

# 2018 Advent Devotional



By: Jesse

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ADVENT...a time of **waiting**. Waiting for what? For whom? Waiting for Jesus. God stepped out of heaven and became a vulnerable, breakable baby to push back the darkness of the world and call us out of the darkness into an unfathomable light. God would become skin, muscle, and bone and live among humanity.

But we also wait for Jesus in other ways, at other times. We wait for him to show himself, small and mild, in the situations of our daily lives. We wait for him to show himself, wild and magnificent in the beauties of the world he breathed into existence. We wait for Jesus to come again, to break the sky with glory and grace and to shout, “The strife is o’er, the battle’s won!”

These Advent days are “*set aside*” for us to “*turn aside*”... to pull away a bit from the noise and busyness of Christmas as it’s celebrated in this crazy, hectic culture in which we live.

So for each of these Advent days, including Christmas Day, there will be a brief devotional, written by a friend or member of St. John’s Christian Church. Our hope is that you relish the words, appreciate the message and maybe see a fresh and marvelous approach to Christmas. May you grasp the real meaning of this Advent season and be blessed by the words we share.

A special **thank you** to all the writers and our artist illustrators, Jesse and Luci Meyer! Your time, thoughts, words, drawings and heart will bless each reader as the Advent season unfolds.

Wednesday, December 25th..

As the darkness of night fell, the stars seemed to shine with unparalleled brilliance. A baby’s first cries pierced through the darkness. A precious new mother cried tears of relief. An infant with the heartbeat of the Creator, the promised Savior, lay sleeping in the straw of a manger. God chose Mary for one of the most important tasks in His plan, to give birth to the Savior of the world – no pressure here! Her own life was altered by this sweet sleeping baby. Mary’s life would never be the same because our Deliverer was delivered into the world. Because of this child, people plagued with sickness, sin, and demons were healed, forgiven and made whole. Without the birth of Christ, lives would have remained unchanged...mine too! Joy to the World...the Lord has come!

*“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn – shout for joy before the Lord, the King.”*  
*Psalm 98: 4-6*

***MERRY CHRISTMAS!***



Monday, December 24th..

During a church's children's Christmas pageant, the students were led into the sanctuary. Each group, one by one, rose to perform their song, poem or saying. The kindergarten class was to sing "Christmas Love." All of the children were adorned in their brightly colored clothing, cheeks aglow with color. Those in the front row, center state, held up large letters, one by one, to spell out the title of the song. As the class would sing "C is for Christmas," a child would hold up the letter "C." Then, "H" is for "Happy," and on and on, until all the children holding up his particular letter had presented the complete message, "CHRISTMAS LOVE." The performance was going smoothly until suddenly, one small girl in the front row held the letter "M" upside down, totally unaware that her letter "M" now appeared as a "W." The audience, both children and adults, began to snicker at this little one's mistake. But she had no idea they were laughing at her, so she stood tall, proudly holding her "W." The laughter continued until the last letter was raised. Suddenly a hush fell over the crowd and eyes began to widen. In that instant, everyone understood the real purpose of the festivities. For when the last letter was held high, the message read loud and clear: It did not read "CHRISTMAS LOVE," but "CHRIST WAS LOVE." What better message could a small kindergartner bring? What better message could a small baby bring that Christmas morning so many years ago?

*"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.*

*This is love...he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."*

*I John 4: 9-10*

*Adapted from the 2001 Advent Devotional*

Sunday, December 2nd...

Last year we had begun to set up our Christmas tree when our grandchildren came to visit. We hadn't placed decorations on the tree yet, so the only adornments were the glowing lights. Our little grandson JD wandered over to the tree and stood and stared at it for a little while, taking it all in. But soon curiosity got the best of him and a little finger reached forward and ever so carefully touched a light. After several moments he did it again, touching a bulb of another color and then another and another. Each time as he touched the lights one by one with eyes wide in excitement and a huge smile on his face, he would dance back and forth and shriek with excitement a loud "Ahhhhhhhhh"! This continued for several minutes as he touched each light and danced and shouted with the pure and innocent joy of a child.

This made me think about how we are to experience the joy of our Lord. We know from scripture in Galatians 5:22 that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. Certainly the wonderful times and festivities of the Christmas season with friends and family create beautiful memories and are to be enjoyed. But just as JD was focused on and enjoyed the lights without the distraction of other ornaments on the tree, we must focus on our Lord without distractions and spend time alone with Him, allowing the Spirit to work in our hearts so that we may experience His perfect joy.

Reflect and ask yourself: How do I seek time alone with God, aside from all the busy distractions of the season? Is it in quiet meditation, reading devotions and scripture? Is it in the peacefulness of closing my eyes and enjoying favorite Christmas hymns? Perhaps taking a walk and enjoying creation, thanking Him for all his gifts, especially the gift of Jesus?

However you choose, spend time alone with Him and breathe in all of his goodness, seeking Him with child like anticipation and knowing the joy that comes only from a close relationship with Him.

Blessings to each of you this Advent season as we celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world for each and every one of us.

*May your hearts overflow with His joy!*

Submitted by Ann Grime

Monday, December 3rd...

### The Greatest Love

One winter's night, Jesus decided to come to earth, leaving his glorious and warm home of heaven to enter this most unwelcome world. Before he was born, his mother, Mary, was not welcome in any of the cozy inns. Instead, she had to deliver her baby in a dirty and cold stable. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords was willing to go through this harsh beginning for you and me... What Love Is This?!!

We, who have felt and know God's unconditional love are commanded to share this love with others. John has written in 1 John 4:11:

“My dear friends, if God loved us like this, we certainly ought to love each other” (The Message).

God wants us to share this supernatural love with others. We need to be God's love in this world, to shine for Him, in hopes of it being contagious! If you feel like you don't have that kind of love to share, pray that God would open up your heart to allow him to pour his love inside and then... Claim It!!

We also need to learn how to love by faith. Many times it is hard to love those around us, especially those who have hurt us. We must acknowledge the unsurpassable grace that God bestows upon us each day and in turn, give it to others. When we trust God and truly open our hearts to give us his supernatural & grace-laced love, we grow and have the potential to love anyone that God places in our path.

This Christmas season, and all year through, may we remember God's great sacrifice and the love Christ has for us, trusting that this love will blossom & grow in us to be shared with all of God's children!

Submitted by Aimee Roth

Let peace begin with you this Advent season – peace in your home, in your church, in your friendships, in your workplace, in your neighborhood, in your community – in our world.



Lyrics:

*Let there be peace on earth Let peace begin with me  
And let it begin with me Let this be the moment now  
Let there be peace on earth With every step I take  
The peace that was meant to be Let this be my solemn vow  
With God as our father To take each moment  
Brothers all are we And live each moment  
Let me walk with my brother In peace eternally  
In perfect harmony Let there be peace on earth*

**AND LET IT BEGIN WITH ME.**

Submitted by Dave and Paige Miller

Sunday, December 23rd..

*“Blessed are the peacemakers,  
For they will be called Children of God.” Matthew 5:9*

The beautiful anthem “Let There Be Peace on Earth” was developed in 1955, with the words written by Jill Jackson and the melody by her husband, Sy Miller. The song was devoted to world peace and harmony among people, and how each one of us could make a difference.

A decade later, the song was introduced at a California retreat to a group of young people who were from a wide variety of religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The young people had come together for a weeklong experience devoted to developing friendship and understanding through education, discussion, and working together. The song’s focus on peace and God made it easy to cross many boundaries.

When they came down from the mountain, these inspired young people brought the song with them and started sharing it. It traveled first with them back to their homes and schools, churches, and clubs. Before long, the song was being shared in all fifty states – at school graduations, at Christmas and Easter gatherings, and at various celebrations of peace and brotherhood. It became a theme for clubs. It was recorded, copied, printed in song books and passed by word of mouth. The song spread overseas.

In Sy Miller’s words: “This simple thought, ‘Let there Be Peace on Earth, and Let it Begin With Me’ first born on a mountain top in the voices of youth, continues to travel heart to heart – gathering in people everywhere who wish to become a note in a song of understanding and peace – peace for all mankind.”

Tuesday, December 4th...

The Advent and Christmas season is an excellent time to pause and trace our passage through our yearly, earthly pilgrimage. Each December we can look back and marvel at the designs and purposes of God and recognize how very little we are in control of the events that have shaped the past year. Then with hearts overflowing, look to the observance of that silent, holy night and all its assurance. Because of Christmas, this we know: Christ was born for us. He is love and all the plans He has for us always exceed those of our own. We may be struck by the contrast of our own busy Christmas anticipation compared to the lack of regard it received two thousand years ago. On the night of the original event, not a single innkeeper had space to house the King of Kings. They missed the grandest miracle of all!

All of us are in need of a miracle. In this hectic season, we may live with a sense of urgency for the wrong reasons. Perhaps our time would be better spent looking for the miracles that so clearly exist around us. Especially during the Advent and Christmas season. Miracles remind us that God loves us and that on that very first Christmas so long ago, God gave us the best present of all. His love continues day by day, often through His miracles. Look around you this Christmas. Watch for the miracles of the season.

I pray that those of us who prepare so thoroughly for the holiday celebration might not miss the reason for the season. No matter how full our lives are, I hope we will still have room in our hearts to search for the one whose birth forever changed the world...the same one who is still working Christmas miracles among us.

*Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,  
When Thou camest to earth for me;  
But in Bethlehem’s home was there found no room,  
For Thy holy nativity.*

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus!  
There is room in my heart for Thee.*

Submitted by Alice Tedrow

Wednesday, December 5th...

As I was recently driving through Archbold, I was getting quite frustrated that the train across the main tracks was taking too long to move! I had things to do, places to go... MOVE! MOVE! MOVE! Don't you know, Mr. Engineer, that I am one busy woman! Then I started to think about the story in Luke 10 of Mary and Martha. I've always loved this story, probably because I actually had an Aunt Mary and an Aunt Martha. Martha is described as distracted...after all, she had guests in her home and she was bustling around making preparations. In other words, Martha was a good and gracious hostess! But when she complained that Mary was not doing her part, Jesus said that Mary had chosen what was better. What did that mean? Martha was distracted by all sorts of things that needed to be accomplished, and while those things were good and maybe even necessary, where was her priority? Even good and necessary can distract us from paying attention to Jesus. This season of the year there are distractions all around us. Yes, the things we do are necessary and needed, but think about your focus. Are there things in life – even good things – that distract us from following Jesus? Sit down for a moment, read Luke 10: 38 – 42. “The Master said, “Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much, getting yourself worked up over nothing. One thing is essential, and Mary has chosen it – it's the main course, and it won't be taken from her.” Take a deep breath and REFOCUS on Jesus. You'll be glad you did ...and so will Jesus!

Submitted by Nancy Rupp

Finally, in the book of Revelation, according to the King James version of the Bible, the apostle John describes Jesus as a powerful, fearsome and triumphant warrior King. Please read Revelation 19:11-16. In these verses Heaven is opened, and He comes down from Heaven riding on a white horse, to make war against, and judge evil. He is called “Faithful and True”. His eyes are described as a flame of fire, and on His head He wears many crowns. His garment is dipped in blood that is His own, shed for us, and He is also called “The Word of God”. The armies of Heaven follow Him. Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword that He will use to defeat the nations. The fierceness and the wrath of God is with Him. His name is KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. This image of Jesus is certainly different than how we commonly imagine Jesus. It is the truth, as it has been revealed to us through His Word.

During this joyous time of Christmas we see Him in the manger as “Baby Jesus”, the only begotten Son of God who was sent to show us the Father through Himself and to eventually die for us as the pure Lamb of God, and then was resurrected. But, please remember, He has also been revealed to us through the Word of God as the divine, fearful “Judge” who will cast away those who renounce Him and do not believe in Him as their Savior to eternal Hell. However, if you believe in Him, your life is changing because of Him, you have the blessed expectation of eternal life because of Him, then you can assuredly call Him by the name “Savior”.

Submitted by Roger Zimmerman

**Saturday, December 22nd...**

Throughout the Bible, Jesus has been given many titles and names. The most obvious title at Christmas is “Christ”. Let us look at a few of His titles and names.

What is the meaning of the title “Christ”? In the Bible, 1 Samuel 24 recounts that Saul, the anointed king of Israel, was in pursuit of David, the anointed, soon to be greatest king of Israel, intending to kill him. Saul had to take a pause in a cave in the wilderness of En Gedi. David and his men were hiding in this same cave. David had a great opportunity to kill Saul, but did not. Why? David did not want to kill Saul because Saul was the Lord’s anointed king of Israel. In the Bible I am reading through, there are reference notes about “the Lord’s anointed” associated with 1 Samuel 2:10. In said notes it is reported that the English word “Messiah” comes from the Hebrew word meaning “anointed”. In the New Testament “Christ” translates from the Greek word “Christos”, also meaning “anointed”.

At this Christmas time, we celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus as a man. He is referenced as “Baby Jesus”, “Infant Lowly” and “Helpless Babe” in some popular Christmas songs. In Luke 1:30-32, when the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will conceive and bear a Son, that she will call His name “Jesus”, and He will be the “Son of the Highest”. The Lord God will also give Him the throne of His father David, implying that He will be a “King” of a kingdom that will be eternal.

We also think of Jesus as the perfect “Lamb of God”, and the “Son of Man” without blemish. He was the perfect sacrifice, meek and lowly, as a lamb, for our sins. He was brutally scourged and crucified for us. Have you ever seriously considered the severe pain and torture our Savior, as a man, was subjected to for us?

**Thursday, December 6th...**

The days pass so quickly, and here we are again at the Advent season. One annual event I look forward to is my trip to Charlotte, NC to work at the distribution center of Operation Christmas Child. Last year I had an experience I feel worth sharing. For some time, God and I had been arguing about money. I felt God telling me to give money to someone in Charlotte. By this time Gary and I had given donations to different people who needed a little extra help. We both felt we had given all we could give financially. On the Friday before I left for OCC, a very unexpected check arrived in our mailbox. “OK, God, you win!”

Now...who to give it to? The past three years there were two Hispanic ladies who worked in the restrooms. They worked hard and kept the bathroom spotless. I knew that’s who the money should go to. However, God stepped in. Neither lady was there! So, who was to receive the money? The first day at the center, the leader of my group and I just started chatting. As the week progressed, we met during lunch and breaks. We started sharing information about our families. Finally she divulged that she and her husband were struggling financially and her concern was that she wouldn’t be able to buy her children Christmas gifts that year. AHA!! God revealed His answer! I had someone give her the money inside a devotional book that I bought at the Billy Graham Library.

Last year I also met Gabe. He was 28 and blind from birth. His positive attitude and the message he shared with me was such a blessing! These bonds were not coincidental; we were all part of God’s plan! We all stay in touch and are making plans to get together again this year. The relational gifts I received from these two people are the greatest gifts of all!

Submitted by Judy Sears

**Friday, December 7th...**

In Genesis 3:8a we read “Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...” Imagine, hearing the Lord God walking in your yard as you sit out on your patio in the evening.

Now jump forward to the birth of Christ, approximately 4000 years later. In John 1:14 scripture says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth.” Again, the Lord came to walk with us on the earth.

In John 14:15 – 21, Jesus promises his disciples that after his crucifixion and resurrection, he will send an advocate to be with them. This is the Spirit of truth who will live with them, and be in them. He promises to reveal himself to them as they walk in his presence.

God is present with us and walks with us, as believers, daily. He wants to share our joys and be there for us in our sorrows. He wants to be the one we trust and count on through all circumstances in our lives. He loves to have us spend time with Him alone each day. He knows ahead of time everything that we will face each day and offers his wisdom as to how to handle or respond to each of these things.

What a precious gift is this relationship God offers us! He left heaven and came to earth to make this relationship possible for us to enjoy. Because of his birth, life, death, and resurrection we can enjoy his friendship and guidance, daily here on earth. Through His death and resurrection, He has made a way for us to be with Him and have this precious relationship with Him for eternity.

On Christmas Day, He will be waiting for you when you get up in the morning. He will be there watching as you celebrate His birthday. He will be there with you as you enjoy your Christmas meal, and there as you lay down to rest at night, after celebrating His special day. Enjoy His presence, then, and each day ahead, as He walks with you.

Submitted by Bonilynn Grieser

**Friday, December 21st...**

What an unlikely roster of players God selected to be part of the Christmas story!

Zachariah and Elisabeth were too old! Luke 1 says they were “well stricken in years.”

Mary was too young! Imagine God entrusting His Son to a teenager! What did she know about being a mother...especially the mother of God’s son!

Joseph was too self conscious!” Tongues would wag with him marrying his pregnant fiancé!

The Wise Men were too educated! After all, it seems most intellectuals struggle to believe the Bible!

The Shepherds were too scandalous! Their low morals were well known by everyone!

A baby is too helpless and weak! How can a tiny baby be strong enough to save the world?

God still uses unfit people to repeat His story today. He saved YOU to be a part of today’s gospel story! This Advent season go...tell...share the story of Christmas! You are not too old, young, self-conscious, educated, scandalous or helpless. “Go Tell It on the Mountain...over the hills...and everywhere!” What are you going to tell???

***THAT JESUS CHRIST IS BORN!***

Submitted by Nancy Rupp



Thursday, December 20th...

*“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:17*

Without a doubt, Christmas is the most joyous time of year for many people. You can see it, you can hear it but most of all, you just feel it. After his transformation in Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol”, Scrooge declares “I will honor Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.” He forgot his past and focused on his future.

When the angels appeared to the shepherds, they proclaimed that a Savior had been born to free all people. They would be free not from the tyranny of Roman rule but from their own failure of sin. The newborn baby would have the power to bring peace from God to everyone that would accept Him. The past would be forgotten and a new future is promised.

As we remember the birth of our Savior this Christmas season, we can keep Christmas alive each day. We can be like Mary and Joseph and do what God wants us to do. We can be like the shepherds and Wise Men by following the path that leads to Jesus Christ. We can be like the angels by telling others of the gift the baby gave to all who believe. We can be like Jesus by following his example. We can even be like that star and let our light shine to all who see us!

Let’s forget “Bah, humbug” this coming year and have a Merry Christmas kind of day all year long.

*Heavenly Father, we ask for your strength and guidance to keep the joy of Christmas in our hearts each and every day. Please enable us to show the love of Christ in our words and deeds to all those we may meet. Amen.*

Submitted by Jon and Deb Rupp

Saturday, December 8th...

Perfect Peace-ing

This year I have embarked on learning to quilt. I purchased a book entitled “Perfect Piecing.” Perfect piecing or Perfect Peace-ing? The phrase reminds me of Isaiah 26:3. “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” I always like reading from Isaiah during the Advent season. There are so many prophecies about Jesus in this book.

What I have learned so far about quilting?

**Select and purchase the fabric.** Jesus chose us and at great cost.

**Wash the fabric.** Jesus washed us with His blood to save us from our sins.

**Measure and cut the fabric.** It is a tedious task to measure accurately and cut the fabric to perfectly piece the quilt block. Sometimes the fabric can prove uncooperative in this process. Jesus helps us cut out the things in our lives that rob peace from us.

**Sew the fabric.** Jesus put us together in areas of our lives that are broken and separated.

**Press the fabric.** The seams have to be pressed the right direction to help the block lay nicely. Jesus teaches us to bend away from our old sinful nature.

**Square up the edges.** Always use scripture for the standard of behavior.

**The end result:** Jesus takes those little scraps of our life and makes something beautiful, an heirloom quilt, ready to pass down to the next generation. Our faith becomes a legacy for generations to come, pointing others to Christ. May you be willing to undergo the process of “perfect peace-ing” with the Lord this Advent season.

Submitted by Crissi Stuckey

Sunday, December 9th...

*“So rejoice in him, all those who are his,  
and shout for joy, all those who try to obey him.”  
Psalm 32:11, The Living Bible.*

How we look forward to Christmas. The joy of once again welcoming the baby Jesus into the world. The parties, the gifts, the programs, the music, the meals – all the things we enjoy as we celebrate the season. But what happens when these things are added into our usual schedule? We tend to get frustrated. I have often cautioned about praying for patience. The Lord doesn't give us patience. He gives us many opportunities to practice patience when we ask him for it. Why do I get frustrated? Because things are not going my way. Things are not going the way I want!

The best way to avoid frustration is to practice joy. Find a musical ditty to sing about your joy in life when you start getting frustrated. It makes a huge difference in our attitude when we are celebrating the joy of life.

So this Christmas season – celebrate with song – songs of joy, recognizing joy in the life the Lord has given you. Forget your wishes. Live within the wishes of the Lord. Live with joy!

I am looking forward to Christmas, and may the Lord keep reminding me to remember and maintain the joy of the Lord in my life.

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come!*

Submitted by Norma Fish

Wednesday, December 19th...

Only 5 more shopping days till Christmas! How often at this time of year have we been reminded of the countdown! A reminder is supposed to make us speed up our list making, our gift buying, our baking, our decorating, our party planning, sending out our Christmas cards...and the exhausting list goes on! I wonder how people would react if these reminders said, “Only 5 more days to prepare for the coming of Christ!” Only five more days to condition our minds and hearts through prayer for this great day and to reflect on what Christmas is really about.

How often do we recall the Bethlehem stable? How often do we think about the characters present at His birth? How often do we zero in on the hero of the day – the precious baby, born to save the world? How often do we get out our Bibles and read the account of the Nativity? Have you lost site of the great meaning of Christmas Day? Have you lost sight of the coming of our Savior? At this time of year, try to think, not in terms of shopping days we have left, but rather, how many days we have to prepare for a day that matches no other in history – the arrival of not just any King, but our King, our personal King. A King who would eventually choose to die than live without us. A King that we can always “count” on!

*“For a child has been born – for us! The gift of a son –for us! He’ll take over the running of the world.”  
Isaiah 9: 6 The Message*

Submitted by Nancy Rupp

Tuesday, December 18th...

*T'was the night before Christmas and all through the house  
not a creature was stirring not even a mouse...*

That's because my cat, Pepper, caught them all. Pepper spends a lot of time catching them. She is so proud of the furry gifts she brings to me. She meows to get my attention to show me her gifts. She brings me other things, too: birds, grasshoppers and even a snake once. Her gifts to me provide illustrations of our gifts to God and our relationship with God.

God doesn't really need my money, talents, or time, but He does allow me to be part of His plan and part of the Kingdom work as I serve at our church. So I bring my gifts, my tithes, offerings, talents, and time.

The mouse doesn't really mean a lot to me, but I am thankful for the service Pepper does by removing it from the homestead. When Pepper brings me a gift, I praise her. One day I hope to hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

God provides for me the same things I provide for Pepper: food, shelter, water, loving attention. God even cleans up the messes of my life, just like I clean her litter box.

So as we purchase gifts for each other or for Christmas Cheer or Operation Christmas Child, let's remember the greatest gift God has given us.

"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16

*...Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.*

Submitted by Crissi Stuckey

Monday, December 10th...

I'm sitting here thinking about Christmas....especially Mary. Could I have done what Mary did? Mary was chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus, the Messiah. What an honor to be chosen by God Himself! Mary was young but willing to be obedient to God's request. She was ordinary, just an ordinary girl. God's blessing on her would lead to ridicule by family, neighbors and gossips; after all, she was pregnant and not married. Her future son was to be rejected and murdered. Mary was the only living person to see Jesus from his birth to his death.

Mary could have told the angel, "No, not me, Gabriel! I'm not willing to accept this kind of responsibility! Find some other girl!" Mary might have felt unworthy and too young to be up for this job. But, Mary was accepting, agreeable and willing. She knew her God and knew she could count on Him to be with her every step of the way. God had a plan for Mary's life. God has a plan for your life, too! God can use us even when we feel unqualified or incompetent to do the job.

It's amazing to see what God can do in your life when you are obedient. There are times I feel unworthy but God still uses me in situations I would never imagine. He gave me the opportunity to minister to kids through Youth For Christ at the Outback. Could I have done what Mary did? Could you? The answer is always, "Trust in the Lord."

*"I am the Lord's servant, ready to serve.  
Let it be with me just as you say."  
Luke 1:38*

Submitted by Judy Grime

Tuesday, December 11th...

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness.” Lamentations 3: 21-22

When our son, Mark, was just 3 years old, Advent season found us living in Detroit, MI attending Missionary Internship, training required prior to beginning our mission assignment to Ecuador. We were asked to work in a Methodist Church in exchange for a house and a small living allowance – that was hardly enough to live on. That year Mark had picked out his Christmas gift. He wanted a big yellow Tonka truck – the kind big enough to sit on and ride. We had several extra bills that Christmas so I didn’t know how we would pay the bills, much less afford Christmas presents for the family.

One Saturday morning a few days before Christmas, snow was lightly falling as we had decided to snuggle a little longer in our beds. We were startled awake by the sound of our doorbell. Who could that be? We didn’t have any friends in Detroit yet. As I opened the door, imagine my surprise to see Ray and Bev Gonzalez, dear friends we had known in Chicago when we lived there and attended their church. I must have been in shock as I closed the door and returned to our bedroom. My wife asked, “Who was at the door?” I answered, “Ray and Bev from Chicago.”

As I welcomed them in, they shared that they had driven from Chicago the night before and were there to encourage us. They said they could only stay a few hours, but that they wanted to take us out to eat together, as their guests. When they were ready to leave, they brought out a large Christmas present that they presented to Mark. As he tore off the paper, imagine our surprise – a big yellow Tonka truck: the very one Mark had picked out! How could they have known? As they shared a prayer with us and headed out the door, Ray pressed an envelope into my hand and said, “God bless you



The story of the star is not only simple and sincere, it’s startling! Its behavior in the galaxy of the heavens was totally unorthodox. The Star of Bethlehem was a kind of ambassador of all stellar creations. However, the star was probably no more “incredible” than the angelic proclamations! Who hears angels singing in the night?

The first to go and see the newborn King was shepherds, men whose lives were not easy as they faced loneliness, hardships, exposure to all kinds of weather, away from family and missing the better things in life. A shepherd’s most prized possession was a six foot crook and a sheepskin coat. His culinary wares were carried in a leather pouch by his side as he whiled away the hours playing a homemade reed pipe. Poor, dirty shepherds – the first to lay eyes on the King? **“Incredible!”**

The observance of the star by the Magi, wise in the study of nature and astronomy, led by “their science” to follow the light and cause the entire city of Jerusalem to stir. **“Incredible.”**

It’s still an “incredible” world! It is “incredible” that day by day, night by night, the marvelous works of God endlessly proclaim His glory. “O Lord, how manifold are Thy works, in Wisdom Thou has made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches.” Psalm 104:24. You are I are the crowning production of God’s creative genius and the promise that all who name His name shall behold His glory.” **INCREDIBLE!**

Submitted by Maxine Martin

Monday, December 17th...

There are various Gospels regarding the birth of a King, a Messiah. His birth is celebrated with a holiday when everyone sends greetings far and wide, presents are given and received, homes are transferred into visions of loveliness, stores are filled with colorful treasures, and joyful music pervades the air. Churches become the stage for many new actors and actress learning the part of a shepherd, a wise man or an angel...all forcing me to believe “the incredible” among the pomp and glory, sparkling tinsel and colorful holly wreaths.

There was a young, sweet, modest, unassuming maiden of Nazareth who was chosen to be the mother of this coming Messiah. A messenger of God appeared, telling her the news! **“Incredible!”**

It’s also “incredible” that a carpenter was to become the betrothed partner of this virgin. The Bible describes him as a “just” man, but how did he accept such shocking news?

There was no room in the inn, so a shabby sort of place became the birthplace of a king. “No room,” was the innkeeper’s announcement so he led them to a shed, a stable. He probably sneered at the unpretentious appearance of those two travelers. Imagine using a feeding trough for a newborn baby! Such lowly circumstance – no pomp and ceremony, no fancy party to celebrate the birth of the mighty King of earth and heaven!” **Incredible!”**

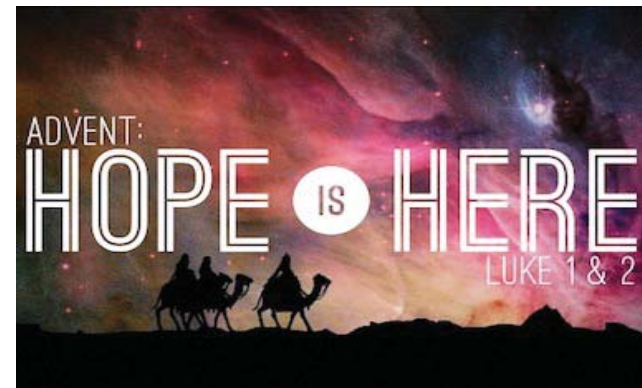
as you prepare for your new assignment.” A few moments later they were on their way back to Chicago.

As I opened the envelope, five \$100 bills slipped out onto the table. It seemed I almost heard an audible voice say, “And you were worried about your December bills?” There was more than enough money to cover our bills and have money left over for Christmas. I was overcome with emotion! How could God, who knew our need, inspire dear friends to drive over 300 miles just to spend a few hours with us, and to be His instruments to deliver just what we needed? Truly God had been faithful to meet our need. God had two of His angels to light the way at Christmas.

May you also find God to be faithful to meet your needs during this Advent and beyond.

*“And my God shall supply all your needs  
according to his riches in Glory in Christ Jesus.”  
Phil 4:19*

Submitted by Dan Light



Wednesday, December 12th...

The holidays are an emotional time for all of us. Some holidays are spent missing lost loved ones, or feeling depressed with our current life situation. Other holiday seasons bring us joy and laughter with friends and family. In each season, it is important to make the time to BE STILL. The Psalmist is pretty clear that during this time of being still, we are able to know God and grow deeper with him.

*“Be still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10*

Think back over previous holidays. Can you recall when you were present enough to truly soak up the blessings of God? We are no different than children in this regard. Just as children go from present to present, we fill our schedules with events and parties. I encourage you this holiday to carve out some time for yourself to be still. This might look like a hike alone, a walk, or a cup of coffee by yourself at a coffee shop. Maybe sit and read that book you’ve been wanting to get started, or better yet, open your Bible. Take a few deep breaths and simply BE STILL. Soak it up and know that he is God, and He loves you!!! I pray that this will allow you to be filled with the presence of God, and to GIVE back to your loved ones this Christmas.

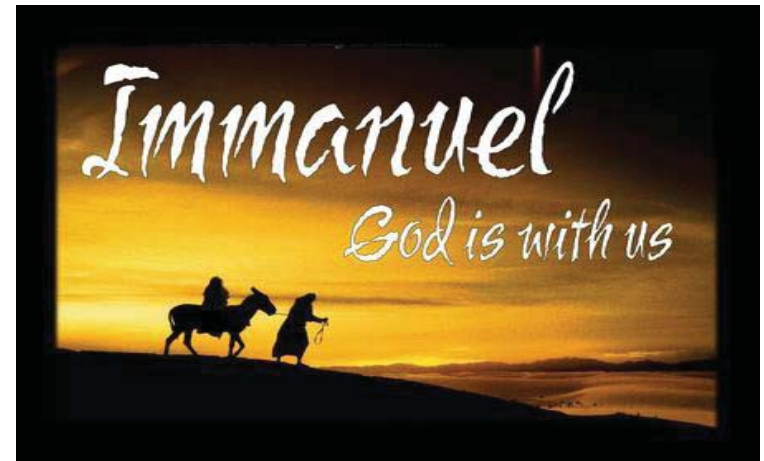
*I hope you will take time to be still this holiday season, and that in doing so, you may experience the utmost joy in Christ.*

In hindsight, they could tell that Jesus had been with them the whole time. Often looking back is when we recognize God’s hand. With the promise that God is with us, let’s forge ahead, anticipating we will see God’s plan unfold.

How is God with us today? Jesus promised that the Father would send a Helper, the Holy Spirit, in Jesus’ name. This Helper will abide with us, teach us all things, and remind what Jesus had taught. Imagine the day when tongues of fire rested on each believer gathered together in Jerusalem. God was very much with them! Jesus promised in Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

So what does it mean that God is with us? We expect guidance, protection, communication with God, the experience of His glory, peace during our troubles, wisdom and understanding. Perhaps you can list other important points. But it’s precious that she ‘will call him Immanuel’, meaning ‘God with us’.

Submitted by David Stuckey



*Sunday, December 16th...*

We recall many Bible verses familiar to the Advent season, prophecies of Jesus' coming and the events leading up to his

Historically, King Ahaz was facing strong enemies and had just received discouraging news that the enemy forces were increasing. But the Lord provided a message that the enemy would not prevail and that Ahaz should ask for a sign to confirm this. Ahaz would not ask, even though he was supposed to. So Isaiah responds "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Immanuel means 'God with us'.

What does it mean to say that God is with us? Consider instances from the Bible. One time when God was clearly present was in the pillars of fire and cloud in the Israelite camp. That started when the Israelites were fresh out of Egypt with limited experience with God. My topical index lists some purposes of the pillars as guidance, protection, regulating the journey, communicating, and manifesting glory.

In the New Testament, God was with people in the flesh; Jesus walked among them. Maybe the best illustration would be when Jesus was not immediately with them. One evening Jesus sent the disciples out to sea without him. But a strong wind was blowing; the waves were rocking the boat. Even worse, there appeared to be a ghost walking on the water toward them. Not until the disciples cried out did Jesus come to them, calm their fears, and stop the wind. We can easily be distracted by circumstances, but when God is with us, He can manage our problems and deal with our fear.

Another time, Jesus was with them without them knowing. After the resurrection, Jesus joined two walkers to Emmaus. Their time together was spent with Jesus explaining how all the Scripture was leading up to Christ's death and resurrection.

*Thursday, December 13th...*

While thinking what I wanted to say about Advent and Christmas the following came to me - John 3:16-17. These two verses show us "why" Jesus came to earth and "why" we celebrate Christmas and Advent.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him."

Most of us can recite these verses by memory and in their simplicity, we can see the great love God has for us. To send your only child to this wicked world, to die a horrible death for sinners - no greater gift of love has ever been given to anyone.

In a way, we continue to live in a state of Advent, as we look forward to Christ's coming again. .. we wait to see Him face to face once we are no longer in this world. To finally see His face and walk, hand in hand with Christ, and live in the place that he has prepared for all who believe in him will be a fantastic celebration!

As we look forward to celebrating Christmas and remembering the birth of Christ, are YOU ready for him to come again? Do YOU believe in Jesus as your Savior so you do not perish? Are YOU ready to live with the Christ Child for all eternity? All we need to do is believe in God's only Son and we will have that eternal life.

Thank you heavenly Father, for loving us all so much that you sent your Son, Jesus, to die in our place so we will not perish.

**Have a blessed Christmas!**

Submitted by Gloria Lauber

Friday, December 14th...

Christmas should be a time of great joy. When the angel announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, he said, "Behold I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

Jesus walked on earth healing the sick, doing miracles and teaching. There were those who hated Him and nailed Him to a cross. Jesus died willingly because He loved us so. He took our sins on Himself. He rose the third day. We serve a LIVING Savior.

As we surrender our lives to Christ we become new creations. Our old lives have passed away, new life has begun. This new life is filled with peace and joy. Gloria Gaither penned these words and the words say it all.

*"I then shall live as one who's been forgiven. I'll walk with joy to know my debts are paid. I know my name is clear before my Father; I am His child and I am not afraid. So, greatly pardoned, I'll forgive my brother; the law of love I gladly will obey.*

*I then shall live as one who's learned compassion. I've been so loved, that I'll risk loving too. I know how fear builds walls instead of bridges; I'll dare to see another's point of view. And when relationships demand commitment, then I'll be there to care and follow through.*

*Your Kingdom come around and through and in me; your power and glory, let them shine through me. Your Hallowed Name, O may I bear with honor, And may Your living Kingdom come in me. The Bread of Life, O may I share with honor, and may You feed a hungry world through me." Amen.*

Submitted by Mary Ellen Johnson

Saturday, December 15th...

*Christmas in Heaven. What do they do?  
They come down to earth to spend it with you.  
So save them a seat just one empty chair...  
You may not see them, but they will be there.*

Which chair? Do I save the chair where he sat to enjoy all those wonderful meals (not counting the enchiladas)? Is it the chair where we sat playing dice for hours and hours? Where after one particularly competitive game his great grandson said to me, "Grandma, do you know Grandpa Bob cheats?" Maybe it's the seat at every athletic event the grandkids and yes, great grandkids, ever participated in. Or possibly the chair where he sat the last Christmas he was with us, intently watching all the hoopla! Could it be the seat on the pew at church in our special corner of the sanctuary? Which seat?

I don't know what your empty seat represents or why it is empty this Christmas. But I do know that God enables you to have memories that make you laugh; make you cry; make you angry; make you proud; make you feel guilty; make you wish your loved one was here. All the memories, good and not so good, will be with you forever.....right there in those chairs where God waits to be close to you. Where he waits to fill that empty place in you heart with His peace, His comfort, His joy, and His love. Sounds like Christmas, doesn't it?

*"Come near to God and He will come near to you."  
James 4:8*

Submitted by Deb Kauffman