

Advent Devotional 2025



We hope you'll follow along daily, be deepened in your faith, and prepare your heart to celebrate the birth of Christ. This year's devotional is written by Pittsburgh Theological Seminary alumnae/i.

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PITTSBURGH
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Ruth L. Boling '24

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 24

1 The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it,
2 for he has founded it on the seas
and established it on the rivers.

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
4 Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false
and do not swear deceitfully.
5 They will receive blessing from the Lord
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
6 Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah

7 Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in!
8 Who is the King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.
9 Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in!
10 Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory. Selah

DEVOTIONAL

I've been to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade twice. The first time all I had to do was pack snacks and water. Our son Daniel was little enough to ride on his father's shoulders, where he had an excellent view of the balloons above and the floats and marching bands below.

The second time was more challenging! Out-of-town guests were visiting. Daniel was older. The days of me hoisting him onto my shoulders were long gone, and my husband had to work. I worried Daniel wouldn't be able to see and would therefore be miserable. Determined, I packed snacks, water, and at the last minute I did one of the dorkiest mom things you can imagine. I grabbed the aluminum step ladder from our kitchen and carried it with us, down the sidewalk, right onto the subway. In midtown, as the crowds pressed in, I set up the ladder as a perch for Daniel, and a good time was had by all.

Psalm 24 evokes the moment of readiness before a parade. Lining the streets are the pure in heart who have been preparing for the occasion by devoting themselves to holy, ethical living. The very gates and doors of the city seem poised, like the worshipers themselves, for what scholars surmise to have been a liturgical procession displaying the ark of the covenant. All are summoned to "lift up their heads" in attention and reverence.

The season of Advent is here. God will come to us anew as we retell the story of God coming to us of old. We'll miss out if we don't gear up, as it were—if we don't do the work we need to do to position ourselves to be in a good place, metaphorically speaking, to take it all in. Emmanuel).

PRAYER

Holy God, I am afraid I will miss seeing You during the crowded, noisy, demanding season of Advent. Give me a pure heart and a sincere desire to recognize You when You show Your face in any guise. Fuel my determination. Give me hope. I want to see You. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Louis Nyiri '96/'24

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 122

1 I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"
2 Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.

3 Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together.
4 To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.
5 For there the thrones for judgment were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May they prosper who love you."
7 Peace be within your walls
and security within your towers."
8 For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you."
9 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.

DEVOTIONAL

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'"

These words resonate with me, for they are words we use each week to begin worship. Before any announcements or greetings, we speak this call and response to bring ourselves into God's holy presence. Hearing these words signals it is time to calm our inner conversations that we might be open to an encounter with God's gracious and gratitude-inducing presence in our midst. It is a signal to be open to God's peace.

Psalm 122 was originally sung by pilgrims on the way to celebrate one of Jerusalem's major festivals. Thereafter, it became a song of praise for the city and a prayer for the city's well-being. We could use a song like this today.

As I type these devotional words, the news of late has been riddled with bad-news events; shootings, natural disasters, war, nefarious behaviors by power players, racism, sexism, and xenophobic acts are often the lead stories on our news outlets. We could use a song of peace like Psalm 122 today.

Peace of the city . . .

Peace within your walls . . .

Peace within [us] . . .

What a blessing to remember during Advent that the one whom we prepare to meet is also the one in whom we rejoice, for this One is the very One who will ". . . Fill the whole world with heaven's peace" (O Come, O Come, Emmanuel).

PRAYER

Ever-loving and ever-giving God, we thank You for Your peace which entered this world in the cry of a tiny child. We pray that Your peace be known once again, and as the song goes, "may it begin with us." In Jesus' name, the Prince of Peace, we pray, amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2025

Dr. Joanne Spence '18/'24

SCRIPTURE

2 Peter 1:12–21

12 Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you of these things, though you know them already and are established in the truth that has come to you. 13 I think it right, as long

as I am in this body] to refresh your memory, 14 since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

19 So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

DEVOTIONAL

There's something deeply kind about Peter's words here. He knows his time is short, and still he offers a reminder—not because his listeners haven't heard it before, but because we all need help remembering what's true. Especially when life is heavy or uncertain.

That feels like Advent to me. A season not just of waiting, but of remembering. Of returning to what we already know deep down, even if we've forgotten or drifted away. Peter is saying, "You're going to need this light. Keep it close."

He reminds us this isn't a cleverly made-up story—it's lived experience. He was there when Jesus was transfigured. He heard the voice from heaven. He saw the glory. And still, even for Peter, the memory had to be tended and passed on. Spiritual truth can fade if we don't return to it.

This line moves me: "Be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place." Yes. Advent invites us to hold our little lamps with care—Scripture, prayer, breath, the quiet trust that light is coming. That light has already come.

I read this passage and remember how the Holy Spirit still moves—in and through us. Not by force or performance, but like a gentle nudge, a whisper through the trees. We don't have to generate wisdom from scratch. We simply have to make space.

So this Advent, let's pause. Let's breathe. Let's remember together that Christ has come, Christ is coming, and Christ is already here—lighting our hearts like the morning star.

PRAYER

Light of the World,
in the hush of this season,
help us to remember what is true.
When shadows lengthen,
teach us to tend the flame.
Kindle our hope,
steady our hearts,
and let Your light
rise again in us—
quiet, radiant, and real.
Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Frances Lin '18/'25

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 21:23–32

23 When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why, then, did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd, for all regard John as a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

28 "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 He answered, 'I will not,' but later he changed his mind and went. 30 The father went to the second and said the same, and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him, and even after you saw it you did not change your minds and believe him.

DEVOTIONAL

I don't know about you, but it genuinely frustrates me when individuals respond to my inquiries with additional questions. It feels like getting trapped in a maze with no way out. Yet Jesus does this so artfully. He frequently refrains from

providing direct answers, opting instead to encourage reflection through his parables. When inquisitive individuals approached Jesus, they often found themselves engaging in a complex process of introspection rather than receiving a straightforward response. This intriguing, remarkable technique prompts me to consider: What motivates Jesus to challenge our thought processes in such a manner?

I would like to focus today on the inspiring scriptural narrative regarding the behaviors of the two sons and the demeanor of their father. The dynamics of these relationships are truly captivating. While the scripture does not specify how the father reacted to each of his sons, it invites us to consider the depth of parental love. As a mother, I can resonate with the joy parents feel when their children choose to obey them, no matter when that obedience comes. Ultimately, the essence of obedience lies in whether the children choose to follow the path that their parents lay out in front of them.

As a parent, I have discovered that my baby possesses an extraordinary ability to evoke deep emotional responses from me. To be candid, my child exhibits a remarkable skill in manipulation. When he cried, I was compelled to respond to his needs with urgency. Through this experience, I have learned that providing him with time and space can foster the understanding that excessive crying is not the most constructive means of communication.

This experience has led me to appreciate a parallel in my understanding of divine patience. I am grateful that God does not react impulsively; instead, God possesses a profound understanding of what is best for us and maintains control over circumstances. In moments of waiting, I imagine God observing with great anticipation, hoping for our surrender, obedience, and willingness to follow God's guidance. This connection allows us to grow, learn, and transform into the best versions of ourselves, aligned with the purpose God has crafted for us.

PRAYER

Holy and loving God,

How grateful I am for the space and time that You provided for me to reach my own conclusions. Please remind me time and time again that You can make anything happen because You are all-powerful, regardless of my willingness to participate. However, because You are loving and You loved me first, You want the best for me. You patiently wait for me to learn, grow, and become the obedient child you desire me to be.

Thank you for keeping things interesting!

Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Michael Haddox '12/'24

SCRIPTURE

2 Peter 3:11–18

11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and destroyed and the elements will melt with fire? 13 But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

14 Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, 15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. 17 You therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, beware that you are not carried away with the error of the lawless and lose your own stability. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

DEVOTIONAL

"I remember his smile," she said lovingly, like she was remembering out loud more than talking to me. "He loved to play cards and dance. Sometimes he'd dance with me. Nobody could dance like Daddy."

I didn't say anything for a moment. I just watched her face, younger somehow in the remembering.

"I used to stand on his feet. He'd hold my hands and spin me around ... Just me and him, in the kitchen."

Looking back, that moment made me think of Christmas decorations. We put them up every year, but they never last. Over time, the lights don't shine as brightly, and new ones are bought. The wreath gets dry and brittle, so you throw it out. Ornaments break, and you replace them. But no matter how many new things you hang on the tree, you can feel what's missing. You feel what time has stolen.

That's often how I feel when I talk with Grandma. The wheelchair holds her in place. She hasn't danced in years. Her body has forgotten how to. And some days, her mind forgets, too.

But not on this day. Her memory—of her dad and dancing in the kitchen—came from someplace deeper. Someplace time couldn't touch. This wasn't nostalgia. It was something more. It was holy.

This life is full of fading things. We try to hold on, but everything eventually wears out and breaks. But according to God's promise, that's not how our story ends.

That dance she remembers isn't over. It's just on pause.

The wheelchair, the broken memories, the aging body, are real, but they aren't final. The chipped ornaments and broken dreams don't get the last word.

One day, the wheelchair will be empty, not because of death, but because of resurrection.

And the music will start again.

PRAYER

Ever-living Christ,

What can be said that will make a difference in the life of another? Will a gentle prayer together help them know Christ? Will holding their hand while they face conflict and despair tell them Jesus does care? Does preaching a bold sermon on loving the Messiah introduce them to a new way of life?

Today we are reminded, Lord: when we stand firm in your name, you do the work, and we are your instruments. That is what makes the difference. Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Andrew Taylor-Troutman '24

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 22:1–14

1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned

their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

DEVOTIONAL

There is prophetic fire burning from the other lectionary lessons, for example, against those "who turn justice to wormwood and bring righteousness to the ground." (Amos 5:7) However, in my pastoral experience, the prevalent sentiment among modern Christians perpetuates Marcionism: asserting that the Old Testament God is characterized by judgment while the New Testament God is kind and loving. Not only does this viewpoint risk a negative view of Judaism, but it also fails to account for the prophetic thrust of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was a prophet in the vein of his Hebrew predecessors. For Christians, Advent also serves as a "refiner's fire" call to repentance (Mal 3:2). We anticipate Christ's return to judge both the living and the dead.

While prophetic judgement is evident in the parable of Matthew 22, another modern tendency is to contend that this judgement only pertains to other people. "They" are the "bad ones" mentioned in this parable (Matt 22:10), or the "weeds" of a previous parable (Matt 13:24–30). Jesus warned against weaponizing his words with the eye-catching metaphor of "logs and specks" (Matt 7:3–5).

As I seek humble and true repentance, I find the language of twelve-step programs useful, though I do not struggle with substance addiction. One must be willing to submit to a higher power. But before this, poet Alison Luterman claims one must "be willing to be willing."

Perhaps such willingness, however imperfect, is akin to being clothed in the wedding robe (Matt 22:11). We "put on the Lord Jesus" (Rom 13:14), for our Savior acknowledges, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41).

PRAYER

Long-expected Savior, if there is a tough truth for us to learn this Advent, may we be found willing. May we also recall Your abiding grace and steadfast love through Jesus Christ, who alone is the Lord, who reigns and prays for us, whose abiding presence is life, and whose return is hope. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Aaron Teter '24

SCRIPTURE

Amos 5:18–27

18 Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!
Why do you want the day of the Lord?
It is darkness, not light,
19 as if someone fled from a lion
and was met by a bear
or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall
and was bitten by a snake.
20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?

21 I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
22 Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them,
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
23 Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
24 But let justice roll down like water
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

25 Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years
in the wilderness, O house of Israel? 26 You shall take up
Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star god, your images,
which you made for yourselves; 27 therefore I will take you
into exile beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is
the God of hosts.

DEVOTIONAL

In the days of Amos, the kingdom of Israel was flourishing. Their king Jeroboam had been around for a long time. He had expanded the nation's boundaries. He had drawn in great wealth through his policies. He had pleased the powerful with what they considered to be a successful reign as their king.

However, the Lord took issue with Jeroboam's success because he was exploiting the poor. Through his policies, Jeroboam was forcing the poor to provide the rich and powerful with the resources of the land so that, "the wealth of the land flowed upward, away from the small farmers, serfs, and slaves who composed the overwhelming majority of the population, [it flowed upward] to the large landowners, the nobility, the great temples, and the crown [itself]" (Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture, Ellen Davis, 68–69).

Therefore, the Lord sent the prophet Amos to declare judgment and proclaim a different vision of success for the kingdom of Israel. Success would mean that Israel would live by God's version of justice—a justice that would roll down to all instead of flowing up to support only those at the top. God's version of justice would be like torrents of water that broke through the barriers at the top to flow down and provide everyone with an ever-living and flowing stream. "Let justice roll down like torrents of water," said Amos, "let righteousness flow like an ever-living stream."

Let us seek this version of justice as we celebrate the season of Advent. Let us anticipate God's justice in the birth of Jesus Christ, who was born, not among the rich and powerful, but among the poor and lowly so that he might reveal God's justice to be an ever-living stream that rolls down to all, no matter their place in life.

PRAYER

God of justice, thank you for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has revealed the full expression of Your justice in this world. May You teach us to walk according to His ways and, in so doing, become a people of Your justice. Amen.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Harold Bennett '25

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:57–68

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbors 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 neighbors, 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.

67 Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

DEVOTIONAL

"Glorifying, Not Gripping About God"

Zechariah, a priest from the lineage of Abijah, was burning incense in the temple. Zechariah was an elderly priest, and he and his wife, Elizabeth, were childless. Given the socioeconomic importance of having children in the ancient world, one can only imagine the stress that Zechariah and Elizabeth experienced regularly. God had not forgotten about Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness, so God sent Gabriel to inform Zechariah about the upcoming birth of a son to him and Elizabeth. Gabriel told him about the upcoming pregnancy, but Zechariah did not buy it.

As consequence of his unbelief, Zechariah lost his ability to talk until Elizabeth gave birth to the child. That is correct: Zechariah was unable to speak for nine months—nine whole months without being able to utter one single word! We can only imagine the discomfort and frustration he felt for nine months as he tried to convey his needs, thoughts, and feelings without being able to communicate verbally with anyone.

But when the child was born, and Zechariah was able to talk, the scripture said he praised God (Luke 1:64). Instead of complaining and grumbling about his experience and hardships over the past nine months, he blessed God. He refrained from badmouthing God. Instead, he gave thanks and honor to God. Zechariah spoke about the wonder of the Lord. He expressed his adoration for God.

What if we made a conscious effort to ensure that praises of God come from our mouths instead of complaints? Imagine if our voices, often filled with grumbles, instead overflowed with adoration for God? There is so much for which to be thankful. God deserves our hallelujahs. Zechariah encourages us to transform our speech into instruments of praise of God, regardless of our situations. Zechariah teaches us to let our words reflect the goodness of the Lord.

PRAYER

Dear God, we glorify Your Name. Guide our words to proclaim Your greatness, during all liturgical seasons and through life's challenges. We repent for filling our voices with complaints. May our speech overflow with adoration for You. May our words articulate praise for You in every way. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Jane Holtzclaw '25

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 40

1 I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear
and put their trust in the Lord.

4 Happy are those who make
the Lord their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.
5 You have multiplied, O Lord my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.

6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.
7 Then I said, "Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.
8 I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."

9 I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.
10 I have not hidden your saving help within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.

11 Do not, O Lord, withhold
your mercy from me;
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness
keep me safe forever.
12 For evils have encompassed me
without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me
until I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails me.

13 Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me;
O Lord, make haste to help me.
14 Let all those be put to shame and confusion
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt.
15 Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

16 But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the Lord!"
17 As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.

DEVOTIONAL

It is Thursday morning. I am sitting at my dining room table trying to focus on writing my sermon. I have just returned from a morning run at a local lake, during which my mind was churning. How was I going to preach this Sunday? Yesterday, a shooter shot through the stained-glass window of a Catholic church in Minneapolis, killing two children and wounding many others as they sat with their teachers for mass. I'm upset and distressed. How does one preach a loving and compassionate God without appearing shallow when too many children are dying at the hands of violent adults?

With these thoughts occupying my mind, I'm looking at Psalm 40. How is it relevant to us now? The psalm is one of praise while at the same time seeking God's presence and help in a time of despair. Not unusual for a psalm, but I realize that the structure is different. Rather than beginning with a plea for help followed by praise, the psalmist reverses the order. Praise is followed by pleas for God's help, followed by further praise then another plea.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible there is a cycle of gloom, doom, and destruction followed by healing and recovery. Perhaps this psalm, as much by its roller-coaster structure as its content, is a reminder that a life of faith has its ups and downs. The question, "God, why this?" doesn't have an answer. But history assures us that God hasn't left us even though God may seem absent. In his resurrection and afterwards, Jesus appeared to leave but kept coming back—again and again and again.

PRAYER

Lord, when we are overwhelmed by the ways of the world, open our eyes to see Your light, so that we may share the strength of Your presence with those alongside us. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Komperda '24

SCRIPTURE

Amos 7:10–17

10 Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. 11 For thus Amos has said,

‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.’ ”

12 And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there, 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

14 Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, 15 and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

16 “Now therefore hear the word of the Lord.
You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’

17 Therefore thus says the Lord:
Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be parceled out by line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.”

DEVOTIONAL

“Too Much”

We all love a good prophet ... when they’re challenging someone else, prophesying doom on our enemies, on our side.

I like to ask people of various traditions, “Who are YOUR prophets?” This is not about people’s favorite “prophetic voice.” It’s about who sees through our facades, who gets under our skin, who is holding us accountable to our covenants, who is drawing us out of our own familiarity, tradition, and comfort zones with a word of the Lord. Who would we rather send south to Judah because their convicting words are just too much for our land to bear?

If we are to learn anything from our Scriptures’ prophetic tradition, it’s that faithfulness is ultimately a matter of how we receive God’s prophets, what we do with discomfort,

and our openness to the prophetic call to repent and see the world through fresh eyes.

The whole idea of “Immanuel” (God-with-us) which we celebrate during Christmastide is rooted in this prophetic tradition. If you head over to Isaiah chapter seven, you’ll find that “Immanuel” is not a welcome promise to King Ahaz from the prophet Isaiah. Immanuel is a source of discomfort, revealing the chasm between the king’s own political plans and the path of trusting Israel’s God. And when the ultimate Immanuel is born into the world, “the land is not able to bear all his words.” (Amos 7:10) He disrupts the status quo and gets sent away with nothing but a cross on his back.

I hope there are other tidings of comfort and joy in this devotional, for Immanuel brings these, too. Today’s text, however, is a reminder that spiritual growth involves prophetic disruption; the way to Christmas light winds through Advent night; Christ is born through Mary’s labor pangs; new creation emerges from the ashes of the cross.

PRAYER

Holy Disruptor, open my ears to the prophets You have sent to my people. Strengthen my heart to bear challenging words. Restrain my fight-or-flight instincts in the presence of discomfort. Prepare me to encounter Your Word however it is made flesh and dwells among us. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Garrett Mostowski '24

SCRIPTURE

Revelation 1:17–2:7

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last 18 and the Living One. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever, and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. 19 Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. 20 As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands:

2 “I know your works, your toil and your endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not and have found them to be

false. 3 I also know that you are enduring and bearing up for the sake of my name and that you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember, then, from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6 Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

DEVOTIONAL

When the unknown emptiness
of dread clogs
your breath—like a heavy stone
jammed in the back of your throat—

and when your knees cave
into the pool of shadows
pouring out from your feet,

may you ignore what the thunders speak.
Cling instead to the candle's hiss
and the susurrus of leaves
murmuring: "Don't be afraid."

And in those whispers
may you sense
the presence of divine absence—

like a hand
laid gently between the blades
of your shoulders
kneading you back to yourself,

back to breath—
into a world
still warm with the memory of fire.

May your lungs balloon deep and wide,
as your feet find the star-lit path again,
moseying between what has been
and what may be,

carried always by the Love that is
and was and
always can be.

PRAYER

Good and loving God,

Let me feel Your breath on the back of my neck as You remind me, over and over again, to set aside my fears. May Your peace carry me and overwhelm me as I walk toward all that's unfolding today. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Gloria Renee Bland '24

SCRIPTURE

Amos 9:1-10

1 I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said:

Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake
and shatter them on the heads of all the people,
and those who are left I will kill with the sword;
not one of them shall flee away,
not one of them shall escape.

2 Though they dig into Sheol,
from there shall my hand take them;
though they climb up to heaven,
from there I will bring them down.

3 Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,
from there I will search out and take them;
and though they hide from my sight at the bottom of the sea,
there I will command the serpent, and it shall bite them.

4 And though they go into captivity in front of their enemies,
there I will command the sword, and it shall kill them;
and I will fix my eyes on them
for harm and not for good.

5 The Lord, God of hosts,
he who touches the earth and it melts,
and all who live in it mourn,
and all of it rises like the Nile
and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt,
6 who builds his upper chambers in the heavens
and founds his vault upon the earth,
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out upon the surface of the earth—
the Lord is his name.

7 Are you not like the Cushites to me,
O people of Israel? says the Lord.
Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt
and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?
8 The eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom,
and I will destroy it from the face of the earth
—except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,
says the Lord.

9 For I will command
and shake the house of Israel among all the nations,
as one shakes with a sieve
but no pebble shall fall to the ground.

10 All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword,
who say, "Evil shall not overtake or meet us."

DEVOTIONAL

My little brother wrote a song, the lyrics of which I believe speak to this time in the life of the church:

This is my season of advent
Watching and waiting
Anticipating what God will do
After my season of advent
I'm coming forth then
Stronger and better
Lord of my advent come

Each of us struggles with the effect of free will on humanity. It would be wonderful if everyone demonstrated unconditional love for one another. Yet, because we are human, we can find ourselves following our own selfish desires, sometimes at the expense of others. It makes you wonder "Where is God?" as we experience calamities.

The prophet Amos reminds us troubles are inevitable. He declares God will eventually address the adversaries in our lives. Then, in verse 7, he speaks of God's love for God's people—from Ethiopia to Palestine.

In the season of Advent, as we watch, wait, and anticipate what God will do within us, our families, our communities, our country, and globally, I encourage you to take the posture spoken in the words of the song.

It is like my little sister and brother on Christmas Eve, running around the house, anticipating what would be under the tree. They operated out of a spirit of expectation, of seeing the fulfillment of their Christmas lists the next morning!

It is the same anticipation the world experienced while awaiting the promised birth of the Messiah, knowing His arrival would give a renewed hope for change and transformation. He showed us a level of unconditional love for humanity which we can seek to reignite today! What a wonderful gift this will be to the world!

PRAYER

Creator of all,

We seek and anticipate what You will do in our lives. Give us the courage to actively position ourselves for Your fulfilled promises. Give us the strength to live in hope, knowing Your love will carry us through the ebbs and flows of our lives. Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Patrick Marshall '24

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 23:27–39

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful but inside are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of uncleanness. 28 So you also on the outside look righteous to others, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

29 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, 30 and you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. 33 You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape the judgment of hell? 34 For this reason I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, 35 so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. 36 Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.

37 "Jerusalem, 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! 38 See, your house is left to you, desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

DEVOTIONAL

We don't expect to encounter language of woe and judgment in this season of hope, peace, joy, and love, but Jesus meets us here with a call to honest self-examination and repentance. Jesus' harsh words in these verses are directed not toward "unbelieving sinners" but to the religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, those who were thought of by others (and themselves) as righteous and faithful. And by extension, Jesus' words here are directed toward us.

It's easy to read this text and think, "Yes, they are hypocrites." It is much harder to ask, "How am I a whitewashed tomb? Where is the disconnect between my actions and beliefs?" It's easy to say, "If I had lived in the days of my ancestors—say, during the Holocaust or Civil Rights Movement—I would have spoken up and done the right

thing.” It’s much harder to say, “What am I doing now?” We must do the hard work of examining our own hypocrisy and sin so that we can take steps to change it.

Advent is a season in which we wait for the coming of Christ—not just the way Christ came 2,000 years ago, but also the way that Christ will come again. Waiting does not just mean sitting around, doing nothing. We are called to active waiting. We are called to prepare this world and our lives for the coming of the Lord. We do that, in part, through self-examination, repentance, and working for justice. By doing this, we are creating space in this world and in our own lives for Christ to be born.

PRAYER

Lord, as we wait for Your coming, help us not to wait passively. May we, with hopeful anticipation, do the hard work of honest self-examination and repentance, so that the faith we bear witness to in the world might match the faith that lives inside of us. Use this season to transform us in Christ. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Patricia Ann Lee '21/'25

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 72

1 Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
2 May he judge your people with righteousness
and your poor with justice.
3 May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
4 May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.

5 May he live while the sun endures
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
6 May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
7 In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

8 May he have dominion from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
9 May his foe bow down before him,
and his enemies lick the dust.
10 May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles
render him tribute;
may the kings of Sheba and Seba
bring gifts.

11 May all kings fall down before him,
all nations give him service.

12 For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.

13 He has pity on the weak and the needy
and saves the lives of the needy.

14 From oppression and violence he redeems their life,
and precious is their blood in his sight.

15 Long may he live!

May gold of Sheba be given to him.

May prayer be made for him continually
and blessings invoked for him all day long.

16 May there be abundance of grain in the land;
may it wave on the tops of the mountains;
may its fruit be like Lebanon;
and may people blossom in the cities
like the grass of the field.

17 May his name endure forever,
his fame continue as long as the sun.

May all nations be blessed in him;
may they pronounce him happy.

18 Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.

19 Blessed be his glorious name forever;
may his glory fill the whole earth.
Amen and Amen.

20 The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended.

DEVOTIONAL

As I read Psalm 72, I was reminded of a quote on the United Methodist marquee located on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. that says: “Justice takes courage.” The longer I live, the more the scales of injustice weigh on the least of them.

King David penned this Psalm for his son, Solomon, as he was about to be crowned king of Israel. This Psalm represents David’s prayer that Solomon would be a righteous judge, breaking the backs of oppressors and violators who kept the poor and weak bound. God gifted Solomon with such wisdom that the world had never known or would ever know again. Under God’s guidance, Solomon would till the fallow ground, leveling the playing field so everyone could obtain equal justice.

As I reflect on Psalm 72, I am reminded of the many struggles that plague not only those in America but also the entire world. Day after day, story after story, it is very easy to find ourselves in a state of burnout and indifference, taking a passive stance in hopes that things will correct themselves. As Christians, we must embody the very same ideas that King David wished for his son Solomon in his prayer. We must give voice to the powerless and disenfranchised and be outspoken as we push back against the injustice that many face daily.

It can be difficult to find fairness in leadership positions. In this present day, we must find leaders who have a heart for the people—Christian leaders who shun evil and love righteousness, who care for the least of them to the greatest of them. Leaders who speak truth to power with a willingness to stand strong in the face of opposition, even if they stand alone.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

You are the God of righteousness and justice. Please send us leaders after Your own heart—who hear Your voice and obey. Give them the courage to stand up for what is right and to fight against injustice. In the name of Jesus the Christ, amen..

SUNDAY DECEMBER 14, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Diane Knauf '23

SCRIPTURE

Amos 9:11-15

11 On that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen
and repair its breaches
and raise up its ruins
and rebuild it as in the days of old,
12 in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom
and all the nations who are called by my name,
says the Lord who does this.

13 The time is surely coming, says the Lord,
when the one who plows shall catch up with the one who reaps
and the treader of grapes with the one who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.
14 I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.
15 I will plant them upon their land,
and they shall never again be plucked up
out of the land that I have given them,
says the Lord your God.

DEVOTIONAL

The ancient Israelites were in spiritual shambles. They had betrayed God's commands to care for the poor, deal justly in economic matters, and live with righteousness. Terrible choices, warned the prophet Amos, bring terrible consequences. Instead of smiting their enemies, as the

Israelites hoped, God would allow their political alliances to be shattered, their idols thrown down, and the people scattered by invasion and exile.

And yet, Amos concludes his words of judgement with a vision of hope. A time will come, he says, when God will gather in those who have been scattered, rebuild desolated cities, and make vineyards and gardens produce abundantly. God will never utterly forsake God's people.

Today there is a heaviness to life that often takes me by surprise. I guess I assumed that we would be in a much better place as a society, and as the church, than we are. Reading Amos' words reminds me that we have always put our faith in ourselves rather than in God, looking to systems, institutions, denominations, and political parties to save us. We like to imagine that God will judge our enemies harshly, but Amos' message is clear: God expects even more of those who profess to be followers.

It seems particularly appropriate in Advent that we revel in Amos' vision of a future in which God rebuilds broken things—even us. As we celebrate again the birth of a baby who would experience the pains and joys of human life and show us the way through death to new life, we also yearn for Christ's second coming, when He will repair and renew the world that He so loves. In the meantime, may we look within our own hearts, making room for the Holy Spirit to turn us back to God in this season of Advent waiting.

PRAYER

Dear God, we hope in You, for You alone are the bringer of true and lasting peace. Make evident to us the difference between what the world promises and what Christ gives to us, so that we would trust and obey You always. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Charissa Clark Howe '14/'16/'23

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 40

1 I waited patiently for the Lord;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
3 He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear
and put their trust in the Lord.

4 Happy are those who make
the Lord their trust,
who do not turn to the proud,
to those who go astray after false gods.
5 You have multiplied, O Lord my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
none can compare with you.
Were I to proclaim and tell of them,
they would be more than can be counted.

6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,
but you have given me an open ear.
Burnt offering and sin offering
you have not required.

7 Then I said, "Here I am;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.
8 I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."

9 I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
see, I have not restrained my lips,
as you know, O Lord.
10 I have not hidden your saving help within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.

11 Do not, O Lord, withhold
your mercy from me;
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness
keep me safe forever.

12 For evils have encompassed me
without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me
until I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails me.

13 Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me;
O Lord, make haste to help me.

14 Let all those be put to shame and confusion
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt.

15 Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

16 But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the Lord!"

17 As for me, I am poor and needy,
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God.

DEVOTIONAL

"I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry." These opening words of Psalm 40 have echoed through my heart countless times this year. Like the psalmist who faced overwhelming circumstances—whether political crisis or personal affliction—I have been through a season of profound challenges. 2025 brought waves of loss and change: beloved family members passing away, a brother-in-law's near-fatal accident, an unexpected goodbye to a cherished pet, and the bittersweet transition from our home of twenty years to move closer to my new call.

In moments of grief and uncertainty, it's easy to connect with the Psalmist's "miry bog." But this Psalm isn't primarily about despair - it's about testimony. The psalmist doesn't just receive deliverance; they proclaim it: "I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation. . . ." This movement from crisis to proclamation shows us that our struggles become our testimony. When God lifts us from the pit and puts a new song in our mouth, we're not meant to keep silent. Our deliverance becomes a witness to others still waiting in their own miry clay.

The family members I mourned this year lived long, beautiful, God-filled lives. My brother-in-law's miraculous recovery and my new neighborhood and church have become sources of joy. When we face seasons of struggle, there is opportunity for testimony on the other side.

As we enter this season of waiting—for deliverance, comfort, God—perhaps you're experiencing overwhelming circumstances. Or maybe you're in a peaceful season—though challenging times eventually find us all. This Psalm reminds us that God's deliverance isn't about survival—it's about transformation. Our struggles become stories of hope, our pain becomes proclamation, and our deliverance becomes a testimony of God's faithfulness.

PRAYER

Faithful God, in seasons of waiting and struggle, remind us that You hear our cries. Transform our pain into proclamation, our grief into gratitude. As we journey through Advent, help us recognize Your deliverance in our lives and give us courage to share our testimony of Your faithfulness. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. James Clements '25

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 24:32-44

32 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that

summer is near. 33 So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 34 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

36 “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. 42 Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

DEVOTIONAL

As a young soldier, I observed some of my peers diligently studying manuals and meticulously preparing their uniforms to remain prepared for tests and inspections. In contrast, I often chose to rest or enjoy leisure activities rather than focus on readiness. When several of us were called for interviews for a leadership position, I found myself at a disadvantage—my uniform was less presentable, and I struggled to respond effectively to the interview questions. This experience underscored the importance of constant preparedness and prioritizing vigilance. Readiness and alertness proved valuable during my deployments in two combat zones.

In this passage, Jesus conveys principles of readiness for the coming of the Son of Man by using the parable of the fig tree and issuing a warning regarding His return. He employs a relatable analogy: just as one interprets seasonal changes through the fig tree’s appearance, so too should individuals discern the signs indicating the proximity of His return.

Given the current climate—a world marked by uncertainty and mounting social, civil, and global challenges—there is a tendency for individuals to become preoccupied with worldly matters at the expense of spiritual preparation. The parable highlights a profound mystery: even Christ does not know the exact moment of His return, yet the emphasis remains on maintaining unwavering spiritual vigilance. This narrative suggests that many may be caught unprepared when judgment arrives unexpectedly. Christ encourages His disciples to avoid complacency or distraction from daily routines, advocating instead for a life lived in anticipation and readiness, in acknowledgment of the certainty of His return.

Ultimately, this allegory serves as a direct admonition to prepare and maintain a state of spiritual alertness.

PRAYER

In the midst of ongoing distractions and challenges, we seek guidance to maintain our focus and remain vigilant in safeguarding our thoughts and emotions. We ask for continued clarity, spiritual awareness, and discernment in recognizing important signs and preparing for future developments. May our faith and concentration be strengthened, and may we be filled with positivity and purpose..

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Donna Jarrell '25

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 147:1-11

1 Praise the Lord!
How good it is to sing praises to our God,
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
2 The Lord builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
3 He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.
4 He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.
5 Great is our Lord and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
6 The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.

7 Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.
8 He covers the heavens with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
makes grass grow on the hills.
9 He gives to the animals their food
and to the young ravens when they cry.
10 His delight is not in the strength of the horse
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner,
11 but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

DEVOTIONAL

I grew up in a faith tradition that celebrated Christmas rather than observed Advent. Thanksgiving awakened our Black Friday appetites, and for weeks we pondered retail catalogs, thick as phone books in those days, and dragged our parents to the television set to watch a commercial for the thing we simply couldn’t live without.

Although I understood Jesus' birth was the reason for the season, our Christmas was a month of widespread indulgence with only the briefest obligatory allusions to Jesus' birth. Did we give each other gifts to celebrate Jesus' birthday? Did we give each other gifts because Jesus himself was a gift? How did Santa fit in?

As I grew into adulthood, I noticed Christmas felt less like a winter festival and more like a grueling marathon. The thrill of the season had been lost to adult demands: gifts wrapped with handmade bows; pictures with Santa; baking and more baking; a fresh-cut, oversized tree decorated to perfection; all topped by the revolving door of get-togethers and gift exchanges. The traditions were the same, but I had far more exhaustion than satisfaction or joy.

Christmas disappointment led me to discover I was better suited to Advent, a season of contemplation and cosmic expectation. Advent relieved me of the frenzied clamor of preparations and allowed me room for reflection. It relieved me of the dreaded January credit card statements, also known as the burden of gift-giving, and allowed me to focus on God's eternal gift. Advent relieved me of the voracious spending, eating, and drinking and filled me with the fullness of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

The world places impossible demands on us during the "Christmas" season, yet Psalm 147 reminds us God is not pleased with strength and speed (10-11). Instead, God delights in those who revere God and place

PRAYER

Holy and hospitable Creator, in the frenzied clamor of this holiday season, stop me from being swallowed whole by the culturally constructed Christmas demands. Help me to be still and instead focus on the greatest gift ever given, remembering that all Advent requires of me is reverence and hope in God.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2025

Written by Dr. Sharon McCart '25

SCRIPTURE

John 3:16-21

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not

condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

DEVOTIONAL

"Yet in thy Dark Streets Shineth the Everlasting Light"

What if—

The star that led the magi to the baby was not a star, but Christ himself coming to earth, "the light coming into the world"?

What if—

The shepherds watching over the flocks at night were so tired of darkness that the light shining from the angels and then from the baby was irresistible, drawing them closer to God than the sky ever could, no matter how many stars were shining?

What if—

The reason some people can't see the Christ-light is that they shield their eyes from it, preferring the darkness of judgment to the light of grace?

What if—

Everybody could see the truth that we all belong in God, so that everything everybody does is done in Christ's light?

Advent is a time to follow the light that came into the world. But instead of waiting for the first coming of Christ, this year we are moving toward our crucified and risen savior, who is still shining as brightly as the star did to guide the magi, as the heavenly hosts shone on the shepherds on the Bethlehem hills.

The carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" points us to the light, following that up with the lyric, "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight!" Our hopes and fears are brought together today as we look toward Christ, the one who allays our fears with His perfect love and gives us hope for the future, if we keep our eyes on the One who came to dwell among us and within us.

PRAYER

Please pray with me:

Loving and living God, when we cannot see the light of Christ, open our eyes to see Your presence. Show us hope where fear has taken hold. Strengthen our faith until every step we take follows in Christ's light-filled footsteps.

In the name of the One who was born on a dark night in Bethlehem,

Amen..

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Paul Yanchek '23

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 130

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

2 Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

3 If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

5 I wait for the Lord; my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

6 my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

7 O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

8 It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

DEVOTIONAL

We all have regrets. Sometimes the regrets are not significant. You order the chicken at a restaurant, while the person with you orders the fish. When the meals arrive, you find that the fish looks much better than the dish that is in front of you. Other than a diminished dining experience, that regret is short-lived and without significant consequence.

However, there are moments in life when the regret is accompanied by shame. Perhaps the shame has left you

feeling like a failure, or that God could never possibly love you. As a pastor, I have spoken to countless people who have (half-jokingly) said that if they ever walked into a church, it would be struck by lightning.

Psalm 130 gives us a very important two-letter word: "if." If the Lord "should mark iniquities . . . who could stand?" In other words, if God were to "retain or treasure up" our sins, we would have no hope. But Advent brings the news that, "to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Lk 2:11)—the Messiah of whom John would declare, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).

In the arrival of the Christ, we know the forgiveness of sins that the Psalmist celebrates in verse four. Romans 8:1 assures us: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The sins, the regrets, the mistakes, and the shame—all of it taken away.

As the days count down to Christmas morning, let us allow our hearts to embrace the gift prepared for us. Not a gift wrapped in glossy paper and tied with a bow, but a gift sealed by the love of God. A gift that declares to us: "blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin" (Rom 4:8).

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for setting me free from my sins, my shames, and my regrets. Guide me to live in the reality that I am a new creation in Christ. I am no longer defined by my past, but by who You say that I am. Thank you for the gift of Your Son. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Lucinda Isaacs '25

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26-36

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there

will be no end.” 34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35 The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

DEVOTIONAL

What is it like to be Gabriel? Can you imagine being sent by God to tell someone—in this case, Mary—that their life will be completely disrupted? Nothing will ever be the same. Maybe it’s the years of ministry speaking, but I feel sorry for Gabriel. It must have felt like such a big assignment. Ministry has taught me how much love it requires to tell someone exactly what they need to hear.

What tone of voice does Gabriel use? We often think that telling the truth is fiery and empowering. We often hear the emboldening voices of the prophets, but Gabriel reminds us that telling the truth often requires tenderness. Tenderness is needed to tell someone that their world is smaller than God intends, just as it requires tenderness to say with a straight-face that nothing will be impossible with God.

I wonder how Gabriel processed after his visitation to Mary. What type of self-care did he do? What practices were involved beforehand in order for him to speak with such tenderness and care? I ask not out of theoretical curiosity; rather, I ask because I have so much to learn.

We live in a moment that requires us to speak truth because we, too, yearn to see the birth of something greater than ourselves. Maybe God is asking you to speak a truth that disrupts routines. Speak a word of possibility in the face of atrophying imaginations. Gabriel’s job wasn’t easy. However, he opens by speaking of favor. I don’t know if I do that enough. Maybe it gave him the assurance he needed to keep speaking. When he tells Mary, “Fear not,” I am open to the possibility that he was also speaking to himself, which means, I think, he was speaking to us, too.

PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit; overshadow our doubts and fears with the confidence of Your love. When we think nothing more is possible, birth new possibility among us. Enliven our imaginations to better receive Your truth in this world. Then give us the tenderness and care to speak truth to one another. Amen.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Steven Allman '09/'24

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:39-48a

39 In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

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 lowly state of his servant.”

DEVOTIONAL

Luke’s gospel begins with a statement of what Jesus’s ministry will be about. Even before Jesus is born, Luke mentions King Herod, but then moves quickly to Zechariah and Elizabeth, a priest and his wife serving far from the center of power, to describe how God mercifully gave this aging couple a child. Then the story moves even further from the center of power to Galilee in Nazareth, where a peasant girl named Mary is told by an angel that she’s going to give birth to the Son of God. Mary and Elizabeth recognize the honor they’ve been given, but they respond with humility. Mary begins her Magnificat by saying, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.” That humility is a fitting response to the presence of a God who “brings down the proud from their thrones” and “lifts up the lowly.” The Incarnation we celebrate during the Christmas season is about God being merciful to and present with the poor and the powerless.

This passage not only provides a mission statement for Jesus’ ministry—it also gives present-day disciples a word of comfort and challenge. It’s a challenge because our culture values the rich and powerful. We worship self-made men and pass legislation that takes government assistance away from the poor. We miss the point of the gospel when we do this. Today’s passage is comforting because many of us don’t feel powerful—we feel unable to change our circumstances for the better, and we wonder if this world will ever improve. In

Jesus, we have the promise that those who yearn for a better world will see it someday. In the meantime, we're challenged to live into that world by loving the powerless and learning to trust a God who cares about each of us, not matter how small.

PRAYER

Holy God, we thank You for the care You give to each of us. We thank You for loving and valuing each of us and giving meaning to our lives. Help us to see the grace of knowing that You love us. Help us to experience that grace in our own lives and share it with every person we come into contact with. May we see every person, and especially those not valued by our society, as your beloved child. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Karleen Jung '25

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:57-66

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 Her neighbors 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 neighbors, 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.

DEVOTIONAL

On Dec. 22, as daylight is at its shortest, we find ourselves in a season of anticipation and waiting. In this deep midwinter time, we read of the birth of John the Baptist. It's a time that stands in thoughtful contrast to the height of summer, which is when we actually commemorate the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist. John's birth has always resonated with me because my own natal celebration falls on his feast day in June.

Luke describes John's miraculous birth to Elizabeth and Zechariah, an event that filled their neighbors with awe and wonder. When the time came for his naming, it was Zechariah who, despite being unable to speak, wrote on a tablet, "His name is John." This act—in defiance of family tradition—confirmed the hand of God at work, leading everyone to wonder who John would become. It serves as a tender reminder of our own unique callings—our purposes that are woven into the very fabric of our being.

John's feast day, celebrated when the sun reigns supreme and the days are longest, seems to perfectly embody his role as the fervent prophet, preparing the way. Yet, his most profound words, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30), resonate deeply with the turning of the seasons: John, the light-bringer of the Abrahamic covenant, humbly steps back as the Light of the world draws near. John's summer light wanes, making way for the increasing light of Christ, born in the deepest part of winter.

As we wait for the Christ child in the quietness of this winter day, we, too, are invited to embrace John's humble posture. What in our own lives needs to diminish? Perhaps it is our anxieties, our self-reliance, our distractions? What must we release so that Christ's light can truly increase within us?

This season is not simply about commemorating a historical birth, but about opening our hearts to allow the incarnation to happen anew. In this time of dark midwinter, may the light of Christ dispel your inner shadows, and may you more fully experience God's shalom..

PRAYER

Divine Light, as days shorten, help us to humbly make space within. May we release what hinders so Your light may grow in us, dispelling shadows and bringing peace. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Porsha Williams Gates '24

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:1-17

1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, 4 and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by

Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, 7 and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, 8 and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, 9 and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, 10 and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, 11 and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

12 And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, 13 and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, 14 and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, 15 and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, 16 and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, who bore Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

DEVOTIONAL

Long before there are angels or wise men or the wonder of a birth, the Gospel of Matthew begins with names. A list. Seventeen verses long. To some, that might seem like an odd way to begin the story of Jesus. But the naming itself is sacred. It's not filler. It's intentional information for what will become the formation of Christ. This Gospel doesn't start with spectacle; it begins with memory.

As a child, I would often look at texts like this and skip over them. Get me to the good part! But what I didn't realize then, and what I know now, is that this is the good part. With adult wisdom, I have learned that reading this genealogy is to feel the weight of one's legacy. It's a call and response between generations. It's a litany of survival. Each name is a signpost, reminding us that Jesus does not arrive from nowhere. He comes from a people and an established legacy.

And then, unexpectedly, come the women. Tamar. Rahab. Ruth. The wife of Uriah. Mary. They are not accessories to the narrative, but rather, they are anchors to the genealogy. Each of them navigated systems not built for their flourishing, and yet, here they are. Women, woven into the story of God, disrupt notions that the divine feminine is easily discarded. The women, too, are present right alongside the names of kings, refugees, betrayers, and the faithful. Each of them counted for the record.

Matthew's genealogy is not just about the bloodline that Jesus is born into but how naming and record keeping is a way of sacred storytelling of survival. I think back to my grandma's Bible. Stuffed between the pages are obituaries from loved ones who have joined the great cloud of witnesses. My mother, too, has her Bible, stuffed with obituaries. Now I, too, have a Bible stuffed with obituaries. This stuffing isn't just a matter of collecting. It curates a sacred space to remember those who came before us and presents a record of their existence.

This, too, is part of Advent: the slow and intentional act of remembering. Not just looking forward to what is coming but honoring the holy that has already been. In remembering the names for the record, we also make space for our own stories to exist and to be added to the list.

PRAYER

God of sacred memory, You move through generations; remind us that You were ever present with our kin. In this season of longing, waiting, and anticipating, remind us that we, too, are part of the unfolding story for the future generations to come. Make us whole as we honor the stories that shaped us, the precious memories that formed us, the flesh of our humanity that holds us. May we recall the names of our ancestors for the record to remind us that we stand in a sacred lineage of believers and people who trusted You. As You were with them, be with us, also. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Ebony Grisom '25

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, “God is with us.” 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

DEVOTIONAL

“Silent Night” has been playing in my ear for months, even as my liturgically inclined self protests, “The baby isn’t born yet.” Hence, I was relieved to learn that “Silent Night” was originally a poem set to music and first performed before a Christmas Eve Mass in 1818! What began as a modest guitar and choral arrangement yielded complex versions that have been translated into over 300 languages. “Silent Night” captures the holy serenity surrounding Jesus’ Birth.

I wonder if the same sense surrounded Joseph when the angel appeared in a dream. Matthew records Joseph’s decision to divorce Mary, his betrothed but not yet known, after learning that she was pregnant. A righteous man, Joseph planned to do so quietly to protect her from scandal. Divorcing Mary was permitted under the perceived circumstances. But what should one do when permission contradicts prophecy? Righteousness extends beyond rules to consider relationship—with oneself, community, and God. Righteousness invites us to pivot, leaving us open to follow a future that we could not have imagined.

Initially unaware of God’s purposes, Joseph yields to God’s plan. The angel tells him, “Do not be afraid”. It reveals the human tendency to yield to fear, and God’s encouragement to proceed because “God (is) with us”. The angel’s assignment is a success: Joseph awakens, marries Mary, and names their baby, Jesus. Matthew doesn’t record Joseph speaking. He “merely” awakens and acts. In a world that tempts us to announce every move, Joseph’s silence speaks volumes. As they say, “Don’t talk about it, be about it.” Joseph fades into the biblical narrative, but his character lives in Jesus. The carpenter’s son becomes our exemplar of a righteous man who seeks mercy, enacts justice, and covers his family with love. Like father, like son.

On Advent’s last day, we give thanks for the Son of God, love’s pure light, and for Joseph, who helped to illumine His way. When this day turns to night, may angels attend to you as you sleep, transforming your fear into the joy that comes in the morning. Sleep in heavenly peace.

PRAYER

God, thank you for the gift of Advent. As our preparation to receive Your Son comes to an end, may our hearts be transformed and be made ready for His Presence. May we receive Him anew with gratitude, the desire to share His love, and the will to work for peace on earth. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2025

Written by the Rev. Dr. Jack Miller ‘25

SCRIPTURE

1 John 4:7-16

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Jesus.

DEVOTIONAL

Merry Christmas!

Maybe you woke this morning to find a few gifts beneath your tree—or found joy in watching someone unwrap a gift you chose with care. But there are more gifts to be opened, lovingly prepared, beautifully wrapped, and delivered to your soul.

The first is love. “Love is from God,” writes the author of 1 John. It’s a gift, freely given without strings or expiration. No batteries needed. No subscription to renew. And here’s the wonder: the more we share it, the more it grows. “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” When we love others as God loves us, God’s love is perfected in us, and we become a living sign of God’s love at work in the world.

The second gift is the Holy Spirit—a gift of assurance. Think of this gift as a beautiful, framed portrait of the Spirit, suitable for hanging on the interior of your heart. Gazing at that image reminds us we belong to God and God abides in us.

The third and greatest gift is Jesus Christ, in whom the love of God is made visible. In Jesus, God comes close. He is the package in which love and Spirit arrive, the very embodiment

of grace. "God sent his Son into the world so that we might live through him." He reconciles us to God, covering our debt of sin. He is our Savior—yours, mine, and the world's.

God wrapped heaven's love in flesh and dwelt among us. This Christmas, may we receive these gifts with gratitude that inspires purpose.

May you be the wrapping paper, bearing Christ's love to others.

May you become the delivery, carrying God's love to a world in need.

May you become the reflection, shining the light of the One who first loved us.

PRAYER

O Perfect Love, we thank You for all your gifts, especially the gift of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us worship Him in Spirit and truth. Make us a gift to others: a carol sung in service, a psalm lived in love, an offering of praise to You, the Giver of all good and perfect gifts. Amen.

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