

Advent Devotional 2022



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 members of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary community focused on the theme of "Rejoice!"

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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2022

Written by the Rev. Kate Mauch, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 1:1-9

1 The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. 2 Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. 4 Ah, sinful nation, people laden with iniquity, offspring who do evil, children who deal corruptly, who have forsaken the Lord, who have despised the Holy One of Israel, who are utterly estranged! 5 Why do you seek further beatings? Why do you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and bleeding wounds; they have not been drained, or bound up, or softened with oil. 7 Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. 8 And daughter Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a shelter in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. 9 If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we would have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

DEVOTIONAL

When I was little, I got a picture book from the library about the people of Israel. Even as a kid, I noticed a pattern. There would be a picture of the people celebrating that God had saved them, and then a picture of the people rebelling against God and being attacked by invaders. Rinse and repeat. As a kid, the solution seemed so obvious. Just stop!

Of course, things aren't that simple. We can probably all think of people we know who can't seem to break a destructive cycle, or are stuck in toxic patterns, or who can't seem to break free from addiction. Maybe we are the very person who comes to mind.

From outside, it can seem so simple. Just stop! But as we all know, it's not that easy. Just like the people of Israel, we can struggle to break destructive cycles and patterns even when we know the pain they cause.

We have reason to rejoice, however. God saw the painful cycle of the people of Israel and took it upon Godself to end it. When the people of Israel could not break the cycle, God broke it for them, by offering them redemption that depended not on themselves, but on God's abounding grace and love.

If you, too, are caught in a cycle you wish to break, dear reader, may you remember that God's redemption, love and grace are already yours. May you find reason to rejoice this season.

PRAYER

God of freedom, too often we do the things we know we shouldn't, and fail to do the things we know we should. Help us to break free of harmful patterns and to embrace the freedom you offer with joyful hearts. In your name we pray. Amen.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2022

Written by the Rev. Michele Ellison, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 67

1 May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah
2 that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.
3 Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Selah
5 Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
6 The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.
7 May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

DEVOTIONAL

Praising God has an emotionally and spiritually uplifting quality that can alter one's mood and perspective.

It is not just a matter of giving thanks for perceived blessings, but praising God for being God, no matter what our circumstances. We praise God in the midst of the sunshine and the rain. Whether there is drought or flood, God is present with us in spirit, as well as through other people.

We praise the Lord for God's presence among us—moving around and through us, bringing us *shalom*. In this Advent season, we praise and thank God for the sending of Jesus the Christ. We praise God for forgiving our sins, and the grace that abounds toward us. We praise God for the grace we experience daily, and our communion with God through

the work of the Holy Spirit. Such a gracious God moves throughout the universe.

PRAYER

O Lord God, we praise you. We glorify you. There is none like you. We thank you for being with us. May you be praised through the earth. I lift up my hands, sing and dance before you. Praise you, O Lord. Thank you for your love. Amen.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2022

Written by the Rev. Peter Sutton, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 1:21-31

21 How the faithful city has become a harlot!
It was full of justice;
Righteousness lodged in it,
But now murderers.
22 Your silver has become dross,
Your wine mixed with water.
23 Your princes are rebellious,
And companions of thieves;
Everyone loves bribes,
And follows after rewards.
They do not defend the fatherless,
Nor does the cause of the widow come before them.
24 Therefore the Lord says,
The Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel,
“Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries,
And take vengeance on My enemies.
25 I will turn My hand against you,
And thoroughly purge away your dross,
And take away all your alloy.
26 I will restore your judges as at the first,
And your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.”
27 Zion shall be redeemed with justice,
And her penitents with righteousness.
28 The destruction of transgressors and of sinners shall be together,
And those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed.
29 For they shall be ashamed of the terebinth trees
Which you have desired;
And you shall be embarrassed because of the gardens
Which you have chosen.
30 For you shall be as a terebinth whose leaf fades,
And as a garden that has no water.
31 The strong shall be as tinder,
And the work of it as a spark;
Both will burn together,
And no one shall quench them.

DEVOTIONAL

This passage from Isaiah talks about transformation by virtue of having changed your ways. Transformation and change are both classic themes of this Advent season. The key outcome is to be found in verse 26: “Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.”

But to be this new city, the city of Zion, it will require its people to be on watch and alert to the coming of Christ. Many Advent carol services start with this great verse: “The Watchmen raise their voices, and together shout for joy, for with their own eyes they see the Lord return to Zion” (Isa. 52:8).

This Advent season, if we too are to experience the joy and the hope of the incarnation, we too must be prepared to be on watch. For surely the coming of a savior might catch us unawares and, if it does, we will have missed being part of the greatest story ever told.

My church—St. Cuthbert’s, The Mother Kirk of Edinburgh—lies at the foot of the Castle Rock, and there is a great sense of both Castle and church being alert and ready to welcome visitors to this great city. So it is with the words of the prayer of St. Cuthbert (below) that we too are now encouraged to help welcome the Christ Child once more into our world.

PRAYER

“Open our eyes, Lord to see your glory. Open our ears Lord, to hear your call. Open our lips, Lord, to sing your praises. Then guide us on our pilgrimage of faith, that with the memory of Cuthbert in our minds, and the spirit of Cuthbert in our hearts, may we walk with him who is the way, the truth, and the life, and find our freedom in his service; even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2022

Written by the Revs. Emily Cooper '19 and Mikayla Kovacic Doepker '19

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 17

1 Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry; give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit. 2 From you let my vindication come; let your eyes see the right. 3 If you try my heart, if you visit me by night, if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress. 4 As for what others do, by the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. 5 My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped. 6 I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me, hear my words. 7 Wondrously show

your steadfast love, O savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand. 8 Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings, 9 from the wicked who despoil me, my deadly enemies who surround me. 10 They close their hearts to pity; with their mouths they speak arrogantly. 11 They track me down; now they surround me; they set their eyes to cast me to the ground. 12 They are like a lion eager to tear, like a young lion lurking in ambush. 13 Rise up, O LORD, confront them, overthrow them! By your sword deliver my life from the wicked, 14 from mortals—by your hand, O LORD—from mortals whose portion in life is in this world. May their bellies be filled with what you have stored up for them; may their children have more than enough; may they leave something over to their little ones. 15 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

DEVOTIONAL

During Advent we wait for the light of Jesus to enter the world. It is a time where we remember who we were before Christ came. It is a time where we hustle around, picking up perfect packages and rushing off to the post office so that we don't have to pay extra postage. It is a time when we laugh with others and smile at strangers.

We also feel the weight of the year pulling our shoulders a bit lower as the burdens bulk to a boulder. We remember we ought to be rejoicing, but instead we are weary. It's been a long few years. Advent reminds us of the relationships that have been wounded, severed, perhaps beyond repair.

Reading Psalm 17 might not ease any of those tensions. After all, the psalmist starts by describing how they have done everything right. They have no wickedness in them. I have wickedness in me, more than I'm ready to admit. Their mouth does not transgress. My mouth can be quite sassy. The psalmist is confident in God's protection and care. What about us, the imperfect sassy folks? Well, even the imperfect sassy folks are offered salvation. Even in seasons of heaviness we are met by the Divine. As verse 6 reminds us, when we call on God we are answered.

PRAYER

Ever present God, guide us so we behold your face in righteousness. Satisfy us each day. Remind us that you are the source of true joy this and every season. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2022

Written by the Rev. James Golla '16, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 147:12-20

12 Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion!
13 For he strengthens the bars of your gates;
he blesses your children within you.
14 He grants peace within your borders;
he fills you with the finest of wheat.
15 He sends out his command to the earth;
his word runs swiftly.
16 He gives snow like wool;
he scatters frost like ashes.
17 He hurls down hail like crumbs —
who can stand before his cold?
18 He sends out his word, and melts them;
he makes his wind blow, and the waters flow.
19 He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and ordinances to Israel.
20 He has not dealt thus with any other nation;
they do not know his ordinances.
Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

How does one rejoice as the cold of winter is upon us? As the weather gets colder and the nights longer, one can find themselves with a case of the winter blues. The effect of the snow and the frost can become overwhelming. The psalmist reminds us that the sovereign God is the one who has control over the elements; like snow, frost, and hail. In response to the chilling angst that has overcome us, God sends God's word as the wind blows. Wind, in Hebrew, carries the connotation of not only the power, but the presence of God. The wind carries God's word throughout the world.

As we approach Christmas, we have the image of God's Word (John 1) wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger (Luke 2). The wind, or rather the presence of God, is made known through God's Word—Jesus Christ the Son. The presence of God is made known in the midst of our cold and blue winter days. A presence that is melting away at the anxiety and fear that we carry. A presence that is melting away at the injustices and oppression in our world. A presence that can help us rejoice, because God is truly with us.

PRAYER

Sovereign God, as seasons of our lives change your Word remains constant. As we look toward the birth of Jesus, let our cold hearts be melted by the warmth of your love. Help us to encounter your presence and love in one another. Praise the Lord! Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2022

Written by the Maryjane Peck, DMin student

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

Advent is a time of longing and waiting. There is a collective remembrance of what was and a desire for more. The need for divine connection permeates throughout this season. During the years before Christ's coming, change (some good and some bad) continued to happen to God's people as it does today. Life is not stagnant; rather it is always full of movement. Throughout all the lifetimes and changes, hope prevailed. God's promise was of redemption: "a light will shine out of darkness." Advent reminds us that in the dark of this season, Christ's light will shine.

Today, we still long for God to be near to us. We ask for God's grace to surround us as we cope with day to day living. In our anxiety and fears, we call out to God in prayer. God hears our cries. Even in our darkest hours, God hears us. Knowing that we are never alone or far from God's love provides comfort and healing. As Christmas approaches, it is a reminder of God's promise that was fulfilled. We can rejoice because God continues to love us beyond our imagining. Today Christ's light will shine around, in, and through us as we share in the love of God in our daily lives.

PRAYER

O God, as the ancient prophets cried to you, hear my prayer. I search for the same star that guided the wise ones to guide me to you. Let me follow your path of truth, no matter what temptations, discouragements, or false idols are put in my way. God, you are my hope and salvation. Let me feel your presence always. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2022

Written by the Rev. Dr. AnneMarie Mingo, Associate Professor of Ethics, Culture, and Moral Leadership and Acting Director of the Metro-Urban Institute

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 80

1 Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth 2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might;
come and save us.
3 Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.
4 How long, Lord God Almighty,
will your anger smolder
against the prayers of your people?
5 You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.
6 You have made us an object of derision to our neighbors,
and our enemies mock us.
7 Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.
8 You transplanted a vine from Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
9 You cleared the ground for it,
and it took root and filled the land.
10 The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches.
11 Its branches reached as far as the Sea,
its shoots as far as the River.
12 Why have you broken down its walls
so that all who pass by pick its grapes?
13 Boars from the forest ravage it,
and insects from the fields feed on it.
14 Return to us, God Almighty!
Look down from heaven and see!
Watch over this vine,
15 the root your right hand has planted,
the son you have raised up for yourself.
16 Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire;
at your rebuke your people perish.
17 Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.
18 Then we will not turn away from you;
revive us, and we will call on your name.
19 Restore us, Lord God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

DEVOTIONAL

“Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved” (Ps. 80:7).

In our daily realities we face compounding political, racial, health, environmental, and other struggles in societies around the world, and we often hear the times we find ourselves living in described as unprecedented. If we reflect on our roles, the difficulties we face are seemingly a result of humanity's ability to either act with love and justice at the center of our choices, or not. As people of faith, there are times when we look at what is going on around us and wonder if God has turned away from us, thus permitting the ongoing injustices we see and experience personally. We feel vulnerable and unsure of how to prevent those who may take advantage.

At other times we are appalled by the realization that the injustices are orchestrated and sanctioned by persons who also profess to be followers of Christ. Yet, scripture shows that when we do not challenge injustice it creates silence between our requests of God, becoming a stark reminder that God requires us to do the work of justice consistently. In this psalm we see that although these times feel unprecedented for us, our hope is strengthened knowing that nothing is new for God. During this season of Advent, we seek and await God's presence in the midst of troubling times; we pray that God will restore us into loving relationship with God and our neighbor and illuminate our way forward to co-create a more just society for all—even in the midst of trials.

PRAYER

God, sometimes we feel distant from the love you have shown in previous times as we see policies and practices create pain for those not closely connected to power. We repent for the injustices we see that are a result of our actions, and ask you to give us courage to change and restore our relationships for your glory. Amen.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2022

Written by the Rev. Carolyn Cranston '99, Director of Alumnae/i and Church Relations

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 110

1 The Lord says to my lord,
“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies your footstool.”
2 The Lord sends out from Zion
your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your foes.

3 Your people will offer themselves willingly
on the day you lead your forces
on the holy mountains.

From the womb of the morning,
like dew, your youth will come to you.

4 The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind,
You are a priest forever according to the order of
Melchizedek.”

5 The Lord is at your right hand;
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

6 He will execute judgment among the nations,
filling them with corpses;
he will shatter heads
over the wide earth.

7 He will drink from the stream by the path;
therefore he will lift up his head.

DEVOTIONAL

As I read this psalm several times, the words of “I Love to Tell the Story” by Ian Eskelin keep ringing in my head. Beginning with the words, “The Lord says to my lord,” God tells us the story of the Messiah, revealing Jesus the Christ to us. We find the prophetic voice of Psalm 110, more than any other ancient scripture, alluded to or quoted in the New Testament. Even Jesus quotes this passage when he is discussing who the Messiah is with the Pharisees in Matthew 22:41-46. God's promises assure us that Jesus, the Messiah, is exalted and sits at God's right hand. Christ will have the ultimate victory over his enemies; all power and authority belong to him. He is a priest from the line of Melchizedek, a priest of peace, not descended from Aaron. Jesus, the Messiah as priest, prays for us without ceasing. Regardless of the burden we are carrying, the grace, love, and prayers of Jesus cover us. We are able to hold fast to our hope in the midst of any challenge to our faith. What an amazing reality. As his people, we have a responsibility to willingly serve Jesus and proclaim the message of the Gospel to everyone. As we prepare for Advent and the celebration of Jesus' birth, let us remember that Christ will come again. Make your heart ready.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the grace, love, and prayers that you pour over us, for you alone quench our hunger and thirst. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit may we be faithful to your calling, living as true disciples of Jesus. It is in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2022

Written by the Rev. Mark Winters, DMin student

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,[a]
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.[b]
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.[c]
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

Unless you're an angsty middle schooler, you may have trouble finding a reference for this kind of material. But what happens when instead of thinking about external "others" as our enemy, we turn inward? What is it like to deal with those internal voices which seem to pick apart every decision or thought, making us question every move, lose confidence, or maybe even give up before we start?

If you suffer from this predicament, you know the voices I'm talking about, telling you things like, "That's a terrible idea", "No one wants to hear what you have to say", or "Of course you're late again. Can't you ever be on time?"

If any of this sounds familiar, Psalm 40 is your prayer, my friend. With the psalmist, we can pray for God to deliver us, make haste to help us. We can pray for God to put those voices to shame who seek to snatch away our life, turn them back, and make the finger-waggers in our mind be put to shame. Because the Lord will draw us up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set our feet upon a rock.

God can put a new song in our mouths, a song of praise, a song which harmonizes with God's own voice, reminding us over and over again that we are worthy, we are beautiful, and we are loved.

PRAYER

Block out the critical, belittling voices, O God, the voices that make us feel like we are anything less than you created us to be. Show us how to rejoice in ourselves, as you do. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2022

Written by Katherine Davoli, MDiv student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 94

1 O Lord, you God of vengeance,
you God of vengeance, shine forth!
2 Rise up, O judge of the earth;
give to the proud what they deserve!
3 O Lord, how long shall the wicked,
how long shall the wicked exult?
4 They pour out their arrogant words;
all the evildoers boast.
5 They crush your people, O Lord,
and afflict your heritage.
6 They kill the widow and the stranger;
they murder the orphan,
7 and they say, "The Lord does not see;
the God of Jacob does not perceive."
8 Understand, O dumbest of the people;
fools, when will you be wise?
9 He who planted the ear, does he not hear?
He who formed the eye, does he not see?
10 He who disciplines the nations,
he who teaches knowledge to humankind,
does he not chastise?
11 The Lord knows our thoughts
that they are but an empty breath.
12 Happy are those whom you discipline, O Lord,
and whom you teach out of your law,
13 giving them respite from days of trouble,
until a pit is dug for the wicked.
14 For the Lord will not forsake his people;
he will not abandon his heritage;
15 for justice will return to the righteous,
and all the upright in heart will follow it.
16 Who rises up for me against the wicked?
Who stands up for me against evildoers?
17 If the Lord had not been my help,
my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.
18 When I thought, "My foot is slipping,"
your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up.
19 When the cares of my heart are many,
your consolations cheer my soul.
20 Can wicked rulers be allied with you,
those who contrive mischief by statute?
21 They band together against the life of the righteous
and condemn the innocent to death.
22 But the Lord has become my stronghold
and my God the rock of my refuge.
23 He will repay them for their iniquity
and wipe them out for their wickedness;
the Lord our God will wipe them out.

DEVOTIONAL

Vengeance. It sounds like something the Prince of Peace should not desire. And yet as Christians we confess that *that* One is the same as the One this cry went up to in ancient times, and to whom it still goes today.

I want to imagine that peace is possible. I look to the themes of the other Advent candles (hope, love, joy) to get us there, but Jesus knows what we're up against. The cares of my heart are many *because* evil systems and wicked leaders ordain that it be so. I can reconcile with my co-worker who said a nasty thing to me about my appearance yesterday. But those who contrive mischief by statute? Who condemn innocent people to death row? The privileged proud who exult in their wickedness? All of these are *systems*. And hallmarks of white supremacy and Christian nationalism. Against these, the psalmist believes, God is—as God should be—*furious*.

Which is exactly why I pray the Psalms. The comfort of knowing that I am not alone in my experience on the hurting end of injustices in the world, and the shared unshakeable faith that God does not want things to be this way.

In Christ, repentance for the individual is always graciously offered. But there is no wicked *system* that survives God's judgment. Nothing evil that we have built makes it to the Kingdom intact. Thank God.

PRAYER

Show up, O God. As you have done in our history: ancestral and personal. Protecting. Saving. Rescuing. Helping. We need that now as much as we ever have. And make it so that no more such prayers need be sent. Bring down with your almighty hand every wicked system that harms, crushes, and exploits. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2022

Written by Mat Meyer, MDiv student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 53

1 Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."
They are corrupt; they commit abominable acts;
there is no one who does good.
2 God looks down from heaven on humankind
to see if there are any who are wise,
who seek after God.
3 They have all fallen away; they are all alike perverse;
there is no one who does good,
no, not one.

4 Have they no knowledge, those evildoers,
who eat up my people as they eat bread
and do not call upon God?
5 There they shall be in great terror,
in terror such as has not been.
For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly;
they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them.
6 O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion!
When God restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

DEVOTIONAL

Reading Psalm 53, I can't help but remember a certain orange VHS tape we owned—*Rugrats: The Santa Experience*. In it, Angelica tricks Phil and Lil into trading her their favorite toys for gifts for one another. Phil gives Angelica his Reptar doll for a box of crayons, and Lil her coloring book for a Reptar space helmet. When Angelica learns that Santa gives lumps of coal to bad kids, she tries to make things right. Angelica returns their toys. On Christmas morning, Angelica receives the Cynthia deluxe playhouse she wanted. But as she looks closely, Angelica spies a small piece of coal in the playhouse garage.

It's more than she deserves.

There is no one who does good, no not one.

Psalm 53 offers a scathing indictment of humanity in its sinful condition. Much like how Santa sees you when you're sleeping and knows when you're awake, God looks down from heaven. And according to the psalmist, what God sees is appalling—abominable acts, perversity, devouring the poor! The psalmist promises terror, scattered bones, shame, and rejection.

Yet for all these terrifying words, the psalm ends with words of longing and of hope—deliverance from Zion. Rejoicing for Jacob. Gladness for Israel.

In Advent we look toward deliverance with the same longing and hope of the psalmist. As we anticipate Christ's return, we rejoice in God's promises. For Christ comes to set us free from our bondage to this sinful condition.

It's more than we deserve. Rejoice.

PRAYER

Merciful God, we confess that we do not seek after you, yet we long for your undeserved grace. Deliver us, O Lord, from our abominable acts, from our perversity, and from our devouring the poor. Deliver us, O Lord, that like Jacob we may rejoice and that like Israel we may be glad; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2022

Written by the Mike Haddox '12, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 126

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

DEVOTIONAL

"I'm painting an elephant, daddy, I'm painting an elephant."
I looked across the table at my 3 year old, totally consumed in his work, filled with joy, painting his favorite animal.

Later, when the painting dried, the joy quickly faded. He came over to look at his elephant and was disappointed and confused. In his initial excitement, he was certain he was painting an elephant. Now the colors had drained into a giant pile of brown and the excitement gone. He wanted to know where the elephant went.

"Elephant?"
"It's right there!"

Without saying a word, he brought me a paintbrush. He trusted his dad to do something with the paint brush that he couldn't. As I began to fill in some lines and details, the excitement grew. He started to see his elephant. In moments his imagination picked right back up, and the joy returned, as his "Elephant?" became "Elephant!"

In the course of a lifetime, we will have moments where our masterpiece gets lost in the messiness of life. Israel finds themselves there in Psalm 126. However, they remember who God is, and what God can do when God is in control. So in anticipation, they hand that control over to God, and look forward to their mess becoming God's masterpiece.

The world is messy, and we often feel that chaos in our life. As we prepare this Advent season, may we recognize

God's control and eagerly anticipate the working of a divine masterpiece in our life.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we remember the blessing of your Word becoming flesh, and the blessing of creation through the life of Jesus. May we look not to ourselves, but to you, as the one who faithfully provides all that we need. Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2022

Written by Mark Russell, PTS Research and Instruction Librarian

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 16

1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
2 say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."
3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,
in whom is all my delight.
4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names upon my lips.
5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.
7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.
8 I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.
10 For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.
11 You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

DEVOTIONAL

On any given day, I could easily find dozens of things to worry about, and often do, whether it is falling behind at work, or the weird noise my car is making, or the increasing amount of money I need to spend to buy groceries. Sometimes the worrying itself creates more issues, and I "multiply my sorrows," as the psalmist would say.

However, these anxieties are usually quieted, if not eliminated, by the mantra, "Everything is going to be okay." Sometimes I have to say it to myself, and sometimes I need to hear it from someone else. God is present in that comforting

reassurance, and in Psalm 16 we are enthusiastically assured that if we put our trust in God, everything will, in fact, turn out okay.

Better than okay, actually, as the phrases "fullness of joy," and "pleasures forevermore" would indicate. While we may not ever occupy the magnificent metaphorical real estate where the psalmist resides, we can still aspire to a life in which we encounter the good more than the bad, and we can experience glad hearts, rejoicing souls, and secure bodies. In the light of Advent, these hopes seem all the more possible.

PRAYER

God of life, keeper of our trust, we give thanks for your protection and comfort. With you as our hope and refuge, the challenges of our lives are more manageable, and the joys of your creation are more attainable. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2022

Written by Wade Massey, MDiv student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 149

1 Praise the Lord!
Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.
2 Let Israel be glad in its Maker;
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.
3 Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.
4 For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
he adorns the humble with victory.
5 Let the faithful exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.
6 Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two-edged swords in their hands,
7 to execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
8 to bind their kings with fetters
and their nobles with chains of iron,
9 to execute on them the judgment decreed.
This is glory for all his faithful ones.
Praise the Lord!

DEVOTIONAL

How can you not love this time of year and be associated with this school? When Jesus was born, the foretelling of the Christ Savior had been known for centuries. Imagine who was present in that time: Joseph, Mary, and three strangers who traveled from the East. They all trusted and rejoiced

in Lord. Joseph to help raise, comfort, and provide for the Messiah. Mary to carry and bring the son of God into the world. The three men who traveled to witness the marvel of God and bless the infant who would be king. They all assembled, they were all faithful, and they all rejoiced.

Rejoice in the Lord for he loves us even when we do not love ourselves. Love is a powerful emotion. We cannot contain it, we cannot control it, we cannot hold it in our hands; yet we feel it, it grows, and it encompasses and envelopes us. If we take away what we think we know about love, what we have experienced in love, and what we see as love, and replace them with examples of God's steadfast love and Jesus' love, we will get a clearer picture of the beauty of love and we will rejoice.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we humbly submit to your will and the direction that you have outlined for each of our paths. Please reinstate humanity to a brotherly bond and let us all know the true meaning of love so that we can rejoice in it. Please help us to remember the perfect gift of Jesus and His sacrifice that you gave to us along with the unselfish love that you have shown us for ages. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY DECEMBER 11, 2022

Written by the Rev. Robin Sharp '18

SCRIPTURE

John 3:22-30

22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. 23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized 24 — John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. 26 They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." 27 John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven. 28 You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' 29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason, my joy has been fulfilled. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease."

DEVOTIONAL

On the surface this scripture lesson seems straightforward. The Baptist's followers are concerned that more people

are going to "the other guy" to be baptized instead of to John. Of course, looking at the text from our perspective we know who they are going to: the Messiah, known as Jesus. Throughout his mission, John proclaimed he was not the light, but he came to testify to that light (John 1:8). As the ministry of Jesus was growing, John knew his was going to diminish—and he was joyful about it.

I could not help thinking about this at a personal level. As Jesus becomes more central to our lives, we are made new, we are reformed. 1 John 2:17 tells us "the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever." For each of us that means as we allow the light of Christ to glow and grow within, that which keeps us from fully knowing Christ—sin—must decrease. In other words, the Jesus in us must increase, as the "I" within us must decrease.

The end of the poem *Thou Shalt Know Him When He Comes*, by Mark Sirett, reads

"But his coming known shall be,
By the holy harmony
Which his coming makes in thee."

As that Holy Harmony increases in each of us, how can we not be joyful?!

PRAYER

Oh, Holy Harmony! Thank you for your dramatic disruption to our lives. As we respond to the "you" abiding in us, we can not help but be joyous at the new persons we become. During this season of Advent, help us to focus on the ministry of the "you", and less on the desires of the "I". Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2022

Written by the Rev. Paul Yanchek, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Psalms 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

Words can bring gladness. Words can cause pain. I am quite sure we have all experienced both. In Psalm 122, the psalmist discovers deep gladness upon the invitation to go to the house of the Lord. Oh, that all would discover deep joy and gladness to gather with the people of God. This psalm includes a prayer for the city of Jerusalem, God's holy city, that it would be a place of peace. A place of *shalom*, of well-being. It is a prayer that Jerusalem would be a place of security, or quietness and ease, for those within its walls. Just like words, the invitation to the house of God can evoke feelings of gladness, but many find them to be words that cause pain and sorrow.

In this season of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus into our world, can we, the new covenant dwelling place of God, be people and congregations that are a reason for gladness for all who come across our paths? A bright spot in an otherwise dark world. Can we be a people and congregations where all people can find *shalom*—genuine well-being? Not abusive words or looks of judgment. Can we be a people and congregations where all people can find security, quietness, and ease? Not condemnation and anxiety. Let the love, grace, healing, and peace of the people of God cause those around to find a source of gladness!

PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, let your love and your light shine in and through your people. Make us a people of grace and healing to a hurting world. May we build-up, not tear down. May we be a people of reconciliation and justice. May we see the people around us with your eyes and love them with your heart. For the sake of your kingdom, let this work be done in me. Amen.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022

Written by the Rev. Erin Kobs, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:2-7

2 The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.
3 You have multiplied exultation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
4 For the yoke of their burden
and the bar across their shoulders,

the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
6 For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders,
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Great will be his authority,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

DEVOTIONAL

This familiar text from the book of Isaiah, often read on Christmas Eve, reminds us of the joyful anticipation of Christ's coming into the world. The people, who have been through so much, are eager for the entrance of light amid the darkness. There will be great rejoicing when Emmanuel, God-with-us, arrives to bring about the coming of God's kingdom.

When our world feels so overwhelming—full of division and distrust, violence and war, suffering and pain—it is hard to see beyond the darkness. But we can rejoice in knowing that God is indeed with us, sending God's own beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be a beacon of light in the world. Even beyond that, we can place our trust in Emmanuel, the one who teaches us how to become beacons of light, shining into the darkest places of our world.

During this season of great anticipation, let us remember it is God who will lift the burdens from us. It is through God's Son, the Prince of Peace, who will shine upon us, enabling us to in turn, shine light onto others.

PRAYER

Wonderful Counselor and Mighty God, you are indeed shining light into the dark places of the world. We wait with eager anticipation for the coming of your Son this Advent season. Let us find moments to rejoice in knowing that we are not alone. You indeed lift our burdens and allow us to continue to shine your light into this world. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2022

Written by the Walter Canter, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 147:1-11; 17

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.

17 He hurls down hail like crumbs—
who can stand before his cold?

DEVOTIONAL

The choir director at my childhood church had a large collection of neon colored hula hoops. He would spread them around the floor in haphazard patterns and have his elementary school aged singers run in and sit inside a hula hoop. I believe it was primarily a plot to keep us from poking one another, but my favorite use of the hula hoops (aside from actual hula hooping) was to sing "Allelu! Allelu! Allelu! Alleluia! Praise Ye The LORD!" (When I use the verb 'sing' here, I mean something more along the lines of 'rhythmically scream at the top of our adolescent lungs.') When we 'sang' the Allelus, we were allowed to jump into another adjacent hula hoop. It was glorious mayhem, especially when one of us would get too excited and jump into the next hoop on "Praise Ye The Lord!" instead of "Alleluia!" The result was full contact children's choir, and it was glorious.

Psalm 147 is all about the joy of returning home, rebuilding, and reconciling wrongs, and like the psalms that surround it, it begins and ends with "Hallelujah!" which means "Praise

the Lord!" but, in the middle there's a hail storm (v. 17). As you rejoice your way through Advent remember that sometimes songs of praise are messy and chaotic (especially in the middle). Embrace the beauty of God in these messy songs and know that God is gracious, and your song of praise, however it sounds, however it looks today, is fitting.

PRAYER

Awesome God!
Let me praise you today.
Allelu! <insert your own dance move of prayer>
Allelu! <insert the same dance move of prayer>
Allelu! <insert the same dance move of prayer>
Alleluia! <amp it up by switching up your move and going all out>
Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2022

Written by the Rev. Jelty Ochotan '11

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:18-10:4

18 For wickedness burned like a fire,
consuming briars and thorns;
it kindled the thickets of the forest,
and they swirled upward in a column of smoke.
19 Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts
the land was burned,
and the people became like fuel for the fire;
no one spared another.
20 They gorged on the right but still were hungry,
and they devoured on the left but were not satisfied;
they devoured the flesh of their own kindred;
21 Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh,
and together they were against Judah.
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.
10 Woe to those who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes,
2 to turn aside the needy from justice
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
to make widows their spoil
and to plunder orphans!
3 What will you do on the day of punishment,
in the calamity that will come from far away?
To whom will you flee for help,
and where will you leave your wealth,
4 so as not to crouch among the prisoners
or fall among the slain?
For all this his anger has not turned away;
his hand is stretched out still.

DEVOTIONAL

This contemplation cannot be separated from the initial reading in Isaiah 9:1-17 and the reading after, because there is a very strong and deep connection about God's mighty omnipotence to punish wickedness as a sign of his love for his chosen people. God does not absolve any of his people from wickedness, because wickedness is not the identity of God. The picture of wickedness is like a person who is hungry and is never content. Everything is eaten up but nothing is satisfying. How many wicked ways have destroyed us today? Racism in all forms, school shootings, worsening of environmental pollution. Nothing can be rejoiced in these matters.

Are there still unfair decisions between us? A despicable decision? The weak do not get justice, the rights of the poor are being seized, stolen properties, being orphans?

The way of wickedness must be destroyed so that it will not destroy God's people in the slightest. Wickedness can be ceased through the judgment of God's love in various ways. The annihilation of wickedness and condemnation of the wicked are signs of God's judgment for the ungodly and his love that liberates his people. This year's Advent celebration delivers a profound message that the coming of Jesus frees his people from the path of wickedness and leads them to the path of salvation.

PRAYER

O Jesus, your coming frees your people from the ways of wickedness. Help us to understand which is the way of wickedness and which is your way of salvation. We are often blind to the path that leads us into judgment. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2022

Written by the Rev. Shawn Malarkey, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 11:2-15

2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" 4 Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." 7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What, then, did you go out to see?

Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9 What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

11 "Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and violent people take it by force. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John came, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. 15 Let anyone with ears listen!

DEVOTIONAL

Advent has always been billed as a season of dual expectations. We are asked to suspend our rootedness in the present moment as we travel thousands of years backward in time to vicariously await the first coming of Jesus. We are then encouraged to hurl our consciousness forward in time to some hazy future point where our long-awaited Savior returns again in power to establish the Kingdom of God in all its fullness. What if for a moment though, we pull our thoughts back from the past and future and rest fully in our personal and God-touched present?

Our Gospel passage today is all about John the Baptist: John's followers, popular thoughts about John, Jesus' take on John, John's elevation as the last prophet, and perhaps an implied narrative about how early Christians were interacting with those who still considered themselves to be John's disciples. For all that, what then about John? Not past or future, but presently sitting in a dark jail cell, hungry and cold, waiting with eyes wide and heart open for messengers to return with news, his grime-covered hands shaking with anticipation as he hears a door open.

What then about you? Take a moment to separate yourself from past and future anxieties, and rest easier today. What was true for John in his present is true in your present as well. Rejoice, for messengers have already arrived, and the news they bring is better than you ever imagined in your wildest dreams.

PRAYER

Gracious God, you know the regrets of our past and the distractions of our future. By the power of your love, hold us tenderly in our flitting and fleeting now, and enable us to live ever more fully in your present, where you live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2022

Written by the Rev. Dr. Jane Holtzclaw, DMin student

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 foes 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

During recent travels, I fell “victim” to airline drama: a canceled flight likely to cause me to miss the event that was the purpose of my journey. The agent, in a position of power, easily could have thwarted my ability to make my destination. He chose, however, to address my predicament in a meaningful manner.

Psalm 72, felt to be a prayer or hymn sung at the coronation of a king, speaks to the powerful relationship of a king to his people and of the king to God. Many scholars also find it to be messianic. It is interesting to note that the focus is not on the king's power in terms of authority, wealth, or military strength. Rather, the king is charged with being the hands and feet of God—caring for his people, God's people, by providing for the poor and the oppressed according to the will of God: “May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor” (v. 4).

We all live in community with one another and in that community we each have a place of power in relationships—a type of kingship. This psalm serves as a call to action. In our relationship with others it is our duty to act in accordance with that which God desires. And God provides what we need to do just that: “rain that falls on the mown grass . . . showers that water the earth” (v. 6). We are not in this alone, and for that we can rejoice and be grateful.

PRAYER

Gracious God, as we travel on our journey through Advent, open our eyes to see what you want us to see, open our ears to hear what you want us to hear, so that we may live more fully live into that which you created us to be—bringing righteousness to the poor and justice to the oppressed. Amen.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2022

Written by the Antonio Lawrence, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 25

1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
2 O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
3 Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
4 Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.

5 Lead me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are the God of my salvation;
 for you I wait all day long.
 6 Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast
 love,
 for they have been from of old.
 7 Do not remember the sins of my youth or my
 transgressions;
 according to your steadfast love remember me,
 for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!
 8 Good and upright is the LORD;
 therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
 9 He leads the humble in what is right
 and teaches the humble his way.
 10 All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and
 faithfulness,
 for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.
 11 For your name's sake, O LORD,
 pardon my guilt, for it is great.
 12 Who are they who fear the LORD?
 He will teach them the way that they should choose.
 13 They will abide in prosperity,
 and their children shall possess the land.
 14 The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
 and he makes his covenant known to them.
 15 My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
 for he will pluck my feet out of the net.
 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
 for I am lonely and afflicted.
 17 Relieve the troubles of my heart,
 and bring me out of my distress.
 18 Consider my affliction and my trouble,
 and forgive all my sins.
 19 Consider how many are my foes
 and with what violent hatred they hate me.
 20 O guard my life and deliver me;
 do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
 21 May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
 for I wait for you.
 22 Redeem Israel, O God,
 out of all its troubles.

DEVOTIONAL

I appreciate when the season of Advent comes around each year. It is that time where we anticipate the coming of Christ into a world desperately needing a savior. Advent is a time where we need the reminder that we have a God that is with us, even in the mess that we have created. Advent is a time when communities of faith can reflect and remember. We take the opportunity to reflect on where God has brought us from. We also embrace the opportunity to remember the God who has been consistent in the journey. As we sit with Psalm 25 today it is a necessary reminder to continue to keep our trust in God. We approach this passage of scripture not knowing exactly when this psalm has been crafted, yet we know there is trouble present. Over the last few years,

we do not know when the trouble would come, or where the trouble would come from in our lives. It was just an understanding that trouble would always be present. This passage of scripture reminds us that even with trouble being present, we can trust that our God is present with us. Psalm 25 shows us the power of repetition in the life of a believer. The ability to repeat the certain words or phrases is what continues to ground our faith no matter the season we are in. Psalm 25 gives us an image of hope to mature us spiritually along the journey of life. It reminds us that no matter how difficult the situation is before us there is someone who will have our back during it all. Is that not good news for the believer today? My hope today is that no matter what we face as life happens, we develop the ability to trust God no matter the transitions around us.

PRAYER

God of grace and mercy, we thank you for the ability to guide us through life. Help us to learn how to trust you on a deeper level. Help us to reimagine a future that helps us model what faith, hope, and love looks like in public. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2022

Written by Maj. Corinne Cameron, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 145

1 I will extol you, my God and King,
 and bless your name forever and ever.
 2 Every day I will bless you
 and praise your name forever and ever.
 3 Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised;
 his greatness is unsearchable.
 4 One generation shall extol your works to another
 and shall declare your mighty acts.
 5 They will recount the glorious splendor of your majesty,
 and on your wondrous works I will meditate.
 6 They will proclaim the might of your awesome deeds,
 and I will declare your greatness.
 7 They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness
 and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.
 8 The Lord is gracious and merciful,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
 9 The Lord is good to all,
 and his compassion is over all that he has made.
 10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
 and all your faithful shall bless you.
 11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom
 and tell of your power,
 12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds
 and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2022

Written by Dr. Jodie Eckenrod, MTS student

SCRIPTURE

Revelation 20:11-21:8

11 Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire, 15 and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." 5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. 7 Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. 8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

DEVOTIONAL

Revelation might not be the most likely book Christians are reading during this joyful season, yet this book is the culmination of the entire message of Scripture and of God's plan for creation. And in it is a real reason to celebrate.

Human beings love stories. There's nothing more satisfying than a three-act play or the latest Star Wars trilogy. The Bible tells us an amazing story that is still unfolding; a story that

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
The Lord is faithful in all his words
and gracious in all his deeds.
14 The Lord upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.
15 The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
16 You open your hand,
satisfying the desire of every living thing.
17 The Lord is just in all his ways
and kind in all his doings.
18 The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
19 He fulfills the desire of all who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.
20 The Lord watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.
21 My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord,
and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.

DEVOTIONAL

Christmas evokes many different memories. These include decorating our homes, singing beautiful music, and enjoying family time with favourite treats. However, not all memories are filled with joy. We also have some memories that are tinged with both sadness and joy.

One example of a both/and memory is when I visited my dying grandma who suffered from dementia. It was the beginning of December, and I quickly ran out of things to say. I turned to my aunt who suggested I sing Christmas carols to Grandma. As I sang, my grandma joined in and we sang together for over an hour. This was the last time I spent with her. It is a Christmas memory that is filled with both joy and sadness.

In our psalm for today, we read how the psalmist remembers the wonderful deeds of God (v. 6). We also read of sorrow as the Lord promises to raise those who are bowed down (v. 14). In both these joy-filled and sorrow-filled memories, we read that the Lord is present. The Psalm invites us to remember that the Lord is near (v.18) and believe that the Lord hears our cries (v. 19).

This year, as we make new memories, let us invite God into all of our memories.

PRAYER

Memory-making God, we thank you for your presence in our lives. Today we give to you our both/and memories as we draw near to you and listen to your voice. Amen.

involves God and involves us. We read in Scripture about God's creative activity and desire to relate to creation. God came to dwell among creation, coming to us in the form of an innocent baby.

The passage from Revelation shows us that the Creator God who spun the universe into existence will bring heaven and earth together and will dwell among us again. We celebrate the humble beginnings of this process during this season of hope and anticipation.

The Son of God has lived among us and will dwell among us once again. Surely that is good news!

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we thank you and we praise you—we rejoice that you are working in history to join heaven and earth. We rejoice that you have come to us, and you will live with us again, remaking humanity. We rejoice that we can trust in your promises and that you, oh mighty God, wish to dwell among your creation. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2022

Written by the Rev. Lucinda Isaacs, DMin student

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:26-38

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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

DEVOTIONAL

Who knows how many Gabriels there are in our world? God can use whomever God pleases as a messenger. Do sleep disruptions, dreams, or apparent happenstances constitute anything more than an overactive imagination? When Mary is confronted by Gabriel, Luke tells us that she is perplexed. I like to imagine that she was shaken to her core. Mary was trying to make sense of this peculiar moment. Was she worried about projecting her wishes? Did she think that she was making all this up? Faithfulness perplexes us at times, and we are invited to ponder the wonders of God. These moments are difficult to comprehend, especially if we are tempted to jump to answers or look for easy confirmation. What if, instead, we allow ourselves to be shaken to our core? In the shaking, we begin to ponder things we assume are impossible. The shaking is holy. The stirring is sacred. The trembling shakes loose shame and fear. The wonder creates a world larger than the one we fashioned with our doubts and perceived unlovability. Nothing will be impossible with God. Mary shows us that one way to rejoice is to be perplexed. When we are perplexed, do not be afraid. Rejoice in the shaking. Ponder the stirring.

PRAYER

Gracious God, shake us now. Perplex us. Help us to not always seek answers when we encounter your mystery, but shake loose in us everything that makes your grace feel impossible. This way we can ponder the world you'd have us create. Amen.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2022

Written by Danielle Kendig, MDiv student

SCRIPTURE

Luke 1:39-48

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.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed.

DEVOTIONAL

When I began my motherhood journey, I would meet a group of other mothers each week at our local library. Sitting in this large room, we would watch our little ones play while we shared early-stage motherhood stories.

I have carried one of these special moments in my heart for the last nine years. A fellow mom pointed out my oldest, two at the time, sitting on top of a slide. He was gripping the sides of the slide, unsure and peeking around to see if anyone was watching. Nervous, he let go of the sides and slid down with full force. At the bottom, he was grinning ear to ear with pride! Jumping for joy, he made eye contact with me. Knowing his accomplishment, he beamed with innocent self-satisfaction. The fellow mom said, "What a moment to witness! That sweet glimpse of self-satisfaction." She continued, "At what point in life do we lose this?" She was right. As adults we struggle to allow ourselves the right to grin with pride and jump for joy.

Upon reading the Luke passage, I found my mind back in that library, asking this same question. The innocence of the child in the womb, "leaping for joy"—what a sentiment! There are moments in our lives that we are blessed with something so wonderful that it allows for rejoicing. Passing the exams, fellowship with classmates, embracing the Holy Spirit in chapel; all are moments that warrant jumping for joy and rejoicing with the Lord!

PRAYER

Gracious Father, we thank you for the moments in our lives where you sneak in the gift of joy. May we continually be encouraged to remember that we deserve to celebrate these moments with you, just as Mary and Elizabeth did those many years ago. We rejoice in the joy that this season brings! Praise and glory be unto you, In Christ's name. Amen!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2022

Written by the Rev. Andrew Tennant '12, DMin student

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

The season of Advent offers us two birth narratives: the more celebrated being Jesus, and the often less celebrated of John the Baptist. However, John's story plays a vital part to not only the birth narrative of Jesus but also to the shaping and beginning of Jesus' public ministry. As the Messiah's coming was prophesied in throughout the prophets so too was the coming of the mighty prophet that would be a voice in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord, and that prophet would become John the Baptist.

As faith leaders, we are called to be a voice out in the wilderness not only in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ, but also to prepare the way for Christ's second coming. As we draw closer to our celebrations and remembrance of Jesus' birth, let us also remember the birth of the prophet who came before him, John the Baptist. Like John, we too were given a name. Let us live into the names we have been given, and let us live into who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. May God bless you all in the name of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Merry Christmas!

PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, allow us to recognize this season the two births that create the nativity story. Give us the strength and courage to step out and be voices out in the wilderness, like that of John the Baptist, as we continue our own faith journeys and as we lead others to the wellspring of life that is Jesus Christ! Amen.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2022

Written by the Rev. Mary Robin Craig '10

SCRIPTURE

Revelation 22:12-17, 21

12 "See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work. 13 I am the Alpha and the

Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”
14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates. 15 Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. 16 “It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” 17 The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let everyone who hears say, “Come.” And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.” 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

DEVOTIONAL

As Advent draws to a close, we stand on the cusp between the end and the beginning. The church year is coming to an end. In the Northern Hemisphere, the agricultural season has wound down. The secular calendar is near its end.

And here is Jesus, saying not, “I am the end and the beginning,” but “I am the beginning and the end.” He is pushing us toward a new beginning. He is not lingering in the late hours of the night, but traversing time and space toward his appearance as the morning star.

If your life has been marred by sleepless nights, then you have looked up toward Venus, the planet traditionally called the morning star. Venus appears in the sky a few hours after sunset or a few hours before dawn. Venus is the light-bearer, the dawn-bringer.

Whether you are an outcast in the late-night fields of physical labor, an individual of prominence and wealth seeking something more in the light leading you onward, a young mother working through the waves of the final hours of pregnancy, whether you are anyone at all who feels an unsettled longing and a deep thirst for a new future, the morning star shimmers for you.

The darkness is filled with sorrows and travails. The winter winds of want and need blow cold. But tonight we wait in hope for the star which heralds the breaking forth of the dawn.

PRAYER

Light of the World, soft and gentle, radiant and bright, we pray on this Christmas Eve that you break into our world tomorrow with the insistence of the cry of a newborn and the power of ruler of the universe. May we rejoice as the end becomes the beginning and the least becomes the greatest! Amen.

SUNDAY DECEMBER 25, 2022

Written by the Rev. Balajiedlang (Bala) Khylllep, Associate Director of PTS World Mission Initiative

SCRIPTURE

John 3:31-36

31 The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. 32 He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony. 33 Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. 34 He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life but must endure God's wrath.

DEVOTIONAL

Are you confused yet? If you are like me, you find John's Gospel in so many ways difficult to understand. Nicodemus' confusion when Jesus talks about being born again or born from above resonates with me. I can empathize with John's disciples who seem to be confused about who to believe as superior—John, their prophet and leader who was way ahead of Jesus in proclaiming and baptizing, or this Jesus, whom they witnessed being baptized by John himself and just beginning his ministry.

In these verses, John the Baptist is confronting his disciples that he is nothing in comparison with this Jesus. He was just a messenger sent ahead to prepare the way for the one who comes from above. Therefore, he urged his disciples and those who question his authority to turn their ears and hearts toward Jesus and believe his testimony because he is the one sent by God, full of the Spirit, and is the very Word of God.

John set a great example for all of us. His willingness to set himself aside and with joy, allowing Jesus to be lifted above his popularity, is an important reminder for us as Christians, especially as we live in a world full of misinformation and disinformation. There is so much information we consume that is crafted to uphold control and power over others. It's confusing to know who to believe and what is true in these days, but John reminds us through humility that the truth will be and is revealed.

PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we come before you this Christmas Day knowing that often times we have failed to listen to your gentle and truthful word. We're often confused between the power and prestige of this world with the humble and lowly

message brought through Jesus Christ. Give us the ears to hear, eyes to see, and a discerning heart to know and believe what is true and to cling to the truth proclaimed through your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Scripture quotations contained in the lectionary readings are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

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