvation, and peace. Although his path to prophecy was burdened by doubt and fear, Zechariah's faith ultimately rejoiced in the greatness of God, who has been, and who always will be working among his people to fulfill the oath sworn to Abraham to rescue the people of Israel and free them to serve the Lord our God "in holiness and righteousness." The conversion of Zechariah in the Gospel of Luke to hope filled believer from fearful doubter was so subtle yet so profound. He simply gave witness to the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit filled his heart with hope and joy as words of trust and gratitude flowed from his heart.

### A Prayer to Embrace Our Blessed Self

O Holy Spirit, help me to know myself, what I am and what I can become. Enable me to see the good in myself and rejoice in it, to see the flaws and change them. Teach me to live with myself, to accept myself, and see myself through your eyes. Remind me that becoming what you want me to be is more like cultivating a garden than chopping down a forest full of trees. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

By: Anthony Polini

# Friday, December 3

## Luke 1:76-79

76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.  
78 By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.'



This baby boy born to Zechariah and Elizabeth, who would be named John, Zechariah's prayer to God for a son was answered just as our prayers will be answered. We must be patient, open and wise. God works in his time and his way, quite necessary for all these difficult, nearly impossible situations we give him.

I am constantly in awe that our God, with his unlimited powers, chooses to love us and work through us - all he asks in return is that we are faithful to him.

Dear God - Thank you for the many blessings you have given "your flock". Help us to be mindful of these blessings daily. We promise you our love and faithfulness. Amen

By: Judy Satrapa

# Saturday, December 4

## Philippians 1:3-11

3 I thank my God every time I remember you, 4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, 5 because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. 9 And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight 10 to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, 11 having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.



Philippians is a Letter of Paul's that is filled with JOY [Jesus/Others/Yourself] There is Joy in praying for others [Intercessory Prayer]. It may take years for the "Prayee" to respond but Persistence is taught in Colossians 4:2.

The Five-Finger-Guide to prayer may be helpful.

Look at the thumb and pray for those nearest and dearest to oneself.

The second [Pointing] finger represents those who teach [home, church, school, work, etc.].

The middle finger stands tall for those who lead [church, home, work, play, governments, etc.].

The weakest [4th] finger reminds us of those who are troubled in mind, body or spirit.

The smallest, least important finger [Pinkie] represents ourselves.

By: Bob Barnes



# Sunday, December 5

## Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

‘The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

“Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.

5 Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,  
and the rough ways made smooth;

6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” ’



Many times, the writers of the Gospels use scripture passages from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) in order to draw deeper connections between God’s work throughout all time. This passage includes a reference to another scripture in the Hebrew Bible. See if you can find it (there is a big hint in the passage itself, also a study Bible should have the reference in its notes, or you can check it out online at Bible Gateway and read the footnotes: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=luke+3&version=CEB>).

Read the original version of these words and then think about why Luke would have chosen to include this in his description of John. How does each passage add meaning to the other?

# Monday, December 6

## Psalm 126

- 1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dream.
- 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
'The Lord has done great things for them.'
- 3 The Lord has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.
- 4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
- 5 May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.
- 6 Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.



Psalm 126 is part of what is called a song of ascents, a restoration psalm. The psalm may have been written about the people of Zion returning home after being held captive in Babylon. The people's tears and sorrow during captivity had turned to laughter and songs of joy as they returned. This is a psalm of hope, the words speaking the truth that God turns all things to good. "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them." We know God hears our pain, sorrow, and prayers even when we don't think that he is listening. During hard times it is easy to believe that we have been abandoned but we can be thankful for a loving and caring God who will deliver us and one day we will be "like those who dreamed"

### Prayer

Dear God, we come to you in prayer to thank you for all that you do for us. Thank you for being with us in hard times as well as good. Help us to always remember that we can come to you with our joys as well as our sorrows. May we always remember you are there for us even when we think we have been abandoned. We love you and thank you. Amen.

By: Ken and Debbie Hyatt

# Tuesday, December 7

## Isaiah 40:1-5

Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.

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

3 A voice cries out:  
'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'



This reading reminds us that the Glory of God is coming and we are encouraged to prepare the way for our Lord. Remember to take the time during the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season to stop, pray and reflect over what God means to you and how he helps and guides you daily. We must tell ourselves to slow down a few minutes every day to prepare our hearts and souls for the most wonderful day ever, Christmas Day. Amen

By: Ann Timmons

# Wednesday, December 8

## Romans 8:22-25

22We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; 23and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.



Hope is powerful. We can hope for many things. We can hope for the future. We can hope for healing. We can also lose hope, and then get it back. I've always been a hopeful person, it's the patience part that is a challenge for me. I hope for something and would like it right now. I hope that what I'm asking for doesn't take very long to arrive. I've even hoped to have patience!

Strengthening my faith over the years has helped me understand that patience is actually a key part of hope, which is why I love these verses from Romans 8. I need the reminder! Another favorite comes from Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hope for what we can't see but have the patience to know that through our hope and faith, God saves us.

In the words of the wonderful Corrie ten Boom: "Faith is like a radar that sees through the fog – the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see."

### Prayer

Gracious God, please give us the patience to hope for things we cannot see but which we long for in Your name. Please help us keep our hope focused on you and your son Jesus Christ, as we patiently wait for His return. Thank you for Your grace and being ever-present in our lives. Amen.

By: Deb Vallo

# Thursday, December 9

## Isaiah 12:2-6

2 Surely God is my salvation;  
I will trust, and will not be afraid,  
for the Lord God is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.

3 With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. 4 And you will say on that day:

Give thanks to the Lord,  
call on his name;  
make known his deeds among the nations;  
proclaim that his name is exalted.

5 Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be known in all the earth.

6 Shout aloud and sing for joy, O royal Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.



Some of our favorite family Christmas traditions include playing holiday music (maybe a little too early for some!), attending the Gloria concert, caroling with other Sun creek members, and singing hymns during the Christmas Eve service. Isaiah 12:1-6 is just that - a song of praise and worship of God as his people await the coming of a savior. As we, too, await the celebration of Jesus' birth during Advent, let us express our joy and gratitude to God by praising him and sharing the good news of Christ with all.

Dear Heavenly Father,

I come to you with so much to be thankful for. As I reflect on your love, generosity, and grace during this season of Advent, remind me to always have a heart of gratitude and praise.

In your glorious name I pray, Amen.

By: Drew and Kate York

# Friday, December 10

## Amos 6:1-8

Alas for those who are at ease in Zion,  
and for those who feel secure on Mount Sa-  
maria,

the notables of the first of the nations,  
to whom the house of Israel resorts!

2 Cross over to Calneh, and see;  
from there go to Hamath the great;  
then go down to Gath of the Philistines.

Are you better than these kingdoms?

Or is your territory greater than  
their territory,

3 O you that put far away the evil day,  
and bring near a reign of violence?

4 Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,  
and lounge on their couches,  
and eat lambs from the flock,  
and calves from the stall;

5 who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp,  
and like David improvise on instruments of  
music;

6 who drink wine from bowls,  
and anoint themselves with the finest oils,  
but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!

7 Therefore they shall now be the first to go  
into exile,  
and the revelry of the loungers shall pass  
away.

8 The Lord God has sworn by himself  
(says the Lord, the God of hosts):

I abhor the pride of Jacob

and hate his strongholds;

and I will deliver up the city and all that is in  
it.



I spent Christmas Eve of 2009 in Hawaii. By some miracle, the SMU football team made it to the Hawaii Bowl, and as a member of the marching band, I got a free trip to accompany them. It was so much fun to spend December in shorts on the beach (and even get to play our drums while standing in the Pacific Ocean).

While walking around Waikiki beach, not all was ease and enjoyment. Right alongside the tourists were many homeless individuals, giving my soul pause. And we know this is the reality in our world, whether in Hawaii or North Texas. God knew this was the reality even in Israel at the time of Jesus's birth.

It is very jarring to think about that or read a passage like this one with thoughts of the joy and peace of Christmas floating through our minds! Advent is one of those unique Christian seasons that is packed with layers of meaning, positioning us to be more open to the wonder of the birth of Christ, but also preparing us to really live as that Christ child eventually taught. So, when a passage like this one from Amos pops up in the recommended list for Advent texts, I am grateful for the reminder of what it really means to follow the Christ child who would grow up to be called a prophet and say things very similar to these words of Amos.

Advent and Christmas provide a powerful opportunity to move past the idle songs and pride that is called out by Amos (and Jesus many years later). In the midst of our preparations for celebration, may we also make room for justice and care of those in need. It can be as simple as donating to a non-profit doing good (or setting up an Amazon Smile donation so that anything you buy there contributes to a charity), putting Heifer International or Kiva donations on your Christmas list, or committing to volunteer your time regularly through 2022 at a shelter.

However we do it, may we follow the path of peace and justice, celebration and compassion, which the Christ child guides us toward, for it is one, unified path.

O Lord, expand and temper our hearts this season. Open our eyes and hands wide. Prepare us to be a people that works toward a reality where all are at ease and full of celebration, where all can sing songs that are full of glory rather than idleness, where all know your overflowing love. Amen.

By: Pastor Patrick Littlefield



# Saturday, December 11

## Luke 1:57-66

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) was a Spanish military man who deepened his faith by reading books about Jesus's life and the saints while recovering from a cannonball injury to the legs. Later, he went on pilgrimages, got an education, and started a new monastic order called the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. One of his many contributions to spiritual development includes a method of praying with scripture that taps into our imaginations. Try it out today by following these steps as you read our scripture.

Get settled in a comfortable chair and in a quiet place where you won't be distracted. Open your hands on our lap, and to ask God to open your hearts and imaginations.

Then read through the passage once slowly and put it down. Now we begin to imagine the scene as if we are standing right there. What is around me? Who else is there? What do I hear in the scene? If I am in a house, what noises are in the house or in the street outside? What are the smells I can pick up? You can put yourself in the shoes of one character or look over the whole scene.

After you examine each sense, consider what conversations take place? What is the mood – tense? joyful? confused? angry?

Feel free to paint this picture in any way your imagination takes you. Don't worry about historical accuracy – this is letting God take our imaginations and reveal to us something of the intimate life of Jesus or others.



57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbours and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. 60 But his mother said, 'No; he is to be called John.' 61 They said to her, 'None of your relatives has this name.' 62 Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. 63 He asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And all of them were amazed. 64 Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. 65 Fear came over all their neighbours, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. 66 All who heard them pondered them and said, 'What then will this child become?' For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

# Sunday, December 12

## Philippians 4:4-7

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.



Did you attend Vacation Bible School as a child? If so, you are surely familiar with the song “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy Down in my Heart.” As I reflected upon this scripture from Philippians, I continually heard “I’ve got the peace that passeth understanding down in my heart. WHERE?...” (You know the rest.) That verse was a challenge for me to enunciate as a youngster. As an adult, it’s been difficult for me to envision. Until yesterday...

As I type this, I am full of eager anticipation for a 30th anniversary trip to Greece that my husband and I will embark upon tomorrow. Twelve days ago, my outlook was not so rosy. That was the day I made the unhappy discovery that my passport expired seven months ago! My first thought was that we will never make it to 31, and the next several hours were not exactly peaceful. Miraculously, I was able to acquire an appointment at the Dallas passport office, and that is where I spent a significant part of my day yesterday. I decided to use some of the waiting time to formulate my thoughts about this scripture.

That’s when it happened! I encountered peace that passeth understanding on the eleventh floor of the Earle Cabell Federal Building. The crowded office was full of travelers in desperate situations like mine. However, the combination of the silenced phones and compassionate employees resulted in a powerful sense of calm. (One of the clerks who assisted me even took the time to thank me for my service as a teacher.) As I scanned the rows of families in plastic chairs, the only sounds to be heard were the happy gurgles and squeals of infants and toddlers who waited patiently with their parents. What could have been a hotbed of short tempers and tears of frustration instead was an oasis of respectful camaraderie. The peace certainly surpassed my understanding!

I left pondering how that peace can be accessible more often. From Max Lucado I have learned that anxiety and gratitude cannot coexist, and I was certainly thankful to be issued a passport. There was more to it than that, however. Everyone was present in the moment, tuned in to the needs of others and showing grace. I’ve decided that I will strive to behave in such a way as I prepare my heart for Christmas.

God, please help us to seek calm during a season that can become hectic and stressful. Give us the gentleness, compassion, and mindfulness to share your peace - a peace that passeth understanding. Amen.

By: Sandy Schneider

# Monday, December 13

## Isaiah 11:1-9

A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse, waist,  
and a branch shall grow out of his roots. and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of counsel and might,  
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of  
the Lord.

3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide by what his ears hear;

4 but with righteousness he shall judge the  
poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the  
earth;  
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his  
mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill  
the wicked.

5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his

6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of  
the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on  
the adder's den.

9 They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of  
the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.



After the big Texas freeze last February, I was so excited to see a tender, new leaf sprouting on a beloved plant. I had assumed this bush had succumbed to the grueling cold and ice. It was beautiful and miraculous!

Like the storm, the world had tried to kill the branch of Jesse. But from the stump sprung new life: the Messiah! Even greater than the original tree, this time it would bear much fruit.

In this passage, the prophet tells us just about everything we could know about Jesus. He tells us of his humble beginnings and at the same time, of his royal ancestry. We learn that through his Spirit-filled ministry, he has tremendous knowledge and insight. We long for the type of relationship Jesus has with his Father. It is an intimate and happy one that results in perfect serenity. When Jesus comes again to reign, the world will ultimately be one of harmony with Humanity, nature, and God.

Right now, we are at that precious time of year where we wait for the coming of the Christ child. But deep within us is the longing for the coming of the Messiah to reign and live with us forever. The prophet Isaiah's profound words give us hope and assurance of God's promise.

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

Remind us daily to turn to you for comfort, companionship, and guidance so that we can live with peace in our hearts. Help us then to share this peace so we can live in harmony.

Amen

By: Jan Baldwin

# Tuesday, December 14

## Acts 28:23-28

23 After they had fixed a day to meet him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. 24 Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. 25 So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: ‘The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah,

26 “Go to this people and say,  
You will indeed listen, but never understand,  
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

27 For this people’s heart has grown dull,  
and their ears are hard of hearing,  
and they have shut their eyes;  
so that they might not look with their eyes,  
and listen with their ears,  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I would heal them.”

28 Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.’



In this scripture, Paul is speaking to the Romans, and a huge crowd came to listen from the morning to the night. Paul is speaking about the Kingdom of God and is telling the Romans about Jesus. While some were convinced and wanted to hear more, others walked away. Before they left Paul said powerful statements such as “you will be hearing but never understanding” and “people’s hearts have become calloused”. How is this something they could just walk away from? Why is it that not everyone wanted to be a believer and have God’s Salvation? These statements hold so much truth behind them. As humans, it can be hard to not have our own agenda. We hear how we are supposed to trust in God and his greater plan but then not follow through. Isn’t this what Paul was saying to the Romans? If we claim to believe in Jesus and follow God, but do not fully open our hearts what good does that do for us as Christians? In his time in Rome, Paul showed boldness to those around him and accepted with open arms to those who wanted to listen to him preach about the Kingdom of God and our savior Jesus Christ. How can we be more like Paul?

Prayer-

Father,

We pray that you allow us to learn and grow like Paul. We pray that we hear and we understand and that our hearts do not become calloused. We pray that people who we encounter learn more about Jesus through us, just as Paul did to the Romans. Lord, open up our minds and hearts as we proclaim your glory, and truly understand what it means to be loved by you. In this holiday season, we are thankful for your love and the blessings we have received. It is in your sons' name we pray, Amen.

By: Hannah Morgan

# Wednesday, December 15

## Luke 7:31-35

31 'To what then will I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? 32They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling to one another, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not weep."

33For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, "He has a demon"; 34the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" 35Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.'



When was the last time you heard music and jumped into dancing? Or the last time you heard someone crying and wept with them? Children can be great examples for us in showing such compassion. Lucy is quick to throw on a tutu and dance around the house, even to some of the weirdest music she finds among her CD collection. And she almost always wants the rest of us in the house to join her in the dance.

Similarly, when her brother is crying, she often grows somber with him. She recognizes his pain and when she can do nothing to fix it, she sits with him.

Lucy constantly teaches us how better to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn (Rom. 12:15). These acts of compassion are what Jesus taught and lived out as the heart of the Gospel, even participating in the ultimate act of compassion of being born as a human among us.

How we live out compassion in our own lives may look very different. John the Baptist lived it out differently than Jesus. Lucy lives it out differently than the rest of us. But the important thing is not getting so swept up in the rest of life that we miss chances to celebrate with those dancing or comforting those who are wailing.

May this season provide us all with more opportunities to live out the core of the gospel and live compassionately with one another.

O God of love, help us see anew the ways you have and continue to live compassionately with all of humanity. Give us the courage and patience to join the dance and share the tears. Amen.

By: Lucy and Patrick Littlefield



# Thursday, December 16

## Jeremiah 31:31-34

Encounter this passage through the early church tradition of “lectio divina.” Lectio divina is a Latin phrase that means sacred reading. You can follow these 4 steps to dig into the scripture deeper.

1. Lectio (reading) - Slowly read the passage and begin chewing on it.
2. Meditatio (meditation): Read again and consider certain words or phrases from the passage. Pick a specific word or phrase to focus on and allow the Spirit to speak to your heart and mind through it.
3. Oratio (prayer): Talk with God and others about the passage. Share the word(s) or phrase(s) that have rested on your heart.
4. Contemplatio (contemplation): Read one more time. Rest in and savor the words of Scripture. Consider how they bring you closer to God and into new rhythms of life.



31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

# Friday, December 17

## Psalm 80:1-7

1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock!  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim,  
shine forth  
2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.  
Stir up your might,  
and come to save us!  
3 Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

4 O Lord God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?  
5 You have fed them with the bread of tears,  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.  
6 You make us the scorn of our neighbours;  
our enemies laugh among themselves.  
7 Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.



This Psalm was written over 2500 years ago, and the writer is crying out for God's grace, peace, and love for the people in the face of the Assyrian captivity. The plea is emphasized by being repeated 2 more times during the Psalms. How poignant this becomes during Advent of 2021. While we have endured our country and the entire world held in captivity by a pandemic, there are many crying out in pain from losing loved ones, pain from losing jobs and business, and pain from losing human connections. Today we, just as the Psalmist then, beg God - "stir up Thy power and come to save us!"

At times the writer blames God for the peoples' terrible problems. Yet the Psalmist also calls God the Shepherd who leads His people, His flock. And the truth is that the nation had wandered away from God, no longer did they follow their Shepherd.

The wonderful Advent message given here is that we have a God who not only will restore us to Him, but He will be so happy for our restoration that He will actually shine His face on us!

### Prayer

Oh, Heavenly Father, we ask that You restore us to Your perfect will. Give us the grace, peace and love that can only come from You. And cause Your face to shine upon us.  
Amen

By: Sharon Sehon

# Saturday, December 18

## Luke 13:31-35

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ 32He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox for me, “Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem.” 34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” ’



Throughout the uncertainty and the stress of the past couple of years, one thing has remained consistent—coming home to two wonderful children. Having a baby around the house during the pandemic (and giving birth at the beginning of the pandemic) has certainly not been a walk in the park, but it is a wonderful thing to embrace Lucy and Isaac no matter what else is going on in our lives.

I think Jesus knew the power of such an embrace, both from receiving it from his mother Mary when he was a child, and in literally and metaphorically embracing his followers—the twelve male disciples, the many other female disciples, the lepers, and all who needed healing. In this passage, even with all the danger and political threats before him, Jesus turns to the act of embracing as a response to the pain and terror swirling through the people of his time.

Jesus embraces us as a mother hen embraces her chicks. Perhaps this Advent can provide an opportunity for us all to know that kind of embrace more fully. Whether it is in reading Jesus’s desire here or in reading about Mary swaddling her baby after confusion and displacement, may we know God’s embrace of a world full of confusion, an embrace that nourishes beauty and peace.

Dear Lord, you are a God who embraces us exactly as we are. Help us know that comfort completely this season, so that we too may be people who offer comfort to those around us. Amen.

By: Erin and Isaac Littlefield

# Sunday, December 19

## Luke 1:46b-55

46 And Mary said,  
'My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
48 for he has looked with favor on the low-  
liness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call  
me blessed;

49 for the Mighty One has done great things  
for me,

and holy is his name.

50 His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.

51 He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of  
their hearts.

52 He has brought down the powerful from  
their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

53 he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,

55 according to the promise he made to our  
ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'



Quite a few years ago, there was a commercial on television that was quite popular featuring a well-known, talented basketball star and his sports beverage of choice. A catchy jingle emphasized how we should “be like Mike”, all while showing various clips of dazzling basketball moves, dunks, dribbles, and of course, him consuming the sports drink. The inference, naturally, that we all should want to drink this beverage, so that we too could be like Mike. After all, Mike was quite the gifted athlete, financially well-off, active in the community and with children, and overall, very influential. Who wouldn't want to be like Mike?

But as I prepare my heart for the season of Advent, with the ever-increasing pressure to do more, be more, buy more, I find that I don't want to be like Mike at all. Or perhaps, it might be better said that what this commercial was emphasizing was not what I want to focus on.

There is another who comes to my mind – one who is often overlooked in our culture, our society, just as she was overlooked in her own time. Instead of a catchy commercial jingle, the song I hear playing in my head is a much more solemn ballad that reminds me of the choice a young girl made, many, many years before. The song I sing quietly to myself is “Breath of Heaven” by Amy Grant. It's not about influence, athleticism, or commercialism at all. It speaks of trust, fear, and a plea for God to be with her.

It speaks of Mary's story. Of how she responded to the Angel Gabriel, upon hearing the news that she would soon carry the child of God. Her entire life changed in an instant, giving up the dreams of what her future might hold with her betrothed – knowing the severe consequences she might face – yet she responds by praising God! Accepting the news with far greater grace than I know I could muster. If God called me now to suddenly give up everything I knew, my dreams and plans for tomorrow, everything I hold dear, in favor of His plan, would I be able to muster the strength to say “let it be as you say”, like Mary did?

If I am honest, there would likely be much consternation, a ridiculous attempt at bargaining, a good amount of complaining, and some gnashing of teeth. But I can aspire to be more like Mary, trusting God with the outcome, placing my faith in Him, anticipating the Advent season with a focus on the things that are truly important. Yes, I would much rather be like Mary than have all the wealth, influence, or popularity of any public figure. Yes, I would like to be more like Mary.

Holy Loving God,

As we enter into this time of Advent, may we be filled with love for You. May we embrace the true spirit of Christmas, bringing Your light in us into the world that is full of darkness. May we look for ways to praise Your holy name as we go about our lives, pausing to give thanks for all the ways that You provide for us, for all the ways You work in us and through us. May we each be more like Mary, trusting in You more than we rely on ourselves. Amen

By: Deb Conway

# Monday, December 20

## Psalm 113

1 Praise the Lord!	who is seated on high,
Praise, O servants of the Lord;	6 who looks far down
praise the name of the Lord.	on the heavens and the earth?
2 Blessed be the name of the Lord	7 He raises the poor from the dust,
from this time on and for evermore.	and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
3 From the rising of the sun to its setting	8 to make them sit with princes,
the name of the Lord is to be praised.	with the princes of his people.
4 The Lord is high above all nations,	9 He gives the barren woman a home,
and his glory above the heavens.	making her the joyous mother of children.
5 Who is like the Lord our God,	Praise the Lord!



The days and weeks approaching Christmas are frequently ones filled with the hustle and bustle of preparing for celebrations with family and friends. It's also a time when we are more aware of the needs of others - of how we can show love and care and be a blessing to those who have less. We thank God for the blessings He's bestowed on us and our loved ones - how He's enabled us to be a blessing to those who might feel less celebratory at this time of year.

But have we truly praised God at all? Or rather, have we offered up fleeting words of thanks and praise as we hurry about our efforts for helping & giving, preparing & celebrating? Have we made time in the midst of all the activity for the Savior Whose birth we're celebrating? Time. Time alone with the Lord.

Many times, certainly not just during the holidays, I've fretted to "stay" in my quiet time with Jesus. My thoughts have rambled all over the place - what I could be doing, what I need to be doing, what I should be doing! Once as I struggled, I felt Jesus was calling to me:

Come away with Me for a while!

Still the Siren voices that call you.

Let My Spirit infuse your mind and your soul,

Feel My peace, grace, and love - all ultimate truths.

Leave the hustle and bustle and worry behind,

Leave the to-do's and must-do's that clutter your mind,

Come away with Me for a while!

I've come to believe that the Lord deeply desires time spent alone with each of His children. Spending time alone with Him not only IS a form of praise but helps us realize how worthy He IS of our praise. Praise must be more time-honored words or even our acts of service performed in His Name.

Dear Lord, please help me to listen as Your Spirit guides me to spend time alone with You. I want to praise You with my heart, my mind, and my presence, not only with my actions and words. Amen

By: Norma Gilpin



# Tuesday, December 21

## Romans 8:18-30

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; 23and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.



Several other mission team members and I had just completed the building of a small, cinder block house in Mexico for a young boy and his family. This moment encapsulated the images of the three day journey: setting down the comforts of home, serving in a 5' x 10' foot area stirring cement on the ground and cutting wood, seeing struggle and poverty for the first time . . . that is there all the time, and learning the boy's lifespan was expected to not go beyond ten years of age. The time came for our group photo with the young boy and his family. The boy's mother gave me her son to hold for our picture together.

This image is a special gift along our Advent journey. "Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing . . . for in hope we were saved." (8:19, 24). By faith, the team was sent to build and to hold the suffering. Not to suffer more, but to realize the glory that is about to be revealed to us: the glory of the birth of Jesus the Christ for our redemption and salvation! As we are sent out to hold and to help those who struggle may we remember to look through our daily circumstances to see what God wants us to see. The gift of love and grace of Jesus to the world. What a Gift!

Prayer: Precious Savior, help us to seek you in all times that we may be guided by the Holy Spirit so that we may be ready to serve those who cross our path. Peace. Amen.

By: Rev. Brett Smith

# Wednesday, December 22

## Micah 4:1-5

As you read the scripture for today, have an extra sheet of paper and a pen, pencil, or variety of drawing tools close by (you can also use the blank space on this page). Read the passage and then illustrate what you see in your mind. Stick figures are totally fine! Pay attention to the details and how they come to life. How does this practice help you understand the scene better? What details were you able to attend to more through this practice?



In days to come  
the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the  
mountains,  
and shall be raised up above the hills.  
Peoples shall stream to it,  
2 and many nations shall come and say:  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of  
the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
3 He shall judge between many peoples,  
and shall arbitrate between strong nations far

away;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning-hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more;  
4 but they shall all sit under their own vines  
and under their own fig trees,  
and no one shall make them afraid;  
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spo-  
ken.  
5 For all the peoples walk,  
each in the name of its god,  
but we will walk in the name of the Lord our  
God  
for ever and ever.

# Thursday, December 23

## Ephesians 2:11-22

11 So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— 12remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.



Each year with the season of Advent we begin to tell the story of God's great love once more. Each year the world is a little different. Each year we are a little different. And the story, though unchanging, speaks in fresh and new ways each time across these many centuries. As Advent makes its way toward Christmas this year, my mind and heart is on how divided our society has become. Politics are more partisan than ever. Neighbors steal signs from the yards of neighbors with whom they disagree. School board meetings have become angry ordeals. The challenges around public health has caused division. Issues of race, economics and justice seem to constantly pull people in opposite directions. Even churches and denominations find themselves torn apart. We live in a divided world.

The Good News is heard in this reading from the Letter to the Ephesians. God is at work to reconcile all things. In Christ, those who were "far off" have been brought near. "Strangers" are now members of the family. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God is bringing peace. God is breaking down the "dividing wall" of hostility that would separate us. In Christ, there is no longer multiple humanities, only one; one where all are equal in the love and grace of God. What a vision! What a dream! What a promise!

Most gracious God,

Help us to embrace the birth of Jesus as the Prince of Peace. Heal our world from its divisions. Make us one. Amen.

By: Pastor Barry Hughes

# Friday, December 24

## Isaiah 9:2-7

- 2 The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.
- 3 You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.
- 4 For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
- 5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
- 6 For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- 7 His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onwards and for evermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.



From darkness into light;  
Instead of death, life;  
Out of bondage to freedom;  
Peace where there was war;  
From sadness to joy.

Isaiah foretold from ancient times that a savior was coming into the world. He prophesied that, for all those lost in the darkness of the world, Jesus was coming to be the light. He told us that all of the painful things we experience in this life would be overcome by the goodness and love of this Christ child.

Throughout the scriptures, Jesus - and faith in Him - is described as the light. It is such an easy metaphor for us to understand. Bad things happen in the dark. As children we were afraid of the dark. In the dark we stumble and lose our way. But in the light, with the flip of a switch or the rising of the sun, we can see the obstacles before us, see that everything is clear and that we have nothing to fear.

Scripture didn't promise us, however, that with His birth our world would no longer have darkness, nor death, bondage, war nor sadness. The light of every day is still followed by night. Jesus, Himself, would descend into the darkest of nights on the cross. But Isaiah's prophecy was that into our darkness was coming one who would be a wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. In our times of darkness we have Counselor to whom we can tell our deepest fears and hurts; a mighty and powerful God to whom we can look for assurance and deliverance; a Father to whom we can look for protection, support and love; and a Prince whose power can bring us peace from the things at war in and around us.

We all experience darkness in our lives. It may be brought about by the loss of a loved one, the loss of a relationship, struggles with disease or injury, or maybe even the stress or sadness the holidays themselves can carry. But through this amazing, miraculous birth, we, as believers in Jesus Christ, have been given the pathway to the light which can outshine the darkness.

As you consider the message for you in this scripture, lift a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the times he has carried you through a period of darkness in your past. Next, pray that He will strengthen you to know that whatever the darkness in your life right now, His light still shines into it and can bring you into the new day. Finally, consider the special person or persons in your life who are struggling with darkness, pray for their comfort and peace, and pray that God will show you how to shine His light into their lives.

The zeal of the Lord - His boundless love for you and His endless and unearned grace given to you - will do this for you and for them.

By Randy Sandifer

# Saturday, December 25

## Luke 2:1-20

Take a moment today, in all its busyness, and read this story slowly and carefully. You can read it by yourself or with loved ones, and as you do, allow the words to flow over you and rest in your heart. Merry Christmas!



In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

### The Shepherds and the Angels

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ 13And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ 16So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.