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DAILY READINGS / NOV 29–DEC 24, 2020

# Advent

# Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

**G**race and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The final days of a difficult year dry up and slip away, like autumn-crisped leaves from a maple tree.

You may say good riddance. By all accounts, 2020 was a hard year. Bring on the Christmas lights and cheerful songs. Or maybe you will end this year with the disappointment of canceled travel plans or uprooted traditions.

This dying year leaves us with the same old griefs—a nation split along political fault lines, the marathon against injustice, our personal battles against loneliness, isolation, and weariness.

How do we dare to hope as each day ends earlier and darker? How could we dare to hang our decorations and pretend, for a few short weeks, that everything is merry and bright?

In 1 Corinthians 1:3-9, Paul begins his letter to a church plagued with problems, but he starts by calling out their true identity. They are “enriched” in Christ, not lacking any spiritual gift, called into fellowship with Christ. But more importantly, he highlights the truth of God’s character— faithful to see them through, to keep them “firm to the end” as they “eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”

In Advent, we remember a world waiting for the Messiah to be revealed, and it reminds us we are waiting still. This waiting isn’t passive, sitting back and hoping for things to get better. Instead we wait with full attention, trusting God to sustain us.

We join God in the work of healing each other’s loneliness, dismantling injustice, and mending our divisions with courage and grace. We lament and call for God to “rend the heavens and come down,” to once again do “awesome deeds that we did not expect” (Isaiah 64:1, 3). We repent, for the things we have done and left undone, on our own and as a family.

And we stay awake, nurturing the spark of hope.

Whatever comes next, may we go forward with courage and confidence. May we remember, in lengthening nights and colder days, that our God will keep us until the end, when the first dawn breaks over the New Creation.

—Jen Yokel

# Monday, November 30<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Romans 13:11–14

*And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Paul's writing in this part of Romans is interesting because it can stand alone as part-instruction, part message of hope. Paul tells us that the time has come to wake from our slumber—calling to mind images of a child slowly waking, like Clara in the Nutcracker, with a yawn and a big theatrical stretch. Cover yourselves in Jesus' light, both for protection from the fleshy things of this still-darkened world, and for making ourselves ready for the dawn of salvation.

And the dawn is coming. We should be careful to not indulge in behaviors that we would rather hide in the shadows of darkness. This will be easier if we wrap ourselves in His light—you can't hide in a shadow if you're cocooned in illumination! With Jesus' light wrapped around us, we'll be better able to see our path and the stumbling blocks around us. Better yet, we will also become shining beacons in the dark for others to navigate by.

We're still in a dark place, but we need to wake up and prepare ourselves. The sun hasn't appeared yet, but we should keep our eyes steady on the horizon because it will be here soon! May we all find peace and hope in this promise.

—Katie Tompkins

# Tuesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>

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Daily Reading: Mark 13:33-37

**B**e on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'

Y'all. I love prophecies about the end times. In a high school academic decathlon competition, I gave a persuasive speech that The End Of The World was approaching. (NOTE: I did not win the competition.) So when I read about not knowing what time the Master is returning, I think of the Rapture coming and no one knowing when it will happen.

Either that or I'm just referencing the end of The Shawshank Redemption. However, I am no longer in high school, and I have realized some of the things I thought I knew when I was fifteen are, in fact, wrong. Acting sad does not convince girls to like you. A can of Pepsi and a Twix bar is not a sufficient breakfast. And maybe—just maybe—this passage is about more than just the end times.

God is not just in sunrises and sunsets. God is not just in the rolling thunder and the laughter of children. God is not just in majestic mountains and stately trees.

If you are watching for God...you start seeing God in many more places.

God is in the fog. God is in the sleet. God is in puddles, and spiders, and your neighbor who can never seem to park close enough to the curb. God is not just there for your highest triumphs and your lowest despairs; God is there in your meh days, the days that you look back and don't remember anything out of the ordinary happening. God is literally everywhere—but the only way to see Him is to be constantly watching. To be eagerly searching for God on a day-by-day, hour-by-hour, instant-by-instant process. Then you'll be ready when the Master appears.

—Brad Rohrer

# Wednesday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>

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Daily Reading: 1 John 1:1-5

**I**n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Christopher Nolan's film *Inception* (2010) illustrates the power of an idea or thought that is "planted" within the mind of a human being. In the film, Leonardo DiCaprio plays Dom Cobb, who learns that if an idea is planted in a target's mind, through the passage of time, it can grow and materialize into reality—and not just in the life of the person who first had or received the thought, but as a material reality that impacts the trajectory of entire communities, even the entire world.

During an incredibly challenging period in my life, I remember watching this film in New York City, on my own. I was about to graduate from my master's program and I knew that God was calling me to a life that was of the wilderness. Materially and physically this life was uncharted, unstable, and unprofitable. This calling was a whisper. A thought. Words I had received throughout my teens and twenties, not just from Scripture reading and prayer, but words that coalesced and formed in every corner of the world I had traveled or lived. They took hold of me and became my reason, my principle, my meaning.

As terrifying as it was to let go of a career, of material stability, and of what felt like life itself—I also felt the profound light of the life God was calling me to. That light shined in the ephemeral and fleeting material world that I occupied, which was often ridden with sin and darkness. Studying history, philosophy, and literature (not to mention reading the news) I had always wondered, "Why is humanity so broken? Why can't we learn from the past?" Yet, following the invisible God, and giving my being completely over to him, I have come to an understanding of this truth: God is light, in Him there is no darkness at all. (Another verse from "the one whom Jesus loved.")

As 2020, the year of COVID-19, comes to a close, I think of Jesus. The invisible Word that became flesh and blood. The invisible One who was light and love. The invisible God who came for me. For us. Becoming just as much of a person as I am with hands just like mine. But as mine are typing on this keyboard, his would be nailed to a cross, expressing and exposing his love that would also prevail over death. He returned, in flesh and blood, and his resurrection changes everything. I know that whatever comes our way, politically, pandemically, publicly, and personally—his love, his word, his light, will always prevail.

—Sue Y. Kim

# Wednesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>

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Daily Reading: John 1:6–9

*There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.*

John (the Baptist) was sent by God to point to someone else as the main event. He was the opener, the supporting act. His job was to get his people ready for the headliner, the True Light that was about to come into the world.

As I reflect on this portion of scripture, I'm reminded of scripture itself as a testimony concerning the True Light—in fact, this is how John would have known the True Light was coming. How else could he have been a witness if the True Light had not yet come? A witness is someone who has seen something that happened. It would have taken great faith and hope for John to trust that the promises and prophecies he read in scripture were in fact true, that God was to be trusted, and to point to it when it came.

It is the same for us in this time and place as the people of God. With humility, we sit under the scriptures, and in hope, we trust that the True Light has come, is here now, and is still coming to us, even in what seems like ever increasing darkness and chaos in the world.

Our job like John is to not promote our own light (if we even have any to offer), but to testify concerning the True Light that has come into the world: Jesus Christ, Emmanuel—God With Us, the light shining in the darkness that will not be overcome.

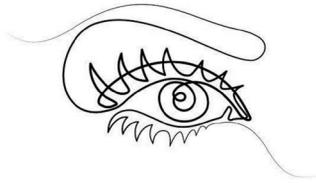
—Adam Croft

# Friday, December 4<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Jeremiah 33:14–16 (MSG)

**W**atch for this: *The time is coming*—God’s decree—*‘when I will keep the promises I made to the families of Israel and Judah. When that time comes, I will make a fresh and true shoot sprout from David’s tree. He will run the country with honesty and fairly. He will set things right. That’s when Judah will be secure and Jerusalem will live in safety. The motto for the city will be, “God Has Set Things Right for Us.”*



*Watch.*

Does the world feel dark to you?

I have a confession to make. My advent reflection, this very one that you were reading, was submitted past the deadline (Sorry Jenny!) [ed. note: It’s okay!]

I had every intention of submitting my reflection early, and then life before the deadline happened. The week was wrought with unexpected events—being a first responder to a bad car crash and a mental health crisis in my neighborhood, unintentionally driving through a protest and being surrounded by police in riot gear, meeting a foster youth wandering the streets late one night because he was lost and could not find the way back to his brand new foster home, and a handful of other events that left my heart aching. All of this against the backdrop of 2020.

The world feels dark.

In Jeremiah, God admonishes his people to be watchful. To watch is to be expectant and hopeful. It is an action requiring awareness and participation. To be watchful in the midst of darkness necessitates intention and focus. It is a simple action when you have enough light to see, but it becomes more complex in the midst of darkness.

And yet, this is God’s decree to his people in the middle of what were dark and heavy times... and it is God’s word to us in the here and now.



*Promise.*

In the dead of night, a reminder is given to God's people, that the time is coming when the light will dawn and the world will be made right.

This year has brought us tears and sorrows too numerous to name. After holding young man's hand following a wreck as he spoke of no longer wanting to be alive, I prayed to God to make things right. After a year of violence, injustice, and protests I wonder when peace and justice will reign. After being in the company of lost and lonely foster child, I cried out to God, aching for redemption. Where is the mending, the redemption, the light?

The world feels dark.

It is in the midst of these aching questions that God reminds us of the promise of restoration. The promise is of this Jesus, this "fresh and true shoot sprout from David's tree," who showed us that another way and another world is possible. The promise of a world ruled with mercy, honesty, safety, and justice. A world made right.

And in the distance, our eyes begin to perceive a

small

flicker

of light.



*Participate.*

And so we hold on to hope. As we wait for the fullness of restoration, as we wait for every tear to be wiped away, for justice and mercy and peace to reign in our beloved city, for the orphan to find a home, for the sick to be healed, for the lonely to be embraced, for all to be made right, we have the opportunity to engage. As I encountered car crashes, violence, and isolation, I clung to hope, the hope that Jeremiah speaks of.

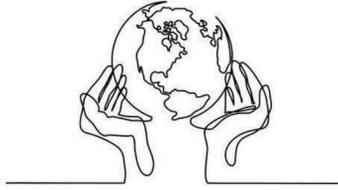
We are invited into this vision of a better world and we have the opportunity to be active participants in recognizing the dawn. “Watch for this, the time is coming—God’s decree.” We are invited to watch and to engage in an active hope—believing so deeply the world is being made right that we cannot help but participate now, to be the hands that work for peace, to have eyes that perceive the dawn. To be watchful and active as we wait...

for the fullness

of light

to emerge.

The world feels bright.



Family, times are dark, but the light is coming. The promise of hope will be fulfilled.

God always meets us in the darkness, admonishing us to watch, reminding us of the promise, inviting us to participate, until the fullness of light dawns. And so, in the midst of the wreckage, the violence, and heartache, we know that God is mending fractured earth, binding broken hearts, restoring shattered hopes.

May we cling to the promise of a world resurrected and we wait for the light.

May it be so, that soon we will declare, “God has set things right for us.”

—Sydney Sample

# Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Isaiah 60: 19–22

*The sun will no more be your light by day,  
nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you,  
for the Lord will be your everlasting light,  
and your God will be your glory.*

*Your sun will never set again,  
and your moon will wane no more;  
the Lord will be your everlasting light,  
and your days of sorrow will end.*

*Then all your people will be righteous  
and they will possess the land forever.*

*They are the shoot I have planted,  
the work of my hands,  
for the display of my splendor.*

*The least of you will become a thousand,  
the smallest a mighty nation.*

*I am the Lord;  
in its time I will do this swiftly.*

As a child, I was fascinated by the moon. No matter where I was—home, camp, vacation—night after night, it was there. It’s something every human can see and experience. The sun is cool too, but it didn’t have the whole “changing shapes” thing going for it (also, I was told not to stare into the sun—probably for the best). So when I saw this verse had moon language in it, my seven-year old self was instantly intrigued.

For me, the beauty of this passage is this: just like a candle is made useless and unnecessary by the light of the sun, so the light of the sun and moon will be made useless and unnecessary by the supreme superiority of the light and glory of Christ.

Let’s sit with that for a moment...

It makes me wonder—with that kind of light—what we will see differently? What beauty awaits us when God’s light overpowers all else? I like to think when God’s light is lighting up our world, it will give us eyes to see each other in a new way—that we will somehow see each person’s story, and see how beautiful and connected we are to each other.

To this day, I still find that staring up at the moon leaves me with a feeling of reassurance and unity. After reflecting on God’s word in this passage, my gazes up to the moon are filled with the sense that our God has something so much bigger for us than the realities we experience today.

—Morgan Thompson

# Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Romans 15:4–13

**F**or everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. <sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written:

*"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;  
I will sing the praises of your name."*

*Again, it says,*

*"Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people."*

*And again,*

*"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles;  
let all the peoples extol him."*

*And again, Isaiah says,*

*"The Root of Jesse will spring up,  
one who will arise to rule over the nations;  
in him the Gentiles will hope."*

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

How long would you wait for a promise to be fulfilled? A week, a month, a year, several years?

How about several hundred years?

In the midst of the smoking ruins of Jerusalem and in Babylonian exile, the prophet Isaiah declared to the people of Israel, “The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope.”

“The Root of Jesse” is an allusion to the royal line of King David, son of Jesse, Israel’s greatest ruler. God had told David his line would rule forever, but now that looks like a big fat lie, the mighty oak of David’s line lopped to the ground and left to rot.

In the centuries after Isaiah’s declaration, the Israelites did return to their homeland, but they were ruled over by the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans.

Many Israelites probably gave up hope of God’s promise ever coming true. But some waited, endured, hoped. As Hebrews 11 says, “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.”

Some were lucky to see their endurance rewarded, such as Simeon and Anna, who witnessed the infant Jesus in the temple and rejoiced at his arrival.

I think most of us can understand the idea of what seems like endless waiting, especially this year during a global pandemic. As the days stretch on, it’s easy to wonder, will life ever get back to normal? Will there ever be a cure? Will we ever worship together as a church again?

Though we are tempted to despair, we are not a people without hope. The stories of those who have hoped and endured are there to remind us that God’s redemption may be long in coming, but it always comes. And that can give us joy and peace in the midst of waiting.

—Chris Yokel

# Monday, December 7<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Psalm 43:3–5

*Send me your light and your faithful care,  
let them lead me;*

*let them bring me to your holy mountain,  
to the place where you dwell.*

*Then I will go to the altar of God,  
to God, my joy and my delight.*

*I will praise you with the lyre,  
O God, my God.*

*Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?*

*Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God*

While everyone was hyping up for their roaring twenties New Year's Eve parties, with flutes of champagne and Great Gatsby inspired costumes, I was preparing to make my way to the hospital for a rare and life threatening condition.

My entire body was covered in open, oozing sores that needed a painful two-hour dressing change twice each day. A superinfection made its way into my bloodstream, and I was fighting 104-degree fevers for days. I basically had zero mobility and couldn't walk for nearly two weeks. I could go on about the uncomfortable and insufferable details, but to put it plainly... it sucked.

As you can imagine I had a lot of time on my hands. Every day before my morning dressing change, I turned my ICU room into an altar. I'd dim the lights and play worship music while singing to the Lord more passionately than ever before... even if it was just under my breath. With arms lifted just a few inches as a sign of surrender I remember being swept away in His peace even throughout my earthly suffering. The two coexist; pain and praise. Scripture proves this to be true time and time again, especially in the psalms. It would be a tragedy for a Christian to face the unexpected disasters of life without the comfort and reassurance of God.

We don't need to visit the Holy Mountain to experience Him anymore. His presence has never been more accessible. The Lord will meet you where you are; quarantined at home, in a hospital, in your car in an empty parking lot, in nature. Wherever you bring the altar, He will be with you.

—Emily Drainville

# Tuesday, December 8<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Psalm 27:1–4

<sup>1</sup>*The Lord is my light and my salvation—  
whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the stronghold of my life—  
of whom shall I be afraid?*

<sup>2</sup>*When the wicked advance against me  
to devour me,*

*it is my enemies and my foes  
who will stumble and fall.*

<sup>3</sup>*Though an army besiege me,  
my heart will not fear;  
though war break out against me,  
even then I will be confident.*

<sup>4</sup>*One thing I ask from the Lord,  
this only do I seek:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life,  
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord  
and to seek him in his temple.*

In this passage the author asks, seeks, and hopes to dwell in the house of the Lord. They want to dwell with someone described as their light, salvation, and stronghold. Even through challenges, the author claims that they can have confidence in their Lord who is greater than whatever may rise against them.

Remember that the Lord who's described in this passage is the same one who is always for you, protecting you, and accessible to you. While our fears and challenges may be completely valid and often overwhelming, our Lord is light, salvation, and a strong defense. He is someone whom we can confidently place our hope in and dwell with all the days of our life.

Following the structure of the passage, take a few minutes to think about the following:

- 1) Verse one describes who the Lord is. Take a few minutes to list out who God is based on words in this passage, other passages, or your experiences.
- 2) Verses 2-3 describe challenges the author faces. What challenges are you facing right now? What fears seem insurmountable?
  - a) After listing the challenges/fears, add a statement such as "my heart will not fear" or "even then I will be confident"
- 3) Verse 4 highlights the hope and requests the author has for the Lord. What hopes and requests do you have for the Lord?
- 4) Read the passage one more time and replace the words "me" or "my" with your own name. How does the passage resonate differently?

# Wednesday, December 9<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Psalm 119:105–106

*Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light on my path.  
I have taken an oath and confirmed it,  
that I will follow your righteous laws.*

God's words never fail, they are never are not true, and they never let us down. Throughout this year most of us have experienced moments where it feels like our world is failing us, the news is not true, and the systems put in place to protect us are failing. In this season we face many moments of uncertainty, but one thing that is always certain is the Word of God, and His providence over our lives. Through it all, we have one thing we can rely on, Jesus, and the hope he brings to our situations.

During this Advent Season, in a time where everything around us is changing, let us take a moment to remember that we have light that guides our path during all moments. A light that points out the hope in all situations, a peace that surpasses all understanding, a faith that can move mountains, and a love that saves us. Together, we can remember that we have a light that is always on, and always true.

# Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: John 12:35–36

**T**hen Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

I can vividly remember in the weeks following the birth of my son, opining to my friends and family my desire to spend more time with my little guy. Six months later I definitely got my wish in the most peculiar way possible! Despite the difficulties many of us face in our current state of affairs, they remind us of what’s truly important. Quite often Jesus uses difficult times to realign our attention to its proper place.

In this passage, Jesus reveals to the crowd the details surrounding his soon approaching death. The crowd demands more answers as their understanding of the Messiah conflicts with what Jesus spoke. Instead of giving a clearer explanation, Jesus brings them back to the present. He reminds them of their incredible privilege of being in the literal presence of the Son of God. Like the crowd that traveled with Jesus, we rob ourselves of the gift of God’s presence by questioning His word. We often allow our faulty understanding of our current circumstances to dominate our thoughts, skew our view of God’s character and allow darkness and despair to lure us away from Him. What have we allowed to dominate our attention and usurp the position in our hearts where Jesus belongs?

The unprecedented events of the past several months have hopefully given us space to pause and reflect on where our attention has been. Just as Jesus reminded the crowd, we also need to “walk while we have the light.” Though we aren’t physically with Jesus, He still calls us to draw near to Him. Think about how timely Jesus’ words are in our moment! The occasions for darkness and despair are abundant. Let’s answer Jesus’ call to commune with Him and bear His abundant light to everyone around us.

—Tony Jean-Baptiste

# Friday, December 11<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Ephesians 5:6–14

**L**et no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

*“Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”*

Paul's letter to Ephesus, written to promote unity in the Ephesian church and in the universal Church, is timely as we live into this Advent season. Ephesians 5:6-14, specifically, reminds us that darkness is the way of the world. Many of us are stumbling around in it, half asleep.

The first chapter of 1 John, particularly the part about walking in the light, has rooted itself deep into my soul. We know that God can speak in many ways, but that His first language is the Word itself. It makes sense that we (as Christians) call it the Living Word. When a scripture comes and speaks into a soul's circumstance, it really does feel alive. First John 1 came to me in the middle of the night a few Septembers ago and called me out of darkness. This passage from Ephesians feels like God's second breath of 1 John. A post script, a reminder, a truth. To get out of darkness, we have to live our way into the light.

I recently had a child, our first. She was born early morning, Pentecost Sunday. Oh, Holy Spirit, how you move and shape our knowing, living, and loving. As I write this, our daughter is only five months old: existing without comprehension of sin, let alone lexicon. But she seems to understand the light. Her eyes dart like magnets to the brightest light in the room. She tilts her head back as she's carried around, instinctively staring at ceiling lights, lamps, sunbeams. A peanut-sized lover of the light.

Childlike faith lives with varied degrees of wakefulness within us. I meditate on our soul's gravitation toward light even in—especially in—dark times. And by God's design, the love of the light only grows as the Holy Spirit dwells within us. Like Joseph and Mary: poor and weary on the journey to Bethlehem, bringing the light of the world. Like Saul before he was Paul: blinded and corrected on the road to Damascus, becoming a new creation.

The Message translation of Ephesians 5:6-14 says: "Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork, the barren pursuits of darkness. Expose these things for the sham they are. It's a scandal when people waste their lives on things they must do in the darkness where no one will see... So watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!"

A wise man (Lyle Mook) once said that the altogether human experience of desperation is defined by "a state of great urgency or great need." The year 2020 has been a dog-year of desperate times. As we look ahead, let's surrender our barren pursuits and make more of our chances. Because Scripture is clear about this: we can live amongst darkness and still choose the light.

—Elizabeth Achilles

# Saturday, December 12<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: 1 Peter 2:5–9

**Y**ou also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

*“See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.”*

*Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,*

*“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone,”*

*and,*

*“A stone that causes people to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall.”*

*They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

As believers in Christ, we easily identify as sons and daughters of God the Father—friends of Jesus, and heirs with Jesus. But Peter tells us we are also priests, part of a holy and royal priesthood.

Growing up in a traditional faith, I thought that only special people were called to be priests, and they were holy and set apart. It appears that we share in that calling, and once we are believers, we, too, are set apart for service to the Lord.

What does it mean to be a priest? What do priests do?

Priests offered sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sins. They also offered up worship for the people. They were the connecting link between people and God.

Jesus is called our High Priest. In one verse that describes him as this, we see that he had to become like us in order to best serve us.

The verses here in 1 Peter hint that we are to offer spiritual sacrifices, and we are called to declare the praises of Jesus, who called us out of darkness.

What are spiritual sacrifices? Certainly not the burnt offerings once offered for sin. Jesus is the final, innocent sacrifice offered once for all. In Psalms we read that praise is a sacrifice, thanksgiving is a sacrifice. In Romans we read that our very lives and our bodies can be offered as living sacrifices. That becomes all encompassing—all that we are, all that we do, can be offered to God as a sacrifice.

As priests and servants of God, we are called to identify with the people we live in community with: family, neighbors, and co-workers. We are called to “declare the praises of Jesus”—to tell of the wonderful things he has done for us, and in us, to the hurting world around us.

—Terry Kole

# Sunday, December 13<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Isaiah 60:1–3

*Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth  
and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the Lord rises upon you  
and his glory appears over you.  
Nations will come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

To get some context for these verses, I looked back to the previous chapter. In it, Israel has allowed their sins to send them into a whole manner of chaos—the wicked reign, and justice is far from their grasp. At the end of the chapter, God renews his covenant with his people, which puts this passage into a whole different light for me. I mean, how awesome is God that in the depths of our darkness, he will come alongside us? When we deserve it the least, he still wants to use his people to be a light to the world.

In verse two, the author really seems to go out of his way to make sure that you, the reader, understand the level of darkness. Not only is darkness covering the earth, but a “thick darkness” is covering the people.

But then the light comes...

About a week ago I was sitting in the Sanctuary city space, waiting for the rest of my homegroup to show up. My wife, Ashley, had run out to grab a quick snack for the both of us, and I ended up having some time to sit alone and reflect. The sun had gone down, and I was left looking out over the dark skyline of Providence. Turning on even a small section of the lights in that room immediately seemed to brighten the entire third floor, and it got me thinking about how much more a light can shine in true darkness.

Every time I look around, I see someone proclaiming that we live in dark times or that things are more messed up now than they've ever been. Depression, anxiety, and loneliness are at an all-time high. The country is torn in two. We're in the middle of a pandemic. It's hard not to feel pessimistic hearing all these things.

But the third verse says, “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” If we allow God's light to shine through us during these dark times, it will shine all the brighter. People are looking for a light now more than ever and are desperate for a savior. We are lucky to have one who loves us unconditionally, and even in our darkest hours, comes to renew a covenant with his people.

—Ben Lucock

# Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:3–6

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

In the chapter before this passage in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he recalls when Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness, and writes about the veil that Moses wore after meeting with God. The Israelites begged Moses to wear the veil because his face shone so radiantly after being in God's presence that it frightened them to look at him. So, while his face was still glowing, he would wear the veil, but when Moses met with the Lord, he would lift the veil and talk to God face-to-face.

Similarly, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:16, "Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away"—which means that we, with unveiled faces, can also reflect God's glory, not only back towards God, but towards others as well. To the world. We are illuminated when we spend time with God.

But if that light felt frightening to Yahweh's own people, it will certainly frighten those who live under the rule of "the god of this age." Does that mean we ought to refrain from meeting with God, or to cover up our relationship with God?

It makes me think of being a kid, playing peek-a-boo with my parents. I have a vivid memory of covering my eyes as I sat right next to my dad, thinking I was invisible. Since I couldn't see him, I believed he couldn't see me.

Those who abide by the god of this age find relief in the veil. If we can't see evidence of God's glory, we don't have to deal with it—it doesn't exist. But it is our job to shine anyway, even if those around us have thrown their hands over their eyes.

Or maybe that's how you feel right now. You're content in hiding. But I want to encourage you to gaze at the light reflected in your brothers and sisters around you who bear the Good News.

Or better yet, to gaze at our loving Father who is sitting right next to you.

—Jenny Currier

# Tuesday, December 15<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: 1 John 1:4–7

*We write this to make our joy complete. This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

Have you ever watched a horror film and found yourself yelling instructions at the screen? Things like, “Don’t go into the basement!” or “Stop hiding and run to safety!” or maybe, “Don’t trust the man who gave you directions while sharpening a knife”? They’re such simple things that anyone in their situation should realize, but these people just aren’t getting it. This passage feels kind of like that.

In the same way that actors in horror films make decisions that lead to audience interjection, people tend to make similar mistakes. I think when we’re too focused on the wrong things, we find it hard to see clearly. We don’t know who to trust or what to do. The apostle John reminds us of one simple fact: God is light. God is life-sustaining, pure, true, unadulterated light. He has no dark corners. He is safe. This passage reminds us when we forget, prodding, “Go to the light.”

Light often refers to whatever is pure, good, and holy. Darkness is simply the absence of light. This passage outlines the beauty that comes from walking in light: fellowship with the Lord, fellowship with one another, and purification of all sin. Why do we stray away from these things? Why do we lose focus and get turned around? What makes us look at what is lovely—fellowship and purification—and still choose lesser things? To be honest, I am not the one to answer that, but I think there’s value in sitting with the question.

When you lose focus and stray from the light, getting confused as to where you are, or what your next step should be, this passage can bring you back to the basics. This is what we know: God is light. When you stray away from the light, think of someone (gently) yelling instructions: don’t hide in the dark, run to safety and truth. Return your focus to what is important. Go to the light.

—Katie Dow

# Wednesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: John 3:16–21

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*

As we consider the advent season and the reason behind Christmas, a question arises: what do I believe about Jesus? Who is this only Son of God, who delivers us from condemnation and death? Who is this light, come into the world to save all of mankind? These are audacious claims, especially when considering a helpless baby in a lowly manger 2,000 years ago. Was he truly God incarnate, or was he just a wise teacher with sage-like wisdom who showed up at a fortuitous time in history?

As C.S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*:

*A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.*

A decision is required; the implications of which lead into eternity. But once a person has made a decision to follow Jesus, how do they act as if they truly are “not condemned”?

In my own life, a primary battleground is my internal self-talk. For years I lost every battle to condemning, shame-filled thoughts present in my mind because I wasn’t even aware a battle was taking place. Even though I believed in Jesus, I was still thinking and acting as if I were condemned. But Jesus didn’t want me to stay there. He doesn’t want any of us to stay in that place! In the midst of major tumult in my personal life, Jesus met me in intimate, powerful, and challenging ways, and invited me into deeper intimacy, healing—living as if I’m not condemned.

Today when I choose those intimate paths, leaning into Jesus in all the details of my day (both big and small), I can live as an object of love as opposed to an object of shame or internal scorn. However, I’m not a robot, and any day of the week I can still choose those old thoughts and think like one who’s condemned, despite a deep (head-knowledge) belief and trust in Jesus.

The Lord’s call on our lives today is to act as if we truly believe we are free from condemnation. What does it look like for you?

What day-to-day thought patterns might you be too comfortable with, that are in conflict with the truth that as believers we are not condemned?

Furthermore, what does it look like for us to live in the light today? What does it look like to confidently acknowledge all parts of ourselves to God, even our sin, knowing that we are not condemned, thanks to the blood of Jesus?

—Matt Atwood

# Thursday, December 17<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Isaiah 40:1–11

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*

*A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."*

*A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?"*

*"All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."*

*t*

*You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.*

John the Baptist—the voice crying in the wilderness—gives us a picture of what God's justice, and ultimately God's glory revealed, looks like. "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain."

The coming of "God With Us" will represent some seismic shifts in the way we understand the world, lowering the proud and lifting the humble. Jesus' Kingdom will lift up the lowly and invite the proud to humble themselves before the King. It will lift up those in the valleys and ultimately lower every mountain.

Our invitation is to follow in the pattern of Jesus, the ultimate mountain who voluntarily made himself low to lift us out of the valley of sin and death (Philippians 2:5-11). In this way we are invited to humble ourselves before the King, to love mercy and to live justly.

—Adam Croft

# Friday, December 18<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: John 9:1–7

*As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*

*“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*

*After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.*

Shortly after returning to church in my mid-20s, I attended a women’s retreat sponsored by my new parish and, as an optional activity, participated in a one-on-one session of healing prayer. Memory has faded much of that particular experience, both in terms of what brought me there and what I experienced, but I remember the words spoken to me immediately thereafter as vividly as if I had seen the vision with my own eyes.

“Jen, you’re in a cave, and it is certainly dark, but you are not in there alone. Jesus is there with you, facing the exit and calling out for you by name, but you can’t see him because you are facing the back of the cave staring at a dark wall. You need to turn around, face toward the light, and walk forward.”

The disciples are looking for meaning in the man’s blindness by looking backward into the past, but they will only find that meaning by looking forward toward what God is about to do. Turn around.

Jesus redirects their attention by reminding them whose work they are there to do and who he is: “I am the light of the world.” Face toward the light.

Jesus then sends the man to wash and see. Walk forward.

The darkness we experience this Advent may be darker than what we have experienced before, but there is light to be seen if we turn ourselves toward it.

—Jen Morrison

# Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Isaiah 2:1–5

**T***his is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:  
In the last days*

*the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established  
as the highest of the mountains;  
it will be exalted above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.*

*Many peoples will come and say,*

*“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the temple of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths.”  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.  
He will judge between the nations  
and will settle disputes for many peoples.  
They will beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.  
Come, descendants of Jacob,  
let us walk in the light of the Lord.*

Choose joy.

What does joy look like in the midst of struggle? When I can honestly say, “Things are not great, I’m not doing ok,” how do I find joy in that moment? It is an easy thing to confuse joy with happiness. Joy includes a feeling of good cheer and vibrant happiness for sure, but joy in its fuller spiritual meaning involves more. It is a deep-rooted, inspired contentment that leads to hope.

The prophet Isaiah in his vision sees the mountain of the Lord’s temple being established and all the nations streaming to it. In the biblical imagination, this is not simply a statement of power or influence or authority, but rather this is a statement of joy and peace and prosperity. This is the renewal of Eden, God’s holy mountain where the presence of God meets the reality and life of man.

When heaven collides with earth, there is peace as the Lord “will settle disputes for many peoples” and “they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” As the nations seek out the Lord to be taught his ways “so that we may walk in his paths,” we glimpse the reality that is to come in the new earth. It is this new reality, this new way of life into which we are being called: to live as those who are in the presence of God, the Creator and Sustainer of life.

This is the promise. This is also our current reality. To choose joy in the face of hardship and struggle is to recognize that while imperfect, we are created and are being recreated into the image of God and into his thriving holy life. This is the root of joy. This is how in moments of struggle I can confess my unhappiness and pain, and yet still declare my joy in the Lord.

In the depths of darkness I choose joy.

—Josh Meister

# Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Isaiah 11:1–10

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.  
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—  
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.  
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;  
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.  
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.  
Righteousness will be his belt  
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.  
The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling[a] together;  
and a little child will lead them.  
The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
The infant will play near the cobra's den,  
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.*

*In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.*

Jesus came forth like a new green branch from a dead stump. So no matter where we come from, any kind of dead stump, we are a brand new green branch in Christ. God continues to show us in the Bible that we are made new in him.

God is the tree trunk from which we are the branches. This imagery of the tree and branches brings to mind John 15. My favorite verse is John 15:5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." Without the tree, there are no branches and no way to bear fruit.

We cannot be stagnant in our faith once we are made new as a green branch in Christ. We must grow and bear fruit. To grow is to be rooted in God's wisdom, reading his word and spending time in prayer. May we find comfort in knowing God has given us all we need to grow and be fruitful.

—Justine Mixer

# Monday, December 21<sup>st</sup>

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Daily Reading: Zephaniah 3:14–17

*Sing, O daughter of Zion;  
shout aloud, O Israel!*

*Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,  
O daughter of Jerusalem!*

*For the Lord will remove his hand of judgment  
and will disperse the armies of your enemy.*

*And the Lord himself, the King of Israel,  
will live among you!*

*At last your troubles will be over,  
and you will never again fear disaster.*

*On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be,  
“Cheer up, Zion! Don’t be afraid!*

*For the Lord your God is living among you.  
He is a mighty savior.*

*He will take delight in you with gladness.  
With his love, he will calm all your fears.  
He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”*

I love to celebrate. In my opinion, nearly every occasion, big or small, is cause for celebration. A friend purchases a dining room table? Celebrate with a delicious feast. A neighbor buys a new car? Celebrate by filling it with balloons. A new co-worker shows up for their first day at the office? Celebrate by treating them to lunch. Celebration not only offers the opportunity to highlight life's many milestones, but to receive intentional joy from those who see and care about us.

Yet, this strange season has brought a screeching halt to our norms and rhythms of celebrating together, leaving us to ask, "How do we celebrate amidst the distance? How long will we have to wait? Does anyone see these moments in my life?"

Zephaniah displays a beautiful image in which these essential pieces of God's heart for meaningful celebration are revealed: togetherness, the hope and "lightness" that celebration offers following a difficult season, and authentic care. There is evidence of God's desire to give relief from life's troubles, that destruction and pain will not have the final word. But, it doesn't end there. God does not simply rescue and depart—He stays for the celebration with us and genuinely enjoys being there. He sings alongside us.

As we wait for the day when we can send out those post-pandemic party invites, may we be people who find our hope in a God who delights in leading us to the goodness of celebration with Him.

—Alyssa Dunrud

## Tuesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>

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Daily Reading: Matthew 1:18–25

**T***his is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

I am, by nature, a planner. For those like me, rules and protocol are the scaffolding for safety and security; a rhythm by which we can predict what's coming. From what we can surmise about Joseph from this passage, he was a dutiful man. His behavior leading up to Jesus' birth points to someone law-abiding and honest, a man of integrity. He had found his young bride and was making the wedding plans—preparing their future home, probably, and imagining what the wedding celebration would look like. Things were going just as he had imagined.

Finding out that his fiancée was pregnant? That the marriage would thus be over? This was decidedly not part of the plan.

The security of our plans, as we often find, is actually no security at all.

But of course, the fact that God changed the script of Joseph's life and invited him into the family of Jesus Christ was the greatest honor that could have ever been given to him. Joseph listened to God's redirection and got on board with the seemingly preposterous idea of miraculous conception. He deferred to God's radical idea instead of his own, and found that God was a greater planner than he could ever be.

Joseph's obedience caused me to wonder: how often does God usurp my mediocre and replace it with His grandeur? Do I accept it with the same level of humility and willingness? Instead of marking my plans in permanent ink, perhaps I need to more fully believe that God's best for me is far better than what my own mind could even fathom.

—Corrie Mook

## Wednesday, December 23<sup>rd</sup>

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Daily Reading: Luke 2:8–20

*And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

Imagine stillness. The quiet rustle of sheep shifting in the darkness. The crackle of a weak fire nearby. Another night in an endless succession of nights of being a shepherd since childhood. Then light! Light stronger than that dim fire. Sound! A voice too grand to be contained in a human chest. Terror! This glory does not belong in the usual course of your life. Savior? A hope whispered wistfully when the Roman oppressors were especially wearisome. Messiah? A promise so old and dusty in the corners of your heart that you barely believe it anymore.

Beloved, God's light sometimes appears when your light is the weakest, when you are closest to darkness. God's voice sometimes intrudes upon your world in a way that unsettles, pulling you from your usual path. God's fulfillment of hope and His promise sometimes comes when you have forgotten how to believe. Do not be afraid. This is good news and great joy.

Imagine sitting in, standing in, being in shock. Extraordinary news: a baby is going to save Israel. Extraordinary delivery: a messenger from God chose to tell you about it. Then suddenly there are more messengers! There are more voices too grand to be human! There is more to be heard! These angels, it seems as though they could not help themselves. They could not help but to join. They could not help but to invade Earth. For, you see, there was extraordinary news.

Beloved, God brings the extraordinary truth of His power to save even into the most ordinary of circumstances. God chooses to speak of the most extraordinary truths to the most ordinary of people. God's extraordinary truth invites ever increasing praise. God's extraordinary truth may not be fully understood until much later. For, you see, He did not just save Israel. Do not be afraid. This is good news and great joy.

Imagine experiencing déjà vu. You are Mary, thinking about the shepherds who just left. Another angel? Another message of finding favor? Another ordinary recipient of extraordinary news? Now there is more. Now there are words like savior and messiah that mean danger. Now there are words like savior and messiah that mean joy. Now there is more to ponder.

Beloved, store every single promise from God like a treasure inside of your heart. Collect them. Do not forget them. Pull them out occasionally to just ponder. Pull them out of the treasure chest in your heart so you remember to hope. So you remember that God keeps His word. Do not be afraid. This is good news and great joy.

Imagine shepherds. Watch them as they return to the fields with their flocks, praising God along the way. No more stillness. No more fear. No more life as usual. Even as they return to where they once were, they are not who they once were. They know the world is not what it once was.

Beloved, life will go on as usual and yet it will never be the same. But praise God for we have an assurance of His promise of peace. Do not be afraid. This is good news and great joy.

—Jocelyn Bell

# Thursday, December 24<sup>th</sup>

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Daily Reading: Luke 2:22–35

**N**ow there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

*"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."*

*The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.*

Have you ever had to wait for something? Of course. Waiting is part of life.

But have you ever had to really wait?

A wait that was painful and costly? A wait that brought you to your knees?

In the passage for today we meet Simeon—a man waiting to see the Messiah of God before he died. Simeon received this amazing promise from The Holy Spirit. The Message translation describes Simeon as “a good man who lived in the prayerful expectancy of help for Israel.” Prayerful expectancy. What a beautiful way to describe his posture for waiting. How long did he wait for that promise? We don’t know. However, his reaction to the fulfillment of that promise suggests it may have been a painful and costly wait that brought him to his knees many times.

But then, suddenly, the promise arrives. Not only does Simeon see the Messiah with his eyes, he holds Him in his arms! His immense gratitude overflows naturally into worship.

So, what have you been waiting for? A test result? Job? Home? Spouse? Promised child? Financial breakthrough? Healing miracle? If you’re feeling tempted to throw in the towel on your promise, don’t. God longs to show you that He is faithful to do what He says He will do—and more.

—Corrine Fischer



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